



EXPERIENTIAL EVENTS FACILITATION GUIDE

Planning & Conducting a Walk Audit

CONTACT INFO:

Brooke Bettolo

Senior Health Educator, Built Environment Program

Larimer County Department of Health and Environment

bbettolo@larimer.org

INTRODUCTION

Many communities in the United States are designed exclusively for cars. This leads to dangerous conditions for pedestrians and bicyclists.

Experiential events are when individuals participate in hands-on, in-person activities to demonstrate a new concept, design, technology. Experiential events like walk audits bring people together to start making their vision of healthy, safe, and walkable streets real. In a walk audit, participants go for a walk together to note the safety and comfort of walking in a defined area. They pay special attention to hazards that make them feel unsafe and assets that make them want to return to this route in the future. This can be completed by community members or with professionals such as elected officials, traffic engineers, and other decision makers. In this toolkit, we give you the tools to hold your own walk audit that will help you achieve the goals of your community.

WHY DO WE WANT WALKABLE COMMUNITIES?

When our streets are walkable, our communities benefit in many ways. Streets designed for walkability are safer for all users. Additionally, health benefits include reductions in obesity and other chronic diseases and increased endorphins levels. Walkable communities increase a sense of belonging and neighborhood social interaction. Kids and youth who walk to school are more likely to meet physical activity recommendations and have better academic performance. Finally, giving people the option to walk instead of drive can improve the safety of streets and reduce air pollution and asthma rates.

WHY DO A WALK AUDIT?

A walk audit can be as simple as taking a walk and writing a list of the things you find along your walk that make it easier or harder to move actively. Walk audits can be done on your own but are often done by a group of people using a checklist to:

- Evaluate street infrastructure and conditions,
- document barriers, positive features, activities, and
- document observations of the walking environment.

A walk audit can occur as part of a bigger plan to assess overall walkability or can be a one-time event to understand or express concerns about a specific area.

Adapted and directly from Safe Routes to School "Get to Know Your Neighborhood with a Walk Audit" (2018).

WHAT IS A WALK AUDIT?

Completing a walk audit can be the start to making positive change in your community, leading to a safer, more accessible, and more comfortable walking environment for everyone. A walk audit can occur for different reasons.

Walk audits can be used to:

- Identify walking barriers and benefits in a community
- Bring community members of all walks and abilities together to discuss problems and brainstorm solutions
- Count disparities, evaluating whether different neighborhoods have walking environments that differ in quality and infrastructure
- Determine problems that can be easily fixed
- Identify needed improvements to be included in funding asks, plans, and projects
- Reach out to elected and appointed officials around a problem ahead of a request for change

SIMPLE STEPS TO A WALK AUDIT

This toolkit will walk you through a simple, easy way to complete a walk audit:

1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate it

- This section helps define your goals, determine what tools you want to use, decide a route, and schedule your walk audit.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need

- This section will help you figure out who to invite to the walk audit and what supplies you will need.

3. Get Walking: What to Do and What to Look for

- This section explains what to do on the day of the walk audit itself.

4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change

- This section helps you figure out next steps after your walk audit.

1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate It

What's your goal?

The first step in planning your walk audit is knowing what your goal is. Your goal might be to:

- Engage community members and educate them about walkability and safe streets.
- Carry out an evaluation of a specific set of streets to plan for funding requests or improvements.
- Get decision-makers involved and activated for change.
- Something else!

Your goal will help you decide whom you invite, how many walk groups are needed, what information you record, and where you walk.

What information do you want to obtain?

Having a list of questions or a checklist for people to document their observations is important. You may want a general sense of people's concerns or you may want a standard evaluation of engineering needs along a route. What you want to know and who will be participating in your walk audit will determine the type of walk audit evaluation tool you select.

Things to consider when choosing your walk audit evaluation tool:

- Who will be conducting the walk audit?
- How much detail do you want?
- How complex a walk audit checklist do you want?
- How will this information be used?
- Is there information that you want to collect that is not part of the tool you want to use? Can you add your questions in?
- If you can't find an existing tool that meets your needs, modify one to create your own!

There are many walk audit tools, checklists, and forms available.

The Built Environment (B.E.) Team at Larimer County Department of Health and Environment has identified possible walk audit tools – There are checklists at the end of this document.

1. Get Ready: Where's the Route and How to Rate It

Where's the Route?

The next step is knowing where you want to walk. With your goals in mind, identify your route:

- Is the route convenient for the people you want to attend?
- Is this a route people walk (or could walk) frequently?
- Is it a route that connects a starting place to a popular destination?
- How long do you want your route to be?

Walk audits are commonly a half mile to a mile, although you can make them shorter or longer depending on your group's energy level and desires. Remember that it takes much longer to evaluate a route than to simply walk it – walk audits often average around 30 minutes per half mile – so think about how long you want to be out.

