

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

Overview



Local planning can be a powerful tool for improving the health of communities. However, local plans often do not concretely identify and prioritize the actions needed to realize their goals.

This toolkit provides resources to support implementation of local plans to improve community health and create more equitable communities. It is intended to guide public health professionals and others involved in the planning process in assessing, organizing, and prioritizing local plan implementation actions to improve community health outcomes. It is designed to support plan implementation efforts in towns, cities, and counties, and can be adapted to fit the local context of a wide range of communities.



Healthy Community: “A community that is continuously creating and improving those physical and social environments and expanding those community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential.”

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention¹

Local Plan Implementation Toolkit

The Local Plan Implementation Toolkit includes the following resources:

- *Plan Implementation Toolkit: Overview* — Introduces the toolkit and discusses how local plan implementation fits within a community context.
- *Plan Implementation Toolkit: Worksheet* — Outlines steps local governments, public health professionals, planners, and partners can use to develop detailed, community-specific, and actionable work plans to implement local plan goals.
- *Increasing Access to Healthy Food: Linking Planning Goals & Implementation Actions* — Provides examples of local planning goals related to food access, with specific implementation actions to ensure community members have equitable access to healthy, affordable food.
- *Plan Implementation Toolkit: Working with Community Partners* — Discusses the range of public agencies and community stakeholders that can be effective partners in implementing local plan goals.
- *Plan Implementation Toolkit: Evaluation Guide* — Discusses how groups can define what success looks like and different methods to evaluate progress towards reaching these goals.



What is local planning?

Local planning is a process that establishes long-term goals for the community's future and organizes high-level strategies for how the community will accomplish its goals. Local planning documents include:

- Comprehensive plans
- Housing plans
- Park and recreation plans
- Neighborhood revitalization plans
- Food systems plans
- Active transportation plans
- Transit plans
- Sustainability plans

Through planning, public officials work with community members, local organizations, and other partners to establish a vision and articulate values for the future; create a plan document capturing this vision, values and goals; and work with local organizations and community members to implement the plan.

In this toolkit, "local planning" includes any community or municipal planning that occurs below the state level, including regional plans such as county plans, land use plans for Regional Planning Commissions, long-range transportation plans for Metropolitan Planning Organizations, and transit plans for Regional Transit Authorities.

Local Planning and Public Health Priorities

The field of planning grew out of the public health issues created by the design of communities in the early to mid-20th century. Early planning efforts focused on reducing the transmission of communicable diseases and separating industry and manufacturing land uses from homes, light businesses, and parks to limit the exposure of community members to pollutants.² With the eradication of many communicable diseases and improvement of medical technology to treat those communicable diseases that remained or emerged, planning was no longer seen as essential to protect public health and the two fields drifted apart.

In recent years, local planning efforts have started to reengage with their public health roots by focusing on the impact community design has on current public health issues related to chronic diseases such as diabetes, cancer, and cardiovascular disease. These diseases are increasingly linked to modern economic conditions and community design that promote physical inactivity and poor nutrition. A new generation of planners and public health professionals is working together to tackle these pressing issues.³



Federal, state, and local laws may direct local government and planning officials to prepare specialized planning documents such as Environmental Impact Statements, American’s with Disabilities Act (ADA) Compliance Audits, and Comprehensive Operations Analyses to show compliance with legal standards.⁴ Current guidelines and laws that inform local planning processes, along with a growing recognition among planners that community health should be a planning priority, can help local planning become a valuable tool to advance community health goals and address health inequities.

What is health equity?

“Health equity is a state where all persons, regardless of [ability], race, income, creed, sexual orientation, gender identification, age or gender have the opportunity to be as healthy as they can — to reach their full ‘health potential.’”⁵

What causes health inequities in local communities?

There are persistent, significant, and socially determined differences in the conditions that create health and the opportunity to be healthy for certain populations. These *social determinants of health* are conditions created by decisions that affect the larger community or society, such as local plans and policies; corporate decisions; neighborhood actions; resource allocation; and others. These decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including both positive and negative social forces such as sense of community, economic pressures, environmental conditions, discrimination, implicit bias, and the current political climate.

Adapted from: MINN. DEPT. OF HEALTH, *Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: Report to the Legislature* (2014), http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/che/reports/ahe_leg_report_020114.pdf .

Health Equity and Planning

When done well, local planning benefits all members of the community and helps to reduce underlying inequities experienced by groups within the community. However, local plans have not always considered the wellbeing of all community members. The development and implementation of some local plans has also served to perpetuate existing and create new health inequities within a community.

How can local planning efforts address health inequities?

Cities, towns, villages, counties, and regions can undertake specialized plans and develop planning documents that directly address inequities. For example, a jurisdiction may prepare an Environmental Impact Statement on a roadway project that addresses the project's impacts on low-income neighborhoods, the various racial and ethnic populations in the community, Tribal resources, and recreational facilities. An ADA Compliance Audit can inform local policymakers of gaps in its infrastructure to support individuals with disabilities by including curb cuts, signalized intersections, and well-maintained sidewalks. A Comprehensive Operations Analysis can be prepared for a transit agency to discuss whether its services meet the needs of communities of color and neighborhoods with low rates of vehicle ownership.



