

Get Active Orlando

Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Orlando, Florida | 2003-2008

In 2003, Orlando’s City Planning Director led a group of people on a tour of the Parramore neighborhood, a predominantly lower income, African American neighborhood in Orlando, Florida, burdened with high rates of chronic disease. As he led the group through the neighborhood, he pointed out characteristics that might make it difficult for the residents to be physically active, such as unsafe intersections. He noted the lack of greenspace and the high rates of crime. Then, he reminded the group of their unique opportunity to reshape the community through active living.

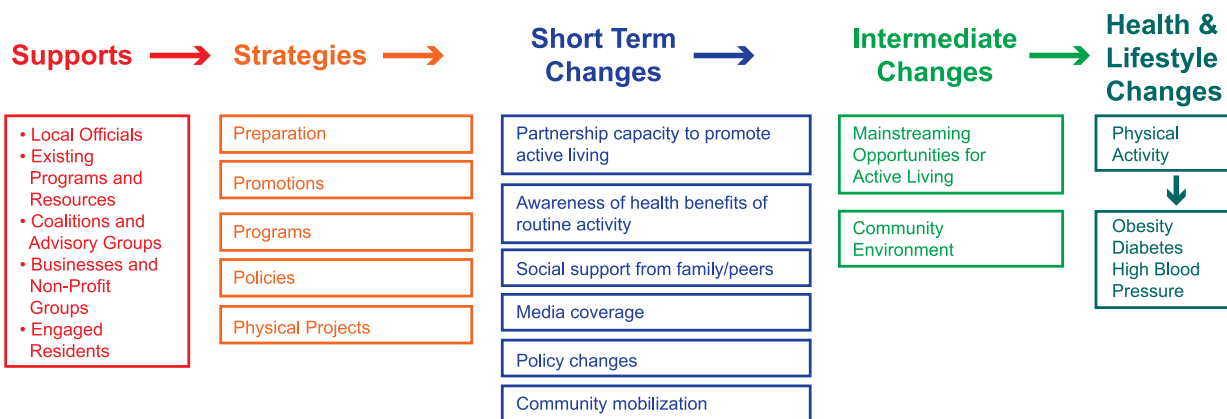
“[Active Living by Design] has proven that even with very small improvements, you can make big changes.” -Staff

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of physical activity each day. In November 2003, the City of Orlando City Planning Division received a \$200,000, five-year grant as part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Active Living by Design national program (www.activelivingbydesign.com). By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the ALbD initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.¹

“[ALbD] is not just a planning project. It is not just a health project. It is not just a biking project. It crosses all these professions and areas of interest and everybody can actually see where, while we all may have different focuses, this is one area where we can all link together and accomplish something for the good that also gives back to us.” -Staff

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model (also known as the 5P model) provided five active living strategies to influence this community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5P model represents a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes.

Active Living by Design Community Action Model



¹ The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

Prior to the ALbD grant, the communities faced considerable challenges to active living. In 2000, seventy percent of Hispanic residents and forty-six percent of African American residents reported sedentary lifestyles. Community perceptions of pedestrian safety were low, and the community lacked adequate bicycle facilities, parks, and sidewalks. The Parramore community is geographically separated from the downtown core by an interstate, which limits walking and bicycling destinations. Pedestrian and bicycle safety features were in poor condition. Paths were fragmented and poorly lit.

“[Johnson’s Diner] is about a mile and a half from us. We can’t walk there. It would be lovely to walk, but you can’t... because of the traffic, the dogs, the lighting, the transients, drug dealers.” -Community Member

To enhance opportunities for active living, the Orlando ALbD partnership utilized the 5P model to identify conditions, barriers, and opportunities for active living, implement promotional and outreach techniques to facilitate resident participation, and promote the incorporation of active living elements in city decision making about design and planning. All efforts are described in this report. Overall, the partnership stressed the importance of using assessment data as a platform for policy change, creating connections across disciplines, and engaging community leaders.