Create a map to show where your group will walk. You can do this as simply as taking a screenshot of a Google Map or Mapquest map, or by highlighting the route on a community map. Your city or municipality may be able to help make a map for you, and this is a great way to introduce your project and gain their support and participation. You can also draw your own map.

Schedule Your Walk Audit

- **Pick a date:** Pick a date to do your walk audit, keep in mind the time of year, day of the week, and whom you want to invite to the walk audit. You may want to give participants a few dates to see when most are available.
- **Pick a time of day:** Think about the time of day that you want to conduct the audit and how long you intend to make it. If you are evaluating a school route, you'll want to conduct the audit during arrival or dismissal time to see how students on foot and bicycle are interacting with cars and buses. Do you want to see conditions during rush hour, or during the middle of the day? Most audits are conducted during daylight hours, but an audit at dusk or nighttime will reveal different things.
- **Determine your start & end time:** Plan to have everyone meet 15 minutes before you want to start walking and provide some time after the walk for a brief discussion of the finding.

2. Get Set: Who Will Help and What You Need

Gather people!

You will want to invite people to participate. Who you invite will depend upon your goals, the location of your route, and so on. See the box for potential invitees. You may want to invite elected officials or your public works director to encourage follow-up action to your walk audit. We also recommend inviting people of all ages and abilities to include their perspectives.

Considerations:

- If your goal is to motivate community members you may have a bigger group participating in the walk audit together. Try not to have a walking group that is larger than 10 people, so that it will be relatively easy for everyone to hear each other and stay together. If you have a lot of interest, consider having multiple groups start at different locations at the same time, or have multiple walks.
- If your goal is to evaluate more territory, you may want to have smaller teams of one to three participants covering different streets and routes.
- Determine who will lead each walk audit. The leader should be familiar with the walk audit tool you are using and should feel comfortable leading a group to discuss the pros and cons of the street environment. Familiarity with the neighborhood is a plus, but not essential. Your leader can lead an informal discussion, or you can get help from city planners or engineers to help identify and discuss issues.
- Provide reminders to everyone regarding the start date, time, and location, and wear comfortable shoes and appropriate clothes for the weather. You may want to discourage umbrellas since it is hard to hold one and write at the same time.
- If you have multiple groups consider having people of differing backgrounds and a mix of community members and professionals in each group. The varying perspectives will be a great learning opportunity for participants.

Gather supplies:

- Copies of maps and your selected walk audit checklist/ assessment tool for each participant. Be sure to provide your selected walk audit checklist or assessment tool in the languages spoken by your walk participants.
- Clipboards & pens
- Nametags
- Cameras or phones
- Sunscreen, snacks, and water (or ask everyone to bring a water bottle, especially on hot days)
- Flashlight or headlamp
- You may want to provide safety vests, in case any of your participants would like to wear one

Consider Inviting:

- Neighborhood/community residents & business owners
- City/town transportation staff (engineers, planners, public works staff)
- City/town departments interested in safety and physical activity (health department, police/enforcement, parks & recreation)
- City/town council members, mayor
- Members of community organizations, faith communities, walk/bike groups, or Neighborhood Watch
- Older adults
- Students and families
- Nonprofit organizations

3. Get Walking: What to Do and What to Look For

Before you walk

Plan to meet up at least 15 minutes before you will start walking, to accommodate stragglers, pass out supplies, review instructions, and answer questions.

- Be sure to have everyone in the group introduce themselves. Having participants get to know each other and share concerns and observations is part of the goal.
- Provide some training about your walk audit tool before the walk begins.
- In addition to having a leader, consider assigning responsibilities to additional people, such as a recorder, photographer, or “sweep” person to make sure you don’t lose any one This may not be needed for all groups.

While you walk

Have your leader stop the group periodically to discuss particularly good or bad features, or just to see what people are noticing and experiencing. Along the way ask everyone to look around and listen. What do they see around them? Vacant homes? Litter and trash? Gardens and trees? What do they hear? Dogs barking? Loud cars? Construction? Birds chirping?

On the walk audit, you will be documenting:

- The infrastructure. Note strengths and weaknesses of the physical environment, such as the condition of the sidewalks, intersection crossings, signage, lighting, benches, bus stops, etc..
- The behavior of people walking, bicycling, and driving. Observe how many people are walking or biking, how they are interacting with others on the street, and whether they are following traffic laws. Take note of traffic flow, vehicle speed, and whether drivers are obeying traffic laws.
- Factors that contribute to comfort while walking. Do people feel too exposed to traffic? Does the area feel deserted and unwelcoming? Are there street trees providing shade and the cozy feeling of a ceiling?
- Encourage people to take pictures of what they are seeing.

