Purpose and Overview

2012-2015

Contact:
Teresa Penbrooke, MAOM, CPRP, Director
Healthy Communities Research Group
An initiative of GP RED – a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization
211 N. Public Road, Ste. 225, Lafayette, CO 80026
Headquarters: 303.439.8369  Direct Line: 303.870.3884
Fax: 303.664.5313  Email: TeresaP@GPRED.org
I. Purpose

The purpose of the Healthy Communities Research Group (HCRG), an initiative of the national 501(c)(3) non-profit organization GP RED, is to provide research, education, and development to identify and align parks, recreation, and related public and non-profit organizations as engaged providers of public health to help reduce obesity and improve quality of lifestyles in their community.

Public parks and recreation agencies, and related non-profit providers, are the agencies that provide public broad-based access to and management for physical and natural assets in most communities. They are also usually the leaders in public programming and community education, or at least in providing spaces for public programming. They have been historically mostly absent from the community public health arena and discussions, but now should be considered as a primary provider of public health in every community.

Many national initiatives have and are being used to provide programmatic and community education approaches to address health and obesity (such as HBO’s Weight of the Nation documentary, Let’s Move, ACHIEVE, LiveWell, Hearts N’ Parks, Play 60, the National Physical Activity Plan, etc.). The goal of the HCRG is to provide a tested and proven systematic transdisciplinary community-wide management and planning approach (Systems Thinking) with tested tools, methods, identified issues, analysis, and evaluation to identify priorities that help lead organizations move forward to identify the key factors and analysis for resource investment (funding, people and time) to effectively increase active living and reduce obesity in their communities.

The HCRG helps parks, recreation, public health, and related departments and organizations, use a Systems Thinking Approach to assess, analyze, document, and evaluate five key elements related to the repositioning of parks and recreation as a primary preventative community public health provider for their community through systems and tools for:

- Convening Community Stakeholders and Champions – Residents? Partners? Providers?
- Fiscal Resources and Distribution – What funds? How should they be allocated?

Note: The lead agency does not always have to be the provider of improvements or programs, but can also act as the facilitator, (as a liaison or umbrella organization) that helps to convene and mobilize the various resources in the community towards a common goal.
II. Background - What is the Healthy Communities Research Group?

History and Introduction
Since 2009, the Healthy Communities Research Group (GP RED, Indiana University Bloomington, along with Indiana Parks and Recreation Association, the Bloomington Parks and Recreation Department, GreenPlay, Design Concepts, and Beta Site communities) has been working together to develop the Healthy Communities Surveillance and Management Toolkit™ to help communities reduce obesity through integration of parks and recreation and public health.

Dr. David M. Compton was the primary initiator and champion of the work, starting with his work in the early 2000's for the Center for Active Living when Chair of the Recreation, Parks, and Tourism Studies Department at the University of Utah. After he moved to the University of Indiana – Bloomington to lead a similar department, he compiled a full team (including current HCRG Director, Teresa Penbrooke) to create and test the initial Healthy Communities Surveillance and Management Toolkit™.

The Toolkit™ identifies and targets the community aspects that influence obesity and active living. The initial “alpha project,” in Bloomington, Indiana, was successful. Now the methods are now being integrated into a training process and toolkit to be applied to additional “beta” site communities for further refinement, testing, and implementation in the future.

Dr. Compton retired from IU in 2010, and GP RED assumed direction of the project from that point forward. Dr. Compton and IU are still involved as key HCRG Team Members. South Bend, Indiana, was the first Beta Site in 2010, and they are now moving forward with Year Two Implementation. Other Beta Sites are in recruitment and planning stages.

GP RED Healthy Communities Research Group – Leadership Team Members
- Teresa Penbrooke, MAOM, CPRE, GP RED and GreenPlay, LLC, Director
- David M. Compton, MS, MPH, E.D., Professor Emeritus, Department of Environmental Health, Indiana University, Research Consultant for GP RED
- Rob Layton, FASLA, Design Concepts, GRASP® CVM Analysis for Levels of Service
- Kiboum Kim, Ph.D., GP RED, Senior Research Associate, Stella® Modeling
- Dirk Richwine, CPRP, Superintendent, Henderson, NV, Liaison and Spokesperson
- Cindy Heath, CPRP, Executive Director, GP RED, Safe Routes to Play™, Whole Measures, and Complete Streets Liaison,
- Jessica Osborne, MURP, MUD, Active Community Environments Coordinator, Healthy Living Branch, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
- Gretchen Armijo, MURP, AICP, LEED AP, Built Environments Coordinator, Prevention Services Division, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)
- Lori Hoffner, HCRG Volunteer Coordinator for Business and Organizational Analysis
- Dianna Damask, Practicum Intern, MPH Candidate 2013, Health Systems, Management & Policy, University of Colorado Denver Anschutz Medical Campus
III. Specific HCRG Focus Areas – 2012 - 2015

Transdisciplinary Collaboration, Partnerships, and Involvement
GP RED and the HCRG are committed to fully recruiting, engaging, involving, supporting, and integrating partner organizations, trade associations, and agencies from the fields of parks and recreation, public administration, education, public health, transportation, and safety to test, publish, communicate, and share these resources. Our goal is not to duplicate what other organizations are doing well, but to support them, provide proven and tested systematic tools, and fill the gaps.

