

Texercise Walking Trail Toolkit

A guide for implementing indoor and outdoor walking trails



Table of contents

Purpose 2

Introduction 3

Why create a walking trail? 3

Getting started 5

Walking trail best practices 6

Potential barriers 10

How to create an indoor walking trail 12

How to create an outdoor walking trail 15

Walking trail tips and techniques for success 17

Conclusion 18

Purpose

This toolkit was developed to support workers, communities and civic groups create walking trails. Just as there are many different types of people, there can be many types of walking trails. The toolkit provides general information to help you create any type of walking trail.

From planning to completion of your trail, this comprehensive tool shares best practices, tips and techniques, and easy step-by-step instructions for promoting physical activity and ways to develop walking groups.



While this kit aims to provide comprehensive instructions for creating walking trails, the information and resources are general enough to allow for all trail types. Information and steps provided in this document should be modified to best serve the unique aspects of each trail and its users.

Introduction

Physical inactivity is a major risk factor for many negative health conditions, and is estimated to cause 2 million deaths annually worldwide. It is estimated to cause 10-16 percent of breast cancer, colon cancers and diabetes cases, and 22 percent of coronary heart disease globally.*

Along with maintaining a healthy diet and not using tobacco, daily physical activity is a major component in preventing chronic diseases. Yet most Americans spend the majority of their waking hours being sedentary.

One of the best ways to promote physical activity and help prevent the negative effects of physical inactivity is for communities, work sites, civic groups and other entities to develop policies and environments that support and encourage physical activity.

Why create a walking trail?

Walking trails are an easy, accessible way to create an encouraging environment that motivates people to take the necessary steps to create a healthier life. They are an easy, low-cost way to provide an environment that supports physical activity. The benefits that walking trails provide to users and developers (e.g. communities, work sites, and civic groups) are numerous.

Benefits for the user:

- Improved quality of life.
- Decreased risk of chronic disease.
- Lowered stress.
- Increased self-esteem and well-being.
- Potential weight loss.
- Lowered risk of osteoporosis.
- Improved circulation.
- Increased energy.
- Improved sleep.
- Improved immune system.

* Stats from the World Health Organization

Benefits for the developer:

Work sites

- Improved healthcare cost management.
- Reduction in sick leave.
- Lower employee absenteeism.
- Enhanced employee productivity.
- Better employee morale.

Communities

- Improved health of residents.
- Increase in interaction with community.
- Lower community healthcare costs.
- Increase in alternative transportation opportunities.

Civic groups

- More interaction with trail users.
- Enhanced fundraising opportunities.
- Improved health of trail users.
- Improved public opinion of the civic group.
- More positive media stories.

Knowing up front the return on investment is not only essential in garnering needed support and collaborations for the project, it also helps the developer understand the benefits of creating a walking trail.



Stop!

Before you go any further, take time to list the benefits your trail will provide. Be sure to include the benefits for the site, the community and users.

Getting started

Do your homework

Before deciding on formal plans for your trail, it is a good idea to **research existing walking trails** in the area to:

- Assess areas that support physical activity.
- Survey existing trail users.
- Understand the process of creating a trail.
- Identify needed resources.

Research can save time and energy while providing the information you need to successfully create a walking trail.

Keep in mind that no two trails are the same. While some trails are elaborate, with lots of amenities, they may not be the right choice for your site. It's perfectly fine to incorporate ideas and components of existing trails into your design, but make sure your trail (whether indoor or outdoor) meets the needs of your site and users.

Along with your budget, the location, layout/design and accessibility of your environment will help determine the best trail for your site.

After you have researched existing trails, it's time to start **gathering support** for the trail. Before any development, you need to determine if your leadership and trail users want a trail. Information you collect through research can be used to educate and persuade relevant parties.

Remember that the success of any walking trail depends on the support of existing and potential trail users. Survey active and potential trail users and share your ideas to gain their support. They can be good advocates for your proposed trail.

Hold a meeting with leaders and partners to determine if the group wants to create a trail. Once that is determined, form a workgroup to discuss the details of the project:

- Location (indoor or outdoor).
- Budget.
- Desired amenities.
- Timeline for development.

Getting support

- *Work site walking trails need management and facility support for successful development. Find a champion for the trail from your work site leadership to engage other work site leaders.*
- *Community walking trails require the approval and implementation of city leadership. Identify a spokesperson from your city government to champion the trail.*
- *Civic group walking trails need the support of not only their members, but also of their leadership. Identify a leader to campaign for the trail.*

Remember

Getting top-level and trail user support before you start work on the trail makes the process easier and helps ensure its success.