Preparation

Partnership

The ALbD grant provided an opportunity for the City of Orlando to unite diverse organizations, agencies, and individuals under a common purpose. The Get Active Orlando Project Director, also the director of the City of Orlando City Planning Division, recruited fourteen organizations and agencies interested in the opportunity to address active living issues to form the Get Active Orlando partnership. He strategically sought partners that were a natural fit, such as the Orange County Health Department, and those that were able to offer financial and resource support. Community members from the target neighborhoods rounded out the partnership. Over the five-year grant period, the partnership sought new partners as project goals and objectives took shape. The partnership also formed working relationships with non-members. For example, several members of the partnership established a relationship with the Florida Department of Transportation.



“[ALbD creates] an excuse to have partnerships and to have people come together so that we can exchange these ideas. It creates a forum...they have worked on this mentality of let’s get this done and let’s be as resourceful as possible and use the partnerships and resources that we have.” -Partner

Once the partners began working together, the leadership used several strategies to make sure they remained engaged. First, the partnership defined specific goals and expectations for the project period. In addition to these broad expectations, the partnership identified specific action items and highlighted successes at each meeting. Partners were involved in decision making and, in the later years of the grant, took turns leading monthly partnership meetings, which led to more active engagement, discussion, and contributions. Members were encouraged to explore or fill different roles within the partnership.

“If you can provide a very structured work program...and you can provide definitive assignments and outcomes at each meeting, then people can feel like they’ve actually accomplished something. If they walk away from the meeting and nothing’s happened, we’re losing people.” -Staff

In an effort to capitalize on individual strengths, the partnership formed several committees based loosely on the 5P Model. For example, a preparation committee was charged with identifying potential financial supports. Likewise, meeting agendas were structured around the 5P model. As the grant activities evolved, the partnership structure remained flexible.

One of the significant strengths of the partnership was its diversity. Each partner had distinct connections, perspectives, and skill-sets. Because the partners represented a number of disciplines, a variety of perspectives and opinions contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities for creating environments conducive to active living.

“We all have different areas of expertise, but we all have one thing in common. We see the benefit of creating an environment that is conducive to active living...but the fact of the matter is we all realize that we might be able to put something together, but we might not be able to do it individually.” -Staff

The most significant challenge for working within the Get Active Orlando partnership was maintaining continuity in the relationships and activities of the partnership as organizations joined and left the partnership and partner representatives changed. In order to address this challenge, the partnership developed an orientation manual and asked each partner organization to designate more than one ALbD representative.

The table below lists all partners involved with Get Active Orlando.

Members of the Get Active Orlando partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Florida Hospital • Florida Nurses Association • Healthy Community Initiative • Orange County Health Department • Orlando Health • Orlando Regional Healthcare • Rippe Health Assessments • University of Central Florida, School of Nursing • Winter Park Health Foundation
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Gift for Teaching • Nap Ford Community School
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beardall Senior Center • Callahan Community Center • Central Florida YMCA • City of Orlando <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Downtown Recreation Center - Family, Parks, and Recreation Department • Florida Bicycle Association • Florida Freewheelers Bicycling Club
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • City of Orlando City Planning Division* • City of Orlando Transportation Department • Metroplan Orlando
Community Leaders, Policy & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayor’s Advisory Committee
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bike Works • Johnson’s Diner
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adeo Media Group • Evolve Design Group
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arlington/Concord Neighborhood Association • Community Concepts Services Inc. • Downtown Orlando Partnership • Harry P. Leu Gardens • Orlando Neighborhood Improvement Corporation • Senior Resource Alliance
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parramore Kids Zone

*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

Leadership and Champions

The Director of the City of Orlando City Planning Division served as Project Director for Get Active Orlando throughout the ALbD grant. His commitment and leadership was the driving force behind much of the partnership’s success, both in terms of active living goals and project sustainability efforts.

“My role is to be an advocate for active living when I meet with developers. My role is an advocate for active living with elected officials. My role is to remind staff of the importance of active living...My role is very broad.” -Staff

The Project Director recognized that the partnership could have had an even larger impact if there had been a full-time staff person dedicated solely to ALbD. His city planning responsibilities demanded much time and attention, which limited his role in ALbD.

Early in the grant, the original lead agency found it was unable to fulfill its coordination role. Recognizing the need for additional staff support, the partnership hired a Project Coordinator, an individual who previously worked with the partnership as a marketing and public relations consultant. The Project Coordinator acted as a liaison among partners, coordinated communications within the partnership, and managed many of the day-to-day operations of the project. The partnership also elected a chair and vice-chair each year.

