BACKGROUND

Walk the Block is a neighborhood revitalization initiative focused on getting residents out on the sidewalk. Benefits range from crime prevention due to eyes on the street, improved public health from increased walking, and strengthening community by connecting residents around a common goal of improving their neighborhoods.

HOW IT WORKS

Walk the Block is a walking challenge program designed to be adaptable to diverse communities and neighborhoods. It could be as simple as designating a walking path for the neighborhood all the way to creating a summer-long walking program with reporting, prizes, etc.

Walk the Block programs typically start with a kick-off/celebration day and time. On this day, participants are invited to the route that will be used for walking. There may be a ribbon cutting or other formal announcement that the program has officially begun. Before, during, or after the announcement, there may be other activities for participants to enjoy, such as food, games, or entertainment.

The program lasts for an established time period (e.g., a month), during which participants record the amount of times that they get outside and Walk the Block. Each walk around the official route enters the participant in a raffle to win any number of prizes.

At the end of the month, the prizes are awarded and the community is notified of how many times participants participated in the program and the resulting health benefits (e.g., how many steps were taken, how many calories were burned by the community as a whole, etc.).
1. **Pick Your Partners**
Find committed partners to make your Walk the Block program successful.

2. **Pick Your Route, Day & Time**
Work with partners and residents to decide the length and location of the route that you’ll be walking. Choose a day & time that is convenient for your community.

3. **Plan the Event**
Coordinate who will be doing what on the day of Walk the Block in your neighborhood.

4. **Advertise**
Spread the word about Walk the Block to get a strong turnout.

5. **Walk!**
Get your walking shoes on and get out there! Host your Walk the Block event and contribute to your community’s public safety and health. Continue to advertise to maintain momentum as well as attract new participants.
PICK YOUR PARTNERS

Picking the right partners will ensure that you consider the perspectives of various stakeholders in the community when designing your Walk the Block event. In addition, your partners can share some of the responsibilities of planning and advertising for the event, resulting in higher participation from the community.

Here are some possible partners:
- Nearby neighborhood associations
- Local civic organizations, non-profits, and places of worship
- Peoria City/County Health Department
- City of Peoria Police Department
  Neighborhood Services Unit
- Elected officials
- Local healthcare providers, such as OSF and UnityPoint Health
- City of Peoria Community Development Department
- Local businesses (especially those that fall on your walking route!)

A City of Peoria Police Officer poses for a photo with Walk the Block participants.
Location, location, location (and day & time)! When considering where to hold a Walk the Block event, think about community centers or assets that will make a good “anchor” or “home base,” where you can announce the beginning of the program and set up tables, chairs, or any other supplies you may want to include. This place might be an amenity to the community (e.g., a park, community center, or library) or along the walking path between community amenities. The length of the route should take no more than 15-20 minutes to walk, in order for it to be easy for community participants to get and stay involved.

Safety
When you think you know what route you’d like to use for your Walk the Block program, take some time to walk it yourself. Does it feel safe? Will it be sufficiently lit at all times of the day? Are there any obstacles on the sidewalks that would make walking this route difficult for the young, old, or those with disabilities? Is it level or not too steep?

Day & Time
Consider avoiding a time of year when walking may produce health risks to those involved, such as the dead of winter (December-January) or the peak of summer (July). When choosing a time and day to kick off your Walk the Block program, think about when the greatest number of participants may be available, taking into consideration common work schedules, family responsibilities and other community events.

A route used on the South Side of Peoria that circled the Proctor Recreation Center. The route was 0.4 miles long and took 8 minutes for the average person to complete a single lap.
Plan far ahead of the day of your event to ensure its success. Allow yourself plenty of time to put together all of the partnerships and materials you’ll need, as well as to ensure your advertising has time to filter through the community. There are 3 time periods that make up your Walk the Block event.

Kick-Off Day
The Kick-Off Day is when the community will gather to begin Walking the Block. Sometimes there is a ribbon-cutting or other formal announcement to indicate that participants can begin walking the official route. Before and afterwards, participants and other community members may take part in games, enjoy refreshments, and listen to entertainment. If you’d like to make your Kick-Off Day coincide with a block party that would close off the street, see the Public Works Department’s Website for the required Block Party Permit.

Consider how you will designate the official walking route on Kick-Off Day. This may include signs, stencils, stickers, or other visual cues that guide participants through the route. Residents, organizations, and businesses that are located along the walking route may be willing to participate by placing signs on their property or providing activities for walkers to partake in during the Walk the Block Program.

Participants of a Walk the Block event on the East Bluff play with hula hoops and jump ropes on Kick-Off Day.
Walk the Block Time Period
The Walk the Block period is comprised of the days that fall between your Kick-Off Day and Celebration Finale, when participants are able to report the amount of steps, calories, or times that they Walk the Block. During this time, you will be gathering information on participation, as well as planning and advertising for the Celebration Finale.

Some community members may not hear about Walk the Block until after Kick-Off Day. Continue to advertise and encourage walkers to recruit new participants and find ways for them to get started even if they missed a few days.