Walking trail best practices

Best practices are techniques, methods or processes that are proven effective at delivering particular outcomes. The following best practices are not only useful resources, but also successful in creating any type of walking trail.

- Collaborate with stakeholders.
- Target specific populations.
- Enhance trail experience.
- Market experience.
- Evaluate and modify plan.

Best Practice No. 1: Collaborate with stakeholders

Collaboration with trail stakeholders is important at every stage – from planning to construction and maintenance. Before you start to plan, identify stakeholders and potential partners to include in the development of the trail. The type of trail you hope to develop will help to determine which stakeholders need to be involved.

Work sites

- Business owners
- CEO/executive directors
- Chief operating officers
- Managers
- Trail partners
- Employees
 - Trail users
 - Potential users

Communities

- Mayor
- City council
- Chamber of commerce
- School board
- Parent-teacher association
- City residents



- Trail users
 - Potential users
 - Trail partners

Civic groups

- Civic leadership/board
- Civic memberships
- Neighborhood associations
- Parks and recreation departments
- Schools and work sites

These stakeholders bring knowledge in their given areas and will help ensure that potential barriers will be addressed effectively and in a timely manner.

Best Practice No. 2: Target specific populations

When planning a walking trail, knowing what groups you want to encourage and market the trail to is important. Your target populations depend on the type of trail being created.

Work sites

- Inactive employees
- Older employees
- Employees with disabilities

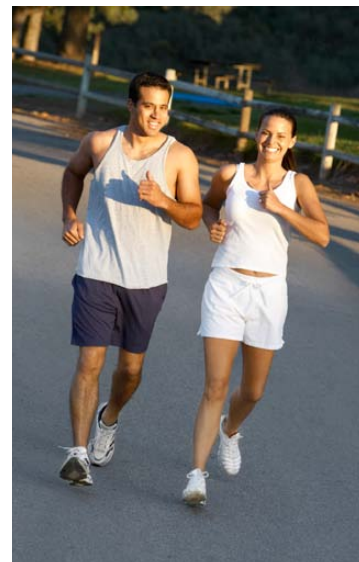
Communities

- Senior residents
- Children and youth
- Residents with low incomes
- Residents with disabilities

Civic groups

- Population the group serves
- Surrounding community

Once the target population has been identified, research what they want in a walking trail. This can be done through surveys, **finding other trails that are successful with the same population** and holding open forums for input.



Best Practice No. 3: Enhance trail experience

From the trail's location to marketing, trail users should be at the center of every decision you make. Intimate knowledge of what users want is critical to enhancing the appeal of the trail. Understanding the needs and desires of users and keeping them in mind when planning the trail are important in ensuring the **best trail experience**. When deciding on the location, safety features and trail environment (look and feel), be sure to think about what type of experience you want users to have.

Proximity is a key component in the success of the trail. Look at sites that are close to trail users. The easier the trail is to get to, the more likely people are to use it.

Diversity ensures that your trail offers a different experience than other area trails and makes it more appealing to users. Survey other trails in your area to see how they are designed (length, difficulty, accessibility and landscaping) and try to make sure your trail offers something different.

Addressing **safety issues** when constructing the trail is important to anticipating any worries users might have. This includes issues pertaining to trail lighting, visibility (are trail users visible from the surrounding area?) and proximity to areas with motor traffic.

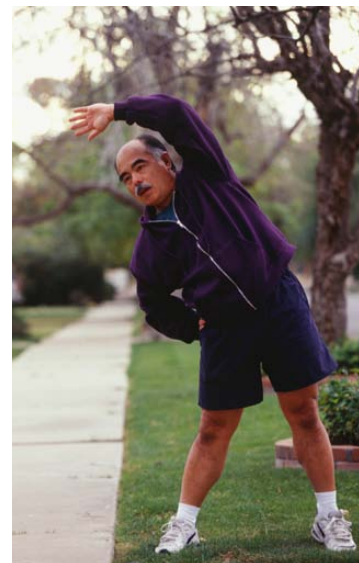
The **trail environment** is important in retaining trail users. Whether the trail is indoors or outdoors, it should be inviting for users. To help create a welcoming environment for indoor trails, paint surrounding walls in soothing colors, hang motivational posters or put up artwork. For outdoor trails, using plants, benches, trash cans and distance markers helps keep the trail clean and provides a relaxed atmosphere.

