2022 Arkansas State Walking College Final Report and Evaluation Summary

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Introduction

Background

In July 2021, the Arkansas Department of Health engaged America Walks to deliver its national Walking College program within the State of Arkansas. Launched in 2015, the Walking College is an online educational program for walkable community advocates, whose goal is to build the capacity of local change agents to increase walking and improve walkability in their communities.

The course curriculum is organized into six instructional modules, each of which has a specific learning objective. After completing the modules, Walking College Fellows will be able to:

- 1. Discuss the history of transportation planning in the U.S. and the role of systemic discrimination in shaping the built and social environments
- 2. Recruit and inspire other advocates to build and grow a local walking movement through creation of a compelling public narrative and inclusive engagement
- 3. Use strategic communications to organize people and campaigns to create safe, healthy, equitable, and walkable neighborhoods
- 4. Identify design changes in the built environment which will foster active, accessible, equitable mobility and safe use of the public space for all
- 5. Navigate the structure of local government and engage elected officials and professionals in conversations about public policy improvements
- 6. Connect social justice, public health, and climate action in a strategic plan focused on creating safe mobility for every community member

During the 6-month course, Fellows commit about 5 hours per week to:

- Study online reading and review materials
- Participate in video-conferenced discussion forums
- Meet with their Personal Mentors for coaching sessions
- Complete community-based assignments

Towards the end of the course, each Fellow develops a Walking Action Plan for their community, which establishes specific goals and an implementation strategy.

Program Planning

America Walks staff worked with the Arkansas Department of Health, Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention, and other partners to establish the program parameters.

It was agreed that the Arkansas State Walking College program would consist of 18 Fellows and a small team of experienced Mentors from the state. Fellowships would be offered preferentially to existing grantees with the Arkansas Department of Health, but there would also be an open application process. The six learning modules (three weeks per module) would be delivered over a nineteen-week period starting January 3rd, 2022, with a one-week mid-term break after Module 3. The deadline for Fellows to submit their Walking Action Plans would be in June and a graduation ceremony would be held after that.

Program Structure

Recruitment of Mentors

Successful Walking College Mentors have advocacy and organizing experience; technical knowledge in community design, transportation planning, and/or public health; and a love of teaching.

Because America Walks and Arkansas Department of Health staff were already connected with a number of individuals in the state who possess these qualities, a "direct outreach" approach was used. Candidates who were interested in a part-time paid position were interviewed and invited to complete a short online application form. Past Walking College Fellows, leaders of local and state advocacy groups, and government professionals were all considered.

The following Mentors were eventually appointed:

- John Landosky Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator with the City of Little Rock
- Kim Sanders Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordinator with the Arkansas Department of Transportation
- Rachel Cotner Advocate from Little Rock and 2021 national Walking College Fellow

Each Mentor was assigned a group of six Fellows. They facilitated discussions with this group and provided one-on-one coaching sessions them, as they prepared their Walking Action Plans.

Awarding of Fellowships

The eighteen Fellowships were awarded through two simultaneous processes. Arkansas Department of Health staff reached out to their existing grantees to invite them to participate. At the same time, an open online application form was created and advertised throughout the state.

Fellowships were awarded to:

- Alyssa Frisby Volunteer for Main Street Lonoke and Lonoke 2022
- Amanda Hicks City Engineer and Director of the West Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Amanda Roberts Member of the City of Batesville Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee
- Amber Havens Parks and Recreation professional and volunteer with the England Mayor's Office and England Coalition
- Andrew Coker Regional Economic Resiliency Coordinator at West Central Arkansas Planning and Development District, Inc. in Little Rock
- Belinda Stillwell Case Manager with Arkansas Department of Health in Harrisburg
- Candace Williams Executive Director of the Rural Community Alliance in Elaine
- Cory Morris Urban Planning student at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville
- Erin Gildner Associate Director for the Equitable Maternal Health Coalition at March of Dimes in Bryant
- Everett Gooch Community advocate and volunteer with numerous organizations in Little Rock