**TIP:** Tracking walking activity can be done with paper records that are dropped off or collected at a central location or by using a free smartphone app such as MapMyWalk, which allows you to create a route online and share it with other users. Pedometers, or small electronic devices that measure steps, have also fallen in price in recent years ($1-5 per pedometer) and could be purchased and handed out to participants if your budget allows.

Celebration Finale
The Celebration Finale comes at the end of your Walk the Block time period and could last several hours or could be an announcement that comes online or tied into another community event. At the Celebration Finale, you will announce how many times the route was walked and award prizes to participants who walked the route the most (you can also consider awarding prizes for other achievements, such as the walker that walked the route most consistently or the participant who recruited the most people to join the program).

**TIP:** Use the sample checklist in the appendix to make sure you’ve got all your bases covered when planning your event.
Getting the community engaged is crucial to the success of your Walk the Block program. When reaching out to the community, first consider the needs of the community and what residents care about (e.g., health, safety, social connection). Then, use the network that your organization and your Walk the Block partners have and use it to your advantage. Finally, look for organizations that may be willing to share the message, even if they are not able to be a partner for the event, such as local places of worship and businesses.

**Low-Cost / Free Advertising**
- Go door to door and inform residents near your Walk the Block route of what will be going on.
- Post about the event online, with social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Nextdoor) and other free internet event calendars.
- Hang fliers at local community centers, such as service centers and places of worship.
- Make announcements at neighborhood meetings.

**Paid Advertising**
- Run an ad in the newspaper or on the radio.
- Place ads on social media networks, such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram.
- Buy a large banner to be displayed in the community.

**TIP:** Designing and ordering promotional materials ahead of time will allow you to leave a physical reminder of the event when you talk to community members. Consider the durability of your materials when making a purchase. While more durable materials are sometimes more expensive, they may be re-used year after year.

*Gather a large crowd of participants by advertising for the event well ahead of time!*
It wouldn’t be a successful Walk the Block event without walking! Here are some considerations to keep the momentum going:

• After the Kick-Off Day, regularly walk the route yourself to ensure that there are no obstacles that have arisen that may make it difficult for participants to walk (such as a fallen tree after a storm).

• Continue to advertise to the community and encourage new participants to join in.

• Coordinate with other local neighborhoods to attract new participants and to keep up the momentum.

• Add an element of competition by providing occasional updates to inform participants how often their neighbors are walking the route.

• Encourage participants to use the “buddy system” to get more people walking and to ensure safe participation for younger walkers.
What if I don’t have enough resources to put on a month-long event?

Walk the Block is a program that can be scaled up and down to match the size of the organizers and the community in which it is held. This guidebook is intended for inspiration and as a starting place for planning an event of any size.

What if it rains during the Kick-Off Day?

Be prepared for rain! If it’s a wet day, organize activities that can be done regardless of the weather. Kids can get into playing in the rain and adults can, too! If you won’t be near a building where you could store some materials, ensure that you have enough pop-up tents/canopies in case the weather doesn’t cooperate.

Where do I purchase t-shirts, stickers, and other promotional materials?

If you have a budget for promotional materials, there are a number of local companies that specialize in printing posters, signs, as well as t-shirts and stickers, such as Pip, AdCo, Fast Signs, FedEx, Staples, and Officemax. Many promotional and day-of materials can be purchased on the internet as well.

How can I have a Health-Mobile at the event?

Both UnityPoint Health and OSF have health-mobiles that offer a suite of free or affordable health screenings which may be able to be present at your Walk the Block Event. Consider performing health assessments before and after the program to measure public health outcomes of Walk the Block. If interested, contact:

UnityPoint Health
https://www.unitypoint.org/peoria/services-methodist-wellmobile.aspx

OSF
https://www.osfhealthcare.org/saint-francis/forms/request-care-van-visit/

What other steps can I take to improve my community with Walk the Block?

Encourage participants to use the PeoriaCares App and/or Website to report potholes, broken streetlights, and graffiti while they’re walking the route. You can also provide participants with the non-emergency Police Department line to report any suspicion of criminal activity along the walking route: 309/673-4521.
SAMPLE WALK THE BLOCK PLANNING CHECKLIST

☐ Pick the organizations and people that you will partner with for your Walk the Block (WtB) Event.

☐ Establish the route that WtB will use.

☐ Pick a day and time that will kick off WtB, as well as a day and time that will serve as the celebration at the end of the WtB period.

☐ Reach out to the Peoria Police Department and the Peoria Community Development Department (if you haven’t already), to ensure that there will be no other events or impediments to holding the WtB event at your desired location, day, and time.

☐ Design and order promotional and participatory materials for the event (e.g., t-shirts, stickers, buttons, flyers, posters, participation slips, route markers, etc).

☐ Collect or purchase materials to be used during the kick-off of WtB (e.g., chairs, tables, trash cans, recycling bins, ribbons, tents, sign-in sheet, music, games, food, water, signs, etc.).

☐ Advertise the WtB event to your neighborhood.

☐ **Hold WtB Kick-off event**

☐ Arrange prizes for those who walked the WtB route the most times.

☐ Calculate total miles walked and corresponding health benefits.

☐ **Hold WtB Celebration Finale event**