HCRG Initiative Focus Areas

Community Involvement and Testing
- Bloomington, IN
- South Bend, IN
- Alignment of Public Health and Parks/Recreation
- Total of 10 nationally

Surveillance and Management Toolkit™
- Initially drafted by IU-Bloomington
- Continued development through Beta Testing
- Tools, Templates, and Instruments
- Publication and facilitation of use nationwide

Community Certification Program
- Identify Community-Specific Key Factors of Influence
- Checklists and Outlines
- Local, National, and Global Application
- Credentials and Award Program "Be a Healthy Community!"

Funding and Development
- Build Capacity for HCRG
- Partner with Communities
- Align with state and national initiatives

Community Alpha and Beta Toolkit™ Test Sites
Up to ten Beta Site communities are being selected to work with the HCRG to examine policies, funding allocations, assets and affordances and engage community partners in planning, management and measurement to increase the physical activity and nutrition habits. These sites will represent a communities with varying sizes systems (state, county, municipal, district, etc.), and demographics. The Beta Site projects are focusing specifically on engaging youth 10-14 years of age (that is the age group when youth are first forming and making their own decisions, and therefore are ripe for community education and influence). The Beta Site project is conducted over a three year period. Periodic progress and outcome reports are made to participants, stakeholders, and citizens.

- Year One is focused on convening appropriate community members, stakeholders and staff to engage a group and collect targeted information using templates and standardized methods to create a Warrant and Year Two Action Plan.
- Year Two is focused on implementing the Community Action Plan, involving all stakeholders
- Year Three is focused on measurement and evaluation, along with implementation of ongoing structure for future continuation.
The Surveillance and Management Toolkit™
This digital and printed Toolkit is designed to provide stand-alone instruction, information collection templates, and background information to allow a community to embark on a Community Plan to increase activity and reduce obesity themselves, through organized and facilitated step by step process. This toolkit is currently being beta-tested and re-written in 2012 for future publication.

The Healthy Communities Certification™ Program (in development)
This focus area is currently in design stages. The initial idea is to create a national Healthy Community Certification™ for participating agencies that includes a series of steps for certification, to be determined. This could be a revenue source for the HCRG, help set standardized identified goals and criteria for communities (similar to LEED™ certification or Tree-City USA), and celebrate and recognize their success and efforts.

Funding and Development
We recognize that with each initiative, allocation of resources (funding, people, and time) is needed. RED is committed to working with communities and partners to identify and procure funding sources for this work. This can include partnering and/or working alone to procure grants, sponsorship, revenue-producing projects, and acting as a fiscal agent for other organizations and projects that fit within RED’s mission and strategic goals.

Education and Sharing
GP RED’s mission includes Research, Education, and Development (RED), and therefore Education is our “middle name” - and part of every initiative we undertake. The HCRG is dedicated to providing content and educational sessions for other associations, agencies, universities, and the general public. We want to share the best practices from all organizations which are working to address the obesity epidemic and improve active living in our communities. Staff are available for presentations, and materials will be published and shared as they become available.
IV. Participation with the HCRG Initiatives

There are more than 5,000 local public parks, recreation, and open space organizations in the United States serving communities with populations greater than 5,000. There are also state and federal agencies. The local agencies may include departments for towns or cities, or may be for counties or special district associations. Most all of the local agencies own and/or manage natural and built assets (parks, ballfields, trails, playgrounds, recreation centers, etc.) that provide places for their populations to move and participate in activities. Most also provide programming, or places for programming in conjunction with other local for-profit and non-profit organizations and agencies.

GP RED has accurate, active email addresses for over 7,000 individuals from these and related organizations (land planning, academic, public health, design, transportation, non-profit, and other governmental), with more contacts being added monthly. Currently over 1,500 distinct organizations are represented in the contact database.

In addition, the HCRG has been collecting names and emails for specific individuals who have expressed individual interest in this topic as we have provided related educational sessions at various state and national conferences. The HCRG educational sessions have been presented at conferences for:

2010
- Indiana Parks and Recreation Association
- National Recreation and Parks Association Annual Congress
- World Leisure Congress – Seoul, Korea

2011
- Indiana Parks and Recreation Association
- Utah Parks and Recreation Association
- Florida Parks and Recreation Association
- California Parks and Recreation Society – Ontario, CA
- National Recreation and Parks Association Annual Congress – Pre-Congress Workshop

2012
- National Association of Recreation Resource Planners (NARRP) – Baton Rouge, LA
- National Recreation and Parks Association Annual Congress - Pre-Congress Workshop

V. Ongoing Marketing, Education