- Jacqueline Doss-Cola Founder of Small Wonders Foundation, Inc. and volunteer with Pulaski County Special School District in Maumelle
- Janea Snyder University of Arkansas Little Rock faculty member in Health Education and Promotion and representative to the Growing Healthy Communities University District Community
- Jennifer Reaves Community Education Specialist with Northeast Region Hometown Health Improvement in Gosnall
- Kelly Giese Volunteer with First United Methodist Church in Newport
- Mary J. (Jodi) Morris Volunteer Master Naturalist and community advocate in Little Rock
- Nicole Chandler Chicot Elementary School and Early Childhood Center in Little Rock
- Sam Jordan Transportation Planner with the City of West Memphis and West Memphis Metropolitan Planning Organization
- Stacy Willinger Planner with the Frontier Metropolitan Planning Organization in Fort Smith

Following an initial phone conversation with the Arkansas State Walking College Manager, the Fellows participated in an onboarding process and Orientation Webinar.

Online Course Platform

Google Classroom was used as the course platform. All Fellows, Mentors, Arkansas Department of Health staff, and other partners were given access to the online classroom.

The curriculum for each module – consisting of links to required and optional study materials, prompts for group discussion forums, and assignments – was uploaded to Google Classroom, the week prior to the start of that module. Fellows were asked to write weekly blogs on their reaction to the reading materials, ideas for the Walking Action Plans, and general Walking College experience, in the Google Classroom "Stream."

Program Implementation

Walking College Curriculum

The six modules which make up the Walking College curriculum were presented every three weeks, according to the following schedule.

Module 1: How We Got Here (January 3 - 21)

- Week 1: A History of Transportation
- Week 2: A History of Systemic Injustice
- Week 3: Learning from History

Module 2: Developing Leadership (January 24 – February 11)

- Week 1: Leadership and Movement-Building
- Week 2: The Power of Public Narrative
- Week 3: Cultural Competence and Health Equity

Module 3: Organizing for Change (February 14 – March 4)

- Week 1: Community Organizing
- Week 2: Planning Advocacy Campaigns
- Week 3: Walking Events and Programs

Mid-Term Break (March 7 – 11)

Module 4: Designing for People (March 14 – April 1)

- Week 1: Walkable Streets and Communities
- Week 2: How to Transform 'Car-Oriented Roads'
- Week 3: Mobility Justice

Module 5: Shifting Public Policy (April 4 – 22)

- Week 1: Institutionalizing Change
- Week 2: Complete Streets and Vision Zero Policies
- Week 3: Other Policy Strategies

Module 6: Planning a Strategy (April 25 – May 13)

- Week 1: Background and Partnerships
- Week 2: Vision, Goals, and Strategies
- Week 3: Challenges and Evaluation

In-Person Walking College Workshop (May 13)

Walking Action Plans due (May 31)

The next section describes the detailed learning activities and assignments Fellows participated in during the modules.

Self-Study and Virtual Classroom Activities

Each week, Fellows were given 3-5 online study materials, consisting of articles, TED Talks, toolkits, and fact sheets to review.

Each module also included a longer list of optional materials, which Fellows did not need to study in depth – instead, they were encouraged to make sure they were generally familiar with the topics covered in this "resource library" so they could return later when they were searching for something specific.

In addition to these self-study activities, Fellows participated in a scheduled, 1-hour group discussion or coaching session once a week, as follows.

- During the first week of each module, a Mentor-led group discussion involving one Mentor and 3-6 Fellows was held, in which the study materials for that module were reviewed and the Mentor facilitated conversations relating that content to the Fellows' own communities.
- The following week, the same group of Fellows met again, but without the Mentor present, so that the Fellows could build peer support relationships, assist each other with planning and problem-solving efforts, and discuss their Walking College experience without feeling inhibited by the presence of their Mentor.
- Finally, during the third week of each module, Fellows participated in one-on-one coaching sessions with their Mentors, which focused on their Walking Action Plans.