During the five-year period, Get Active Orlando had three Project Coordinators. While the frequent changes in leadership could have been detrimental, the effect on the project, was largely positive as the changes brought an influx of fresh talent and enthusiasm. The ALbD National Program Office played an important part in making these transitions successful by providing training and orientation.

Funding and Resources

In order to generate funding and support for Get Active Orlando, the Preparation committee developed a list of potential funding sources and tracked successes. In addition to the ALbD grant, which primarily supported the Project Coordinator position, the partners reached out to a number of local, state, and national funders to introduce Get Active Orlando and, ultimately, to expand the amount of financial and other resources available to support the initiative.

In total, the partnership leveraged \$3,125,200 to support ALbD activities. Funding came from the following sources:

- The Blue Foundation of Florida
- Children’s Safety Village
- Epilepsy Foundation
- Florida Department of Transportation
- Florida Freewheelers
- Florida Planning and Zoning Association
- Orange County Health Department
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (ALbD Special Opportunities grant)
- Track Shack Foundation

The partnership also benefited tremendously from in-kind support. Volunteers provided approximately \$28,000 each year in assistance for programs and other activities.

Community Support and Challenges

The Get Active Orlando partnership recognized the importance of building trust in the Parramore neighborhood in order to gain support from the community. To engage the community, residents were invited to be members of the partnership. Residents specifically asked for assurance that the Get Active Orlando work would be sustained after the ALbD funding ended. In addition, Get Active Orlando collaborated with existing programs and activities in the community. It was important that the partners did not consider their efforts as “charity” for Parramore residents.

“We have to prove that we are going to be something they can count on...” -Staff

The partnership benefited from a strong relationship with the city, which provided logistical support and resources. The Mayor and City Council members also recognized the importance of active living and supported community change through city policy. The Mayor showed his support by kicking off a media campaign and participating in walking groups.

“[The partnership] had a great relationship with the city. We worked really well together...they understand what our organization was about and they valued it. They sort of understood what our expertise was and allowed us to run with some things that as a city you don’t really do...It was a pretty seamless thing.” -Staff

Community Assessment

“How do we improve our community from a physical standpoint and from a programmatic standpoint. We were looking at the five Ps and everything else, and I said...don’t we need to know what we have?...This is an opportunity to create a benchmark of where we are.” -Staff

In September 2004, Get Active Orlando created and tested a street audit tool designed to provide data about the needs of the project area. Partners worked with transportation planners and a researcher, also an active partner, from the University of Central Florida to design the Pedestrian Level of Service/Biker Level of Service (PLOS/BLOS) audit, a 37-question tool that assigned a grade to street design based on perceptions of safety and appeal. The audit tools collected information about streets (one-way vs. two-way, number of lanes), sidewalks, bicycle lanes (presence, width, condition), pleasantness, shade, lighting, speed limits, and personal safety.

Armed with the audit tool, clipboards, and tape measures, volunteer pairs surveyed over 300 street segments in the project area. The data was entered into the city’s geographic information system (GIS) to add an additional layer of information. The partnership used the results to generate maps to provide a visual representation of the infrastructure for active living present in the community. The audit results revealed that the quality of sidewalks in the Parramore neighborhood was limited by low security and little shade. These maps were used to inform design plans and policies, including the City of Orlando’s five-year Downtown Transportation Plan, which called for the improvement of pedestrian and bicyclist safety.

The partnership presented its auditing methods and results to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, academic institutions in the Orlando area, policy makers, city planners, and the other ALbD grantees. The results generated much interest within city agencies and other organizations, including the Florida Public Health Association, Orlando Chamber of Commerce, and the local chapters of the Florida American Planning Association and Florida Planning and Zoning Association.

The partnership also conducted focus groups with community members from the project area to identify key issues and challenges facing older adults. Specifically, the focus groups posed four questions:

- 1) How are you active?
- 2) Why is it important to be active?
- 3) What are the barriers to being active?
- 4) What are one or two key “lever points” that would make a difference too being active?