After you walk

- Conduct a brief discussion right after the walk to gather everyone's impressions, talk about what you saw and possible solutions, and gather everyone's surveys. Find out if attendees want to be part of next steps.
- Make sure the people that participated in the walk have your contact information in case they think of something they want you to know about the walk audit later.
- Your brief discussion can be a quick check-in before people leave or can be a longer problem-solving session. Have someone take notes as people discuss overall observations, prioritize, and consider possible solutions. You may want to discuss who has the power to fix the problems and what steps would need to take place.

4. Get Active: Share Observations and Make Change

Now that you have observations of your walking route, put it all together and make a plan. Assemble your information and share with those that can help make improvements to the route's safety, comfort, and convenience.

Document observations & recommendations

Organize all of the notes, especially if you have more than one group that completed the walk audit. Gather and upload photos taken by participants. Pull the notes, recommendations, and photos together into a simple or more detailed report. Your report can be a one- or two-page overview of participants' observations or can be a thorough, detailed list that notes priorities and potential solutions. Consider making a story map to have a clear picture of the findings.

Follow up with participants

Share your report or overall impressions and note what possible solutions could be taken. Let everyone know their time and efforts were appreciated, and how to keep in touch and help with next steps.

Take the next step

Share your report and conclusions with officials, agencies, and departments that can create the changes you want to see. Present your findings at school board or city council meetings and ask what they will do. Involve the participants in the walk in presenting the findings. To create more awareness, write an article or for local news, publish a blog or comment on social media, and even contact foundations and organizations that may be able to help solve problems. City staff can use this information in their planning processes for transportation and land use development, so make sure your city planner, engineer, mayor, and council have access to it.

Walk audits are a great tool to connect with community members and gather information for planning and traffic safety projects. Learning how to conduct a strong walk audit will allow you to be more effective in supporting safety, convenience, and comfort and will help you improve walking, health, and quality of life in your community.

REFERENCES

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Walk Friendly Communities. (n.d.). Benefits.
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APPENDIX

Sample General Walk Audit Checklist

Directions: Please fill out the following checklist to note problems in the walking environment. You may use the checklist either for each block you walk, or for your entire route.

Route:

Group participants:

1. Sidewalks:

Overall quality and safety of sidewalks score (0-10):

- No sidewalks or paths
- Sidewalks are broken, cracked, or have trip hazards
- Sidewalks are blocked by overgrown landscaping, poles, signs, plants, vehicles, etc.
- Sidewalk is not continuous
- Sidewalk is not wide enough (two people cannot easily walk together side by side)
- Sidewalk has nothing separating it from the street (grass, trees, parked cars)
- Sidewalk is missing accessibility features
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

2. Street Crossings and Intersections:

Overall quality and safety of crossing and intersections score (0-10):

- The road is too wide to cross easily
- Traffic signals do not give enough time to cross the street
- The crossing does not have a pedestrian-activated button
- There is no crosswalk, or it is poorly marked
- I have to walk too far to find a safe, marked crosswalk
- Intersection does not have a curb ramp for carts, wheelchairs, strollers, etc.
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

3. Driver Behavior:

Overall quality and safety of driver behavior score (0-10):

- Drivers do not stop at stop signs or stop behind the crosswalk
- Drivers appear to be speeding
- Drivers do not yield to people walking
- Drivers are distracted (on the phone, texting, paying attention to passengers rather than the road)
- Drivers aren't looking out for people walking
- Drivers make unexpected turns
- Drivers seem hostile or are driving reckless
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

4. Safety:

Overall safety score (0-10):

- Car speeds are too fast
- There's too much traffic
- Pedestrian level street lights are few or not present
- There are people on the street who seem threatening
- Unleashed dogs or other loose intimidating animals are present
- Slippery conditions
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

5. Comfort:

Overall comfort score (0-10):

- There is not enough shade
- There are few or no street trees or other landscaping
- There are vacant lots or rundown buildings
- The street needs benches and places to rest
- There are no or too few trash receptacles available
- Other Problems:

Notes/Comments:

6. Transit or Bus stops:

Overall transit or bus stops score (0-10):

- There is not enough lighting
- There are no benches or not enough benches
- The bus stop does not have a shelter
- The bus stop does not have good signage or route information
- The bus stop is not accessible
- There are no or too few trash receptacles available
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

7. Wayfinding and Signage:

Overall wayfinding and signage score (0-10):

- The route lacks general wayfinding signs
- The wayfinding signs are confusing or misleading
- The route lacks wayfinding to nearby transit or bus stops
- The route lacks wayfinding to nearby public facilities
- The route is difficult to navigate
- The route has incorrect signage and wayfinding
- Existing wayfinding and signage is out of date
- Other problems:

Notes/Comments:

Survey adapted in part from the Microscale Audit of Pedestrian Streetscapes and the AARP Walk Audit Toolkit.

Larimer County Department of Health and Environment
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