At the end of each one-on-one coaching session, Mentors gave their Fellows a writing assignment (typically, 3-5 paragraphs) to be completed and submitted before the next session, 3 weeks later. The topics for these writing assignments related to the content of the current module, and were chosen so that they could ultimately be compiled into a draft of the Fellow's Walking Action Plan:

- Module 1: Describe your community and general walking conditions
- Module 2: Create your public narrative ("Stories of Self, Community, and Now")
- Module 3: Develop a vision statement and a list of 3-5 specific goals for your community
- Module 4: Draft a strategic plan and timeline for steps to accomplishing each goal
- Module 5: Identify potential challenges and develop your project evaluation plan
- Module 6: Compile previous writing assignments and finalize Walking Action Plan

Fellows were also asked to complete one community assignment during each module and blog about their experience in "The Stream:"

- Module 1: Take a walk or a roll in your community
- Module 2: Make a list of potential partners (agencies, organizations, individuals)
- Module 3: Reach out to a new partner to introduce yourself and engage them
- Module 4: Plan, organize, and lead a community Walk Audit
- Module 5: Perform a Local Policy Scan of your community
- Module 6: Create an elevator speech about your project

Although very few Fellows completed all of the assignments, most completed most of them. One Fellow (Sam Jordan) withdrew from the program during the early modules.

The next section showcases two Fellows' "Stories of Self," part of the Module 2 writing assignment.

Fellows' Stories of Self

Janea Snyder

University of Arkansas Little Rock faculty member in Health Education and Promotion and representative to the Growing Healthy Communities University District Community

My "story of self" highlights what has shaped me and motivated me to want to serve and be impactful in my efforts to contribute to help others.

Growing up less privileged has empowered me to work hard to achieve success in my academics upon enrolling in college as a first-generation student. I'm confident I would not be the same person I am today if it weren't for the positive and negative experiences that have impacted my life.



These experiences have shaped me and have allowed me to lead with

compassion, encouragement, and empathy. Over the years I have grown to understand how impactful one person can be in the lives of others and how education can be a catalyst for inspiring hope in others. Throughout my learning experiences I have developed a passion for education because I know how powerful it is in improving the lives of many.

As an adult, I have become fully aware of the disparities that exist amongst individuals and communities, including access to vital resources such as quality education, employment opportunities, housing, and access to care to reference a few. As a faculty member in higher education, this role has fostered me to encourage all my students to strive to do their very best in mastering the educational and professional goals they have. I understand the power that education can have on improving outcomes, and I hope my encouragement efforts will have a ripple effect in inspiring others to do the same in the years to come.

My professional experience as a professor has allowed me to challenge myself to pursue scholarly activities that sometimes require me to address my doubtfulness in being successful in my endeavors. I think my story of self has allowed me to not take opportunities for granted and always do my best at the tasks despite how challenging they may seem, especially with balancing the demands of work and family life. I have learned that there will always be room for success when there is hope and determination. I think challenges help us grow as individuals both personally and professionally. As a certified health education specialist, I'm passionate about helping others improve their overall health outcomes.

Therefore, sharing tips about the benefits of engaging in regular physical activity, learning how to prepare and eat healthy meals, and helping to share beneficial resources with community members inspires me to serve in this capacity. Participating in America Walks Arkansas Walking College has allowed me to learn, increase my knowledge and develop a plan to help address barriers impacting the University District community's walkability. I hope that my efforts will prove to be impactful in inspiring the support of others so that we can collectively help impact positive change within this community.

Amanda Roberts Member of the City of Batesville and Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee

I have come or "walked" full circle in these first fifty years of life. I am a native of Batesville – the oldest city in Arkansas. I live in a 150-year-old home on Main Street in our historic downtown. I attend church just a block down the street from my home. I can walk to the grocery store, several restaurants, the movies, and to most of my meetings. Walking everywhere I can, every day is organic to me. Walking and walkability are cornerstones to where I live. But this wasn't always the case.



My love for my neighborhood started when I attended a middle school that was located a street over from Main Street. Most days I walked after school the quarter mile to my dad's office to hang out in the breakroom until he drove us home across town to a newer area of Batesville. This was the mid-80s. Downtown was stagnant with a slow steady decline on the horizon. New businesses were finding locations in East Batesville, and old businesses were moving away from Main Street. At the time, three of my grandparents also worked downtown. Two in locally owned department stores, and one in the Sears store.