All of the focus group participants recognized the need to stay active and healthy in order to maintain mobility and mental health and to prevent functional limitations. Physical safety related to environmental and interpersonal concerns was a significant barrier for being active. Participants reported walking was their primary form of exercise.

A local community center manager who worked closely with older adults, noted that exercise was not incorporated in the cultural behavior of older generations. While many older adults may have held physically demanding, laborious jobs in the past, exercise for the sake of exercise was not part of their daily routines. Get Active Orlando recognized the need for a widespread awareness campaign to encourage physical activity.



Policies and Physical Projects

Policies and physical projects provided the greatest successes for Get Active Orlando. Because the ALbD grant was submitted and supported by a city department, it was clear that the partnership had a degree of political support from the beginning. The support only increased during the grant period. As a result, several significant policy and physical projects were undertaken, including the adoption of design standards and the establishment of an advisory committee for the mayor and city council. Policy influences and physical projects, related partners, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are described as follows.



► Design Standards

- The partnership identified a number of plans and policies in which to incorporate active living, friendly design standards.
- The Downtown Transportation Plan was rewritten to improve safety using the pedestrian and bicyclist level of service audits and formally adopted by the city council in 2006.
- The partnership recommended updates to the City's Land Development Code to prioritize sidewalks gaps, designate primary and secondary pedestrian corridors, and specify streetscape elements.
- Growth Management Policies were updated to include active living principles regarding land use, recreation, and transportation.
- The Project Director advocated for the inclusion of active living principles (e.g., sidewalk width and connectivity) in developers' individual projects.
- The partnership created a Design Standards Checklist of provisions for pedestrian- and bicyclist-friendly features, to be submitted with all development project applications.

"[The five-year Downtown Transportation Plan] is a pretty significant thing for active living, I think. I think it just laid the foundation that this is going to be a quantifiable program in our community...we are really going to be able to assess what has happened here." -Staff

► Advisory Committee

- The partnership advocated successfully for the establishment of an Active Living Advisory Committee in 2006.
- The committee, made up of partnership members, advised the mayor and city council on all matters related to active living, including urban design, public policy, communications strategies, and capital projects.

"One of our work program items was to establish the mayor's Active Living Advisory Committee. In that respect, its role goes beyond what was required by the Active Living by Design grant in that the committee is there basically to advise the mayor and the city council on all things that may or may not impact negatively or positively on the active living environment for downtown." -Staff

"Everybody is fully aware of what the committee is doing. I think that's very important because, if nothing else, it's a very subtle subconscious message that there's a group of people in the city of Orlando that are focusing and working on this issue every day of the week, every month of the year and there are good things coming out of it." -Staff

► **Street Design Projects**

- The partnership successfully advocated for the inclusion of active living principles in a number of street design projects through evidence-based presentations and political influence.
- The city allocated \$1 million toward the installation of pedestrian countdown timers for crosswalks at more than 400 intersections.
- Sidewalk connections were identified, prioritized, and added to the city's Capital Improvement Plan.
- Sidewalks for Safety provided \$250,000 for 22 new and repaired sidewalks in Parramore.
- Division Avenue Streetscape, \$2.2 million investment from the CRA, provided for new sidewalks, improvements to intersections, and additional street trees.
- The Church Street Streetscape project invested \$15.4 million from the Federal Transportation Reauthorization Act in street improvements for pedestrians.
- The Event Center redevelopment project, located on the edge of Parramore, improved lighting and landscaping, added bike lanes, and built a Creative Village consisting of shops and restaurants.



► **Community Gardens**

- The partnership assessed resources available and interest in community gardens in the Parramore neighborhood.
- The partnership worked with Nap Ford Community School to develop a garden for student and community use.
- Representatives from Leu Gardens provided technical assistance and training on how to begin and maintain a garden.
- Community volunteers and partners went door-to-door to recruit interested gardeners.
- Residents requested the creation of additional gardens following the success of the Parramore Community Garden.
- The gardens increased resident interactions and provided a safe place for physical activity.
- The gardens received political support from the mayor, the city commissioner, and the chief of police.
- The Disney company provided support in the form of a sandbox, picnic tables, compost bins, water fountains, and fertilizer.