Case Study – Rondo Neighborhood, Saint Paul, Minnesota

The negative impact transportation planning and implementation projects can have on communities of color is illustrated by the experience of the Rondo Neighborhood in Saint Paul, Minnesota. In the mid-20th century, local engineers chose to convert St. Anthony Avenue, a local street running from Saint Paul to Minneapolis, into a section of Interstate 94 (I-94) linking the downtowns of each city. In Saint Paul, St. Anthony Avenue ran through the heart of Rondo, a vibrant, predominantly African American neighborhood. Construction of I-94 began in 1956 and concluded in 1968, demolishing homes and businesses, cutting what was left of Rondo in half, and creating air and noise pollution issues for the remaining residents.⁶ The damage to the community fabric in Rondo led to blight, increased drug use, and crime. Today, the average lifespan of a Rondo resident is one of the lowest in Saint Paul.⁷ In 2015, the City of Saint Paul finally apologized to the residents of Rondo,⁸ and the Minnesota Department of Transportation has publicly acknowledged that the earlier I-94 project and resulting damage to the neighborhood “led to a pattern of community distrust” with the agency.⁹

The City, with active input from the Rondo neighborhood, is currently working on a project called *Rethinking I-94*. This project was initiated in anticipation of significant work in the next few years on the I-94 corridor to improve aging infrastructure. *Rethinking I-94* aims to address these past harms and is including residents in the planning for construction and possible redesign of infrastructure so that it will respond to community needs, and build trust with community members. By focusing on “easier, safer travel in the corridor *Rethinking I-94* intends to reconnect neighborhoods, revitalize communities and ensure residents have a meaningful voice in transportation decisions that affect their lives.”¹⁰

Although planners and public officials can never undo the damage they have caused to communities of color and other socially disadvantaged and marginalized groups through these projects, they can show that they are striving to do better by engaging residents and including them in these critical planning decisions moving forward.

Legal Framework for Local Planning

Local planning efforts may be impacted by a range of local, state, and federal laws and policies.

Federal Laws

Federal laws can create requirements about how certain types of planning activities are executed or limit the authority of local governments to do certain things. Federal environmental and civil rights laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act,¹¹ Civil Rights Act,¹² and National Environmental Policy Act,¹³ create standards that should inform the development and implementation of local plans to ensure that local planning efforts consider the health and wellbeing of the entire community.

State Laws

State statutes can require municipalities to engage in specific planning activities and specify the roles and responsibility of local planning commissions. For example, Minnesota statutes require counties, cities, and townships in the Twin Cities Metro Area to update their comprehensive plans every ten years and specifies the role of the Metropolitan Council in overseeing these planning activities.¹⁴

State laws may also go beyond the federal environmental and civil rights laws described above and create separate legal requirements and standards that impact local planning efforts. For example, the Minnesota Human Rights Act includes protections from discrimination based on sexual orientation and familial status in employment and housing that go beyond federal civil rights protections.¹⁵

Local Ordinances

Local governments can create both municipal-specific and regional planning requirements through local ordinances even if local planning is not required by state laws. Local ordinances can also provide direction about how a certain municipality conducts its planning activities. For example, the City of Bemidji, Minnesota, while not required to engage in local planning efforts by state law, enacted a local ordinance ratifying the creation of the Greater Bemidji Area Joint Planning Commission and creating requirements for the participation of Bemidji in the Commission.¹⁶

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The Public Health Law Center provides information and legal technical assistance on issues related to public health. The Center does not provide legal representation or advice. This document should not be considered legal advice.



Endnotes

- 1 CTRS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION [CDC], *Healthy Places Terminology* (2018) <https://www.cdc.gov/healthy-places/terminology.htm>.
- 2 Chris S. Kochtitzky et al., *Urban Planning and Public Health at CDC*, 55 MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY WEEKLY REPORT SUPPL, 34 (2006), <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/su5502a12.htm>.
- 3 AMERICAN PLANNING ASS'N, *Planning for Public Health*, <https://www.planning.org/research/publichealth/>.
- 4 23 C.F.R. §§ 450.220 and .336 (2018).
- 5 MINN. DEP'T OF HEALTH, *Advancing Health Equity in Minnesota: Report to the Legislature 11-12* (2014), http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/che/reports/ahe_leg_report_020114.pdf.
- 6 Ehsan Alam, *Before It Was Cut in Half by I-94, St. Paul's Rondo Was a Thriving African-American Cultural Center*, MINNPOST, June 19, 2017, <https://www.minnpost.com/mnopedia/2017/06/it-was-cut-half-i-94-st-paul-s-rondo-was-thriving-african-american-cultural-center/>.
- 7 ST. PAUL-RAMSEY COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH, *Health Equity Data Analysis* (2017).
- 8 Kevin Giles, *Healing Ceremony Friday Will Say Goodbye to Rondo Neighborhood's Hard Feelings in St. Paul*, MINNEAPOLIS STAR-TRIBUNE, July 16, 2015, <http://www.startribune.com/healing-ceremony-friday-will-say-goodbye-to-rondo-neighborhood-s-hard-feelings-in-st-paul/316059631/>.
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- 10 MINN. DEP'T OF TRANSP., *Rethinking I-94*, <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/i-94minneapolis-stpaul/>.
- 11 29 U.S.C. §701 et seq. (2018); 28 C.F.R. § 35 (2018).
- 12 42 U.S.C. CH. 21 (2018); 45 C.F.R. § 80.6 (2018).
- 13 42 U.S.C. CH. 55 (2018); 40 C.F.R. § 1507 (2018).
- 14 MINN. STAT. §§473.173 and .851 (2018).
- 15 MINN. STAT. CH. 363A (2018).
- 16 BEMIDJI, MINN., Code § 2-393 (2018).