Unfortunately, all three lost their jobs due to the migration to strip malls and open land for big box stores on the other side of town. Sears downsized and moved into a location in East Batesville and the two downtown department stores closed because they could no longer compete with the new Walmart Superstore. My only memory of downtown Batesville in the 90s was an empty Main Street corridor that divided the west and east sides of town. Shopping had all but dried up, the sidewalks were cracking and buckling from neglect, and the two historic movie theaters had closed.

New leadership in the early 2000's realized that revitalization and creating a walkable, vibrant downtown would be essential in motivating people to open businesses, move back into the historic district, and venture outside to walk, bike, and enjoy the outdoors away from the new highways and busy intersections on the "new" side of town. During this transition, my husband and I lived in Northwest Arkansas – one of the fastest growing areas of the country. Hiking, walking, biking, and all types of healthy living and outdoor recreation was easy to incorporate into our lives there, but Batesville was calling us home.

By the time we moved back, downtown had been experiencing a decade of growth and renewal. We knew immediately that living on Main Street was the ONLY place we wanted to be. Empty stores and lots no longer exist, replaced by pocket parks, thriving businesses, farmer's markets, and venues for movies and community events. The neighborhood had returned to one of walking, biking, and outdoor gatherings. Downtown Batesville and I have both come full circle together!

In-Person Walking College Workshop

On Friday, May 13th (the final day of Module 6), the Arkansas State Walking College Workshop was held at the Main Library in Little Rock.













Eleven of the seventeen Fellows, all three Mentors, and several members of staff with Arkansas Dept. of Health, Arkansas Coalition for Obesity Prevention, and other partners participated in the workshop, which was facilitated by America Walks' Nicole Smith and Ian Thomas. During the planning stages, five learning objectives had been established for the workshop.

After participating in the workshop, Arkansas State Walking College Fellows will be able to:

- 1. Build diverse coalitions which champion walkability because of multiple different benefits
- 2. Describe how walking for transportation (as well as recreation) could become routine in their communities
- 3. Engage elected officials and advocate effectively for walkable community policies, projects, and public funding priorities
- 4. Finalize their Walking Action Plans with near-term (1-year) strategies that build long-term project sustainability
- 5. Promote and advance the creation of a statewide walkable community coalition

And here's the agenda for the event

10:30 am: Coffee/Networking

11:00 am: Opening Session (presentation)

11:15 am: Multiple Benefits of Walkable Communities (Objective #1, small-group discussions) 12:15 pm: Lunch

12:45 pm: Walkability Audits (opening presentation followed by group walks):

2:00 pm: Making Walking for Transportation Routine (Objective #2, debrief from walk audits)

2:45 pm: Effective Advocacy for Walkable Communities (Objective #3, panel discussion)

3:30 pm: Fine-Tuning your Walking Action Plan (Objective #4, small-group discussions)

4:15 pm: Creating a Statewide Coalition (Objective #5, presentation)

4:45 pm: Closing session (presentation)

5:00 pm: Close

Walking Action Plans

A Walking College Fellow's Walking Action Plan should look ahead 3-5 years to accomplish measurable change in their community.

Key components include background information, list of project partners, vision statement and goals, strategies with timeline for each goal, challenges and how to overcome them, and an evaluation plan. And every Walking Action Plan is a "living document" which should be reviewed and updated regularly (every 6-12 months).

Here are the principal goals and areas of focus for the 2022 Arkansas State Walking College Fellows' Walking Action Plans:

- Alyssa Frisby will promote health, connectivity, and active transportation education for residents in Lonoke, AR to increase physical activity and improve health outcomes
- Amanda Hicks will encourage citizens to walk by providing adequate walkability in all designs and creating a maintenance program to sustain the equitable changes with resiliency
- Amanda Roberts will create a safe and walkable infrastructure for Westside's residents to access the City of Batesville's pedestrian trail system and existing schools and parks