“Eyes on the street, getting people involved in activities that are wholesome. There are lots of – I started thinking of the benefits of a community garden – community building, partnership. I mean it just goes on and on, so everybody sees the value in this...” -Staff

► **Bike-friendly Projects**

- The city increased bike lane mileage to over 200 miles of lanes and trails.
- The partnership worked to improve the quality and quantity of bike racks based on their assessment activities, including updating a city ordinance to specify the installation of inverted U-shaped bicycle racks throughout the city.
- Seventy bike racks valued at over \$8,000 were donated to the city.
- Bike racks were included in construction plans for 200 transit shelters.

“Virtually every project that we view, every master plan, every conditional use...if there is an opportunity for bike opportunities they are put in there...we are not just talking the talk.” -Staff

Strengths and Challenges

Partners, staff, and community members identified a number of strengths and challenges related to implementing and sustaining policy and physical project strategies.

Assessment data, specifically from the street audit, proved to be a strong platform for policy and physical environment improvements. The data were used in dozens of presentations to document existing problems and to illustrate how change could support physical activity. Use of the data was essential to embedding active living principles into the decision-making framework for planning and policy.

While the partnership had strong political support, the Active Living Advisory Committee appointment included a sunset clause that required the city council and the mayor to reauthorize the group after the ALbD grant ended. Likewise, the partnership faced great difficulty getting some projects off the ground, despite funding and support. For example, the Get Active Orlando work plan included extending the Orlando Urban Trail, a paved bike path. Despite securing funding for land acquisition, design, and construction for a segment of the trail, the project stalled due to conflicts over land acquisition.

The partnership also noted that measuring the impact of its efforts proved challenging. While the impact on individuals could easily be measured through pre- and post-evaluations, it was challenging to measure the impact of policy, promotions, and physical projects.

Promotions and Programs

Promotional and programmatic efforts of Get Active Orlando helped support the policy influences and physical projects by increasing awareness of active living and building social and institutional support for the partnership's efforts. Promotions and programs, related partners, staff, and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are described below.

► *Name and logo development*

- The partnership worked with Evolve Design Group to develop a name and logo for the partnership.
- Get Active Orlando was chosen because it appealed to the target audience and was easily tailored by exchanging Orlando for a neighborhood name.



► **Social Marketing Campaign**

- The partnership received funds through an ALbD Special Opportunities grant to design and implement a social marketing campaign with Evolve Design Group.
- The campaign, launched in 2007, focused on “Reasons to Get Active” identified by the target audience (lower income families, older adults, “downtowners”).
- Advertisements promoting walking, biking, and playing in the Parramore neighborhood were placed in the local African American newspaper (circulation 7,000) as part of the “Walk, Bike, Play” campaign targeting youth and families.
- The Downtown User’s Guide and “e-blasts” from the city promoted being active in Downtown.
- Thirty-six large promotional banners were placed throughout the downtown area.
- A free downtown circular bus bore a Get Active Orlando message for over a year.
- Community members could access a website (www.getactiveorlando.com) for more information.

“We received additional funding through the special opportunities grant...we actually hired a design firm....and we worked with them on research and development. We targeted community stakeholders and met with them to figure out what is the best way to reach our target audiences...and then we kind of put our messages together based a lot on what our focus group said and what our target audience’s core values were...” -Partner

► **Presentations**

- The partnership gave a number of presentations to local, state, and national audiences, including State of Florida Health Department Obesity Summits, the University of Central Florida School of Nursing, the Orlando Chamber of Commerce, ALbD Annual Grantee Meeting, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Children’s Health Initiative, Institute for Transportation Engineers Conference, Orange County Parent-Teacher Association, Lake Ivanhoe design charrette, and Downtown Orlando Partnership.

“I did a presentation on active living design to the staff on College of Nursing who were fascinated by the design park, that they had never thought of that as being a health issue.” -Staff

► **Walking Club for Older Adults**

- With funding from the Track Shack Foundation, the partnership organized a free 10-week walking club program for older adults that coincided with the social marketing campaign.
- Participants were given pedometers to track their steps and received training on proper footwear, safety, stretching, and other walking topics.
- The mayor walked with the group on multiple occasions to demonstrate his support for active living.
- Six 10-week sessions were held during the final two years of the ALbD grant.