Best Practice No. 4: Market experience

Marketing is essential to your trail's success. Every trail should have a marketing plan that is unique to the it and its users. When developing a marketing plan, consider how you want users to think about the trail and the message you want to communicate. There are two parts of a marketing plan: the message, and how that message is distributed.

Remember

The sustainability of your trail is critical in ensuring long-term use. This is a great time to consider ways you can help preserve the integrity of your trail environment. Consider landscaping elements with low water requirements, and provide receptacles where users can recycle paper cups, plastic bottles, etc.



Develop a trail name, slogan and logo to use on your marketing materials. This ensures consistency in your marketing pieces. With a consistent message, all potential trail users receive the same information.

Once the message is established, start planning your delivery. There are many methods to deliver your message; the ones you choose will depend on your resources and the type of trail you develop. Some possible marketing channels include

- Posters
- Flyers
- Newsletters
- Ads (television, radio, newspapers)
- Internet

Best Practice No. 5: Evaluate and modify plan

Maintaining the trail is crucial to its success and its physical integrity. Maintenance requires evaluating the physical state of the trail by walking it periodically. Committee members should walk the trail and note any issues that need to be addressed.

Another evaluation method is to invite users to provide feedback or comments. This can be done with either a comment box at the trail, or a comment section on the trail website. User comments should be checked frequently to ensure that concerns are resolved in a timely manner.

During the evaluation, the project committee should consider how improvements will be funded. Here are a few funding ideas:

- **Trail fund run/walk** – Host a trail fund run/walk to raise money for trail improvements. A run/walk garners trail users buy-in by having them pay a small fee to participate and also raises their awareness of the trail.
- **Trail improvement walkathon** – Hold walkathons to raise funds for trail improvements. Project committee members and trail users can participate to help ensure that improvements are funded.



Stop!

Brainstorm some other fundraising ideas.

Potential barriers

The primary concerns in creating walking trails are funding, accessibility and safety. Every trail is different and has its own unique set of issues.

Funding doesn't have to be a major issue. Fundraisers and partnerships can help defray the costs of building a trail.

For example, hosting wellness-related fundraisers, such as healthy snack sales or competitions, can raise money for your trail. For more costly items (trail kiosks, benches, trash cans and groundcover/plantings), contact potential partners such as local home improvement or hardware stores for donations and volunteer support. Partners can donate materials, as well as help build the needed items.

Make sure partnership contributions are acknowledged. You can recognize partner support in various ways, from having a thank-you sign at the trailhead, providing a place for partners to advertise, to naming the trail after the partner.

If funding is a problem, consider developing an indoor walking trail, since they are typically cheaper to build and maintain. Materials needed for an indoor trail are minimal and may include distance markers, posters and flyers.

Walking trails should be accessible to everyone. Ensuring that trails meet accessibility requirements specified by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is critical. The ADA provides



Home Depot volunteers working on the Austin State Supported Living Center Texercise Trail.

guidelines for creating walking trails to ensure they are usable for people with disabilities. To learn more about ADA trail requirements, exemption qualifications and other information, please visit the Federal Highway Administration website at www.fhwa.dot.gov/environment/sidewalk2/contents.htm.

The safety and security of users should be a primary focus of walking trails. If users feel safe, they are more likely to use the trail. Safety issues include visibility and lighting, proximity to motor traffic and hazards along trail grounds.

When determining what safety issues need to be addressed, ask yourself:

- Is the majority of the trail out of view from the surrounding area?
- Is lighting sufficient?
- How close is the trail to high volumes of motor traffic?
- Are there any major hazards along the trail path?

When dealing with these barriers, be sure to work with someone who knows the trail site's rules and regulations (for example, the chief operating officer for work sites.)



Examples of ADA trail requirements

- *Clear tread width is at least 36 inches.*
- *Tread obstacles are no more than two inches high (three inches when running and cross slopes are five percent or less).*
- *Passing space must be provided at least every 1,000 feet where trail width is less than 60 inches.*
- *Signs indicating the length of the accessible trail.*

Stop!

Before you continue, brainstorm physical barriers you may face when creating your walking trail and possible solutions to those barriers.

How to create an indoor walking trail in the workplace

Most Americans spend their days being sedentary (work, school, driving, etc.) Finding time to be physically active can be difficult. Walking trails are an easy, accessible way for people to be active and improve their overall health.