- Amber Havens will advocate for safe routes to schools, community services and public spaces for all children, families, and visitors in the City of England, and create a walkable city that promotes health and equity for citizens and increased safety for pedestrians and cyclists
- Andrew Coker will advocate for safer, more efficient, multi-modal transportation options for the intersection of Park Avenue, Whittington Avenue, and Central Avenue/State Highway 7 in Hot Springs, Arkansas
- Belinda Stillwell will make safe, accessible sidewalks available to all Poinsett County residents
- Cory Morris will work to establish an inviting and safe gateway between the University of Arkansas and downtown Fayetteville and capture a pedestrian-first tone for the city
- Erin Gildner will work to improve the safety, accessibility, and beauty of a one block section of North Reynolds Road/Hwy 183 between the I-30 Interchange (Exit 123) and Roya Lane
- Everett Gooch will improve the Arkansas River Trail between the Clinton Pedestrian Bridge and the Medical Mile.
- Janea Snyder will work to make University District a safe and walkable neighborhood with a communication campaign to engage residents in using local parks and trails, development of a new comprehensive plan, and adoption of a Vision Zero policy
- Jennifer Reaves will work with city officials to host a "pop-up" event to show how unused greenspace can be used for economic development and tourism activities, and seek to reduce vehicle speeds close to the schools on AR Hwy 181 and AR Hwy 151
- Kelly Giese will build a coalition of people from across Jackson County focused on safe walking conditions for persons of all ages through the formation of walking groups that focus on walkability and recreation opportunities
- M. Jodi Morris will promote community support for Complete Streets, the Tri-Creek Greenway, and Regional Greenways through the 630 Trail connecting Briarwood Area Neighborhood with other Midtown Little Rock neighborhoods, parks, business and healthcare districts
- Nicole Chandler will work to ensure pedestrians of all ages and abilities will have access to safe and equitable streets and bus stops in Southwest Little Rock
- Stacy Willinger will work with Arkansas College of Health Education, Chaffee Crossing, the City of Barling, and Barling elementary School, make Barling an accessible community that appeals to families as a good, affordable place to live

These Fellows' final Walking Action Plans are included as Appendices A1 – A15. At the time of writing this report, two Fellows (Candace Williams and Jacqueline Doss-Cola) have not submitted their Walking Action Plans.

Program Evaluation

Process Evaluation

To evaluate the quality of each of the Walking College modules, Fellows were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with different aspects of the modules.

Six components of each module were evaluated:

- Topics Covered
- Quality of Study Materials
- Mentor-Led Group Discussion
- Fellows-Only Group Discussion
- One-on-One Coaching Session
- Overall Progress So Far

And each component was evaluated on the following scale

- "Very Unsatisfied"
- "Unsatisfied"
- "Neutral"
- "Satisfied"
- "Very Satisfied"

The results of these surveys are provided in Appendices B1 through B6. Across all modules, Fellows were "Very Satisfied" or "Satisfied" in 85% of their ratings of the different components.

Here are a few specific examples:

- Quality of Study Materials: Fellows reported being "Very Satisfied" in 43% of their ratings, "Satisfied" in 49%, and "Neutral" in 8%
- One-on-One Coaching Session: Fellows were "Very Satisfied" in 67% of their ratings, "Satisfied" in 21%, and "Neutral" in 13%
- Fellows-Only Group Discussion: Fellows were "Very Satisfied" in 33% of their ratings, "Satisfied" in 40%, "Neutral" in 23% and "Unsatisfied" in 3%

Further examination of the lower scores for the Fellows-Only Group Discussions revealed concerns about poor attendance/engagement in some of these discussions. In almost 500 ratings across the entire program, "Very Unsatisfied" was never selected.

Outcome Evaluation

As discussed earlier, the goal of the Walking College is to build the capacity of local change agents to increase walking and improve walkability in their communities.

To determine whether this outcome has been achieved and (if so) to what extent, Fellows completed an online self-assessment survey twice – once before they started the program and then again after they finished it. Survey questions addressed Fellows' self-assessed knowledge/skills and confidence.