“[The morning walks with seniors] kind of became a mini lecture series. Yeah, we had the mayor talk about pedestrian safety. We had someone from Track Shack come and talk about senior stretching...We had an Orlando Police Department speak about safety, specifically for seniors, and it turned out to be more of a comprehensive program.” -Partner

► **Bicycle Recycle and Giveaway**

- In 2006, the Get Active Orlando partnership began a bicycle recycle and giveaway program that provided used and refurbished bikes to both adults and children from the Parramore community to encourage bicycling.
- A number of organizations contributed by donating or repairing bikes: Orlando Police Department, The Lynx Group, and Florida Freewheelers.
- Recipients filled out an application detailing why they wanted a bike and how they planned to use it for recreation and transportation purposes.
- The Epilepsy Foundation donated children’s helmets, and Metroplan led a bike safety program.
- More than eight events were held during the grant period, and over 100 bikes have been distributed.



► **Other Policies and Physical Projects**

- Partners held a community bike ride through the Parramore neighborhood to promote cycling.
- Get Active Orlando worked directly with Parramore Kidz Zone (a separate RWJF-funded initiative) and City Teenz to provide youth recreation programs, such as double dutch jump roping, community bike rides, and teen bike giveaways.
- Point-of-decision prompts encouraged people to take the stairs instead of the elevator at City Hall.

Strengths and Challenges

Staff, partners, and community members identified a number of challenges to implementing and sustaining programs and promotions. Specifically, the partnership found it difficult to maintain programs because of the intense resources and staff time needed. For instance, the partnership was interested in developing a bike share program to allow residents to rent bikes for transportation purposes, but decided the program was not feasible due to financial constraints. To address this challenge, the partners viewed the first few months of each program as a pilot period, with the understanding that flexibility would allow them to modify programs to better meet community needs.

At the same time, project failures, such as the initial failed attempt to establish a community garden, helped the partnership rethink their strategies. The partnership realized that the community must ultimately be responsible for programs in order to ensure sustainability. The community garden was successful once community members were recruited to fill leadership roles.

Sustainability

The partners faced challenges with ensuring the sustainability of Get Active Orlando activities. For example, other programs not related to Get Active Orlando formed in the area without input from the community or plans for continuation of funding or services. This lack of foresight and relationship-building for independent projects impeded the Get Active Orlando’s work by damaging their relationship with the community.

“...people are in agreement that, even if we didn’t have a grant, even if we didn’t have a program, we may still be doing the things that we are doing anyway... the whole partnership and the whole idea of active living has taken on a degree of permanence even though the people may not be permanent... It’s something that we want to continue to support. And something that will be here long after the grant is over.” -Staff

Get Active Orlando took action to ensure sustainability of the partnership and general active living principles after the ALbD grant ended. The focus of the Get Active Orlando partnership was policy and infrastructure change, both inherently long-term strategies to improve active living. Likewise, the development of the advisory committee to the mayor increased the impact of the partnership during the grant period and assured that policymakers prioritize active living in the future.

In addition, the Mayor of Orlando created the Pathways for Parramore initiative to improve five pillars of the community: housing, public safety, business development, children and education, and quality of life. The inclusion of the quality of life measure was inspired by Get Active Orlando and their efforts to improve the community. This measure incorporated parks, sidewalks, bike trails, and other aspects of the built environment that support an active living lifestyle.

“When we were first approached by Active Living by Design, and started thinking about it, it struck me how there really is a nexus between how we build communities, how we live in those communities, and how it directly affects your health. There’s no question. Intuitively I guess I think I know what makes a community healthier, but I never really looked at it that way, so it’s really in a sense a repackaging of things we’ve always done. So it was kind of like aha...an aha moment, and...before Active Living by Design and that whole application process, I had not really given it much thought.” -Staff

Get Active Orlando received an 18-month sustainability award from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation with which they planned to explore additional ways to maintain momentum, such as developing a heightened focus on policy and physical projects, conducting an audit of the partnership to identify opportunities, adding new partners, considering incorporation as a 501(c)3 organization, and linking programs to specific partners or community organizations to encourage institutionalization.

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