Creating an indoor walking trail is cheap and easy. Here are some general guidelines.

1. Discuss the trail with stakeholders: The first step in creating a walking trail is to make sure that those who would be responsible for the trail (project committee) want to create a trail. Talk with leadership to determine who needs to be on the committee. Meet with the project group and discuss the need or desire for, and the feasibility and the importance of, developing a trail. Once the committee is committed:

- Outline a tentative project plan.
- Form subcommittees to address specific steps.
- Identify other entities that should be included.

2. Get leadership support: Once the committee agrees to create a trail, begin campaigning for leadership support. As discussed in the **Getting Started** section, gaining leadership support early will make the process easier and more likely to be successful.

Before you make preparations or develop plans, consult with whoever makes decisions about changes to the facility and/or grounds.

3. Survey potential locations: With facility management, review your building's layout and identify possible locations for the trail. Walk the tentative trail locations to determine your best option. Keep in mind:

- Trail accessibility.
- Trail safety.
- Areas already in use.
- Trail environment.
- Possibility of developing multiple indoor trails.

Remember: When surveying your potential trail locations, refer to the **Best Practice No. 3: Enhance trail experience** section.



4. **Measure the length of trail:** When a location has been selected, determine the trail's length. Be sure to note different intervals on the trail ($\frac{1}{4}$ mile, $\frac{1}{2}$ mile, 1 mile, etc.) for marker placement. Distance markers help users track their mileage.
5. **Map the path of the trail:** After the trail path has been determined and its length measured, create a map. Be sure the map includes key markers (street names, nearby businesses, etc.) to indicate trail location, and a line to clearly define the trail path and the trail length. Once you have the final version of the trail map, place a copy at the trailhead and on the trail website.
6. **Contact Texercise for trail markers:** Email Texercise to request trail marker signs, including the distance intervals you need ($\frac{1}{2}$ mile, 1 mile, 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ miles, etc.). You can also make your own markers. When making markers, be sure to include the name of the trail, an encouraging phrase and, most importantly, the distance. Place distance marker signs at eye level or lower. Creating signs that are simple, easy to read and eye catching will help users identify the route and motivate them to continue with their exercise.
7. **Plan a trail kickoff event:** To celebrate the trail's development and to create awareness, plan a kickoff event to unveil the trail to users. Kickoff events could include a ribbon-cutting ceremony with a walk to draw attention to the trail. The event can be as simple or elaborate as your committee decides.
8. **Promote the trail:** There are several ways to promote trail use. How each trail is promoted will depend on the type and available resources. Here are a few ways to promote and increase awareness of the trail:
 - **Email broadcasts** – If you have email addresses for trail users, send a broadcast announcing the trail. This type of promotion is free and works well at work sites that have a database with employee email addresses.
 - **Flyers and posters** – Develop flyers and posters to attract the attention of trail users. These should be eye catching, easy to read and contain all necessary trail information, including trail location.

- **Advertisements** – Contact local media outlets – newspapers and radio stations and television stations – to place ads. Many will post community-related information for free. Ask them when they would be most likely to cover your event and schedule it for that time.
 - **Newsletters** – Include an article or announcement about the trail in all of your organization’s print and electronic communications.
9. **Continue monitoring:** Regular monitoring is necessary to maintain the physical integrity of the trail. Committee members should walk the trail and note any maintenance needs at least every three months. Provide a means – a comment box at the trailhead or a comment section on the trail website – for users to provide comments and suggestions.



How to create an outdoor walking trail

Creating an outdoor walking trail includes some of the same steps as an indoor trail – including lighting, safety, security, environmental factors and costs. All of these factors play a large role in constructing an outdoor walking trail.

7. **Develop a list of trail amenities:** Outdoor trails need more amenities than do outdoor trails. They may include:
 - A marquee at the trailhead to help orient users.
 - Benches and trash cans along the trail.
 - Additional lighting.
 - Security stripes (along concrete paths).
 - Plants and landscaping.
 - Comment box.
 - Distance markers.
8. **Contact partners for materials and support:** Developing partners can help defray some of the costs of building a trail. Consider partnering with:
 - Local hardware stores, construction companies and home improvement centers.
 - Local service organizations (Kiwanis, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts).
 - Local nurseries and landscaping businesses.