Self-Assessment of Knowledge/Skills

Advocates for safe, equitable, walkable communities acquire knowledge and skills in a number of areas in order to be effective. For each of the following knowledge/skill areas, please indicate your current stage of development on a scale of 0 to 6 ("Novice" to "Expert"), based on your own self-assessment:

- Twentieth-century history of transportation planning in the US
- Role of systemic discrimination/injustice in shaping the built environment
- Collaborative leadership, cultural competency, and coalition-building
- Organizing through strategic communications and storytelling
- Grant-writing, fund-raising, and project management
- Engineering design of streets and public spaces
- Public policy research and development
- Data analysis to support campaigns
- Strategic planning

Self-Assessment of Confidence

Advocates for safe, equitable, walkable communities build confidence in their own capabilities, as they become more experienced. For each of the following tasks and strategies, please indicate your current level of confidence on a scale of 0 to 6 ("Not Confident At All" to "Extremely Confident"), based on your own self-assessment:

- Recruit and inspire other advocates to launch and grow a local movement
- Explain the benefits of a walkable community to a variety of different audiences
- Organize effective campaigns which use story-telling and strategic communications
- Practice inclusive engagement and intersectionality with all marginalized groups
- Coordinate events and programs which encourage people to increase outdoor physical activity
- Identify design changes in built environment which improve safety and accessible mobility for all
- Navigate the structure of local government and engage elected officials in public policy discussions
- Plan and implement policy campaigns related to walkable community design
- Write a strategic Walking Action Plan for improving the community

The results of these surveys are provided in Appendices C1 through C3. Fellows increased their self-assessed knowledge/skills and confidence to accomplish key tasks in all eighteen areas studied.

The overall increase in knowledge/skills averaged across all Fellows in all three programs was 65% (where 0 is defined as "Novice" and 6 as "Expert"). Here are a couple of specific examples:

- Organizing through strategic communications and storytelling: 60% increase
- Engineering design of streets and public spaces: 236% increase (ie. more than tripled)

The overall increase in confidence to accomplish key tasks averaged across all Fellows was 48% (where 0 is defined as "Not Confident At All" and 6 as "Extremely Confident"). Examples:

- Recruit and inspire other advocates to launch and grow a local movement: 37% increase
- Write a strategic Walking Action Plan for the community: 91% (ie. almost doubled)

Conclusions

As a result of the AARP State Walking College program in Arkansas, 15 local advocates have completed Walking Action Plans focused on organizing for policy change to create safe, walkable, livable communities.

According to self-assessment surveys, these Fellows substantially increased their knowledge/skills (65%) and confidence (48%) to accomplish key tasks, thereby building their capacity to increase walking and improve walkability in their communities (the goal of the Walking College).

The in-person workshop was successful. In the evaluation, 82% of participants found the workshop "very valuable" (64%) or "valuable" (18%), and 91% reported that they felt more confident to lead a walk audit afterwards.

Finally, 100% stated that they would like to stay connected with the other Fellows and receive ongoing technical assistance from America Walks, Arkansas Dept of Health, and ArCOP.

Appendices

Appendix A: Walking Action Plans

- Appendix A1: Alyssa Frisby
- Appendix A2: Amanda Hicks
- Appendix A3: Amanda Roberts
- Appendix A4: Amber Havens
- Appendix A5: Andrew Coker
- Appendix A6: Belinda Stillwell
- Appendix A7: Cory Morris
- Appendix A8: Erin Gildner
- Appendix A9: Everett Gooch
- Appendix A10: Janea Snyder
- Appendix A11: Jennifer Reaves
- Appendix A12: Kelly Giese
- Appendix A13: M. Jodi Morris
- Appendix A14: Nicole Chandler
- Appendix A15: Stacy Willinger

Appendix B: Process Evaluation

- Appendix B1: Module 1 Satisfaction Survey
- Appendix B2: Module 2 Satisfaction Survey
- Appendix B3: Module 3 Satisfaction Survey
- Appendix B4: Module 4 Satisfaction Survey
- Appendix B5: Module 5 Satisfaction Survey
- Appendix B6: Module 6 Satisfaction Survey

Appendix C: Outcome Evaluation

- Appendix C1: Baseline Knowledge/Skills/Confidence Survey
- Appendix C2: End of Program Knowledge/Skills/Confidence Survey
- Appendix C3: Before and After Knowledge/Skills/Confidence Comparison