For partnerships to be successful and long-term, think about what you can do to support your partners. Ideas can include acknowledging their contributions with signage along the trail, thanking them in newsletter articles or the website, inviting them to speak at your kickoff event, and ensuring they have access to the trail.

9. **Set a construction day:** When scheduling construction, consider:
 - Time needed.
 - Availability of committee members and volunteers.
 - Weather conditions.

Since most people work during the week, scheduling construction during the weekend is typically best. By starting

Use steps one through six of the indoor walking trail guidelines, then proceed to step seven.

Remember

When creating the trail map for an outdoor trail, include key markers such as street names and nearby businesses to indicate the trail location.



construction early in the morning, you can avoid working during the hottest part of the day. Weather can be unreliable, so be sure to have a contingency plan. Is your region typically rainy in the spring? Do you have fall carnivals or other events that could draw volunteers and partners away? Are your summers hot and windy? All these can impede the development of your trail. While you can't plan for everything, you can include the big items and work around the rest.

- 10. Plan for construction of the trail:** Once the construction date is set, develop a construction plan and timeline. The plan should include workstations for building different amenities (benches, trash cans, marquee and comment box). Build these as close as possible to their final placement. If you are going to landscape, have a layout showing where plants will be placed, and decide who will do the planting.

When preparing for the construction of the trail, arrange for snacks or a meal for volunteers. These might be provided by a local restaurant or grocery store. At the very least, supply water for your volunteers.

- 11. Day of construction:** On the day of construction, have committee members arrive early to set up and be ready to start when workers arrive. To help ensure everything is operating as planned, have the construction plan and timeline readily available.

Have a registration/information station for volunteers who have questions. If you are providing food and beverages, place the serving station near registration so volunteers know to help themselves.

It's a good idea to give a brief welcome and thank your workers for their help and support.

- * If your trail site requires extensive preparation, such as clearing and leveling a path, you will have several steps before you reach this final day of construction.



Use steps 7-9 from the indoor trail development guidelines for the remainder of the outdoor trail development steps.

Walking trail tips and techniques for success

The ultimate goal of a trail is to encourage and motivate users to stay active. This section provides tips and techniques to promote trail use, as well as physical activity in general.

Posters are a great way to advertise the trail and to encourage its use. When creating posters, make sure they are eye-catching and informative. Include all the necessary information, such as trail name, location and a slogan or encouraging phrase. Place the posters in areas users will see often so they will have repeated exposure to the information.

Hold **trail events**. By hosting periodic trail events, you keep trail users engaged while encouraging others to become active. Some proven ideas to promote trail use include:

- **Benefit walk:** Look to associations that support wellness research (for example, the American Heart Association, Alzheimer’s Association) for walking campaigns. Discuss collaboration with the association, then coordinate with the trail committee and begin planning a joint event.
- **Walking challenge:** Walking challenges provide participants with encouragement and ways to set goals. Texas AgriLIFE Extension’s Walk Across Texas program challenges people to “Walk Across Texas.” Groups aim to walk more than 800 miles – the equivalent of walking across the state – in eight weeks.
- **Walkathons:** Walkathons let trail developers and trail users be physically active while helping to raise funds for favorite causes. As stated in the Best Practice No. 5, walkathons are a great way to raise money to support trail improvements. They can also allow trail users to use the trail for their own walkathons. Marketing the trail to multiple users enhances community support.

Walking groups provide a way for people to be active while offering social support. Recruit trail users to lead walking groups. Post walking group sign-up sheets with the trail posters and include walking group information on the trail website. There can never be too many walking groups – encourage anyone who wants to start a walking group to begin leading today.



Conclusion

The benefits of walking trails are as numerous and varied as the types of trails you can create. Not only do they improve the health of those who use them, they provide a place where people can socialize and form friendships.

When trails are provided, employers will enjoy decreased healthcare costs as employees become healthier. Additionally, community leaders will obtain support from residents who recognize the improvements being made and trail users will see the benefits healthier lifestyles provide.

As you create your walking trail, we encourage you to share your stories with us. Was this toolkit helpful? How so? What type of trail did you develop and what benefits has your trail provided to the community? Who are your trail partners? What would you have done differently and will you make more walking trails?

Finally: what can we provide to make the process easier? By now we all recognize the importance of creating places where people can be physically active, but taking the first step (or even the second step) can sometimes be challenging. We would like to help you make the process easier, so please provide us with ways we can support you.

Thank you for creating an environment that supports physical activity and values health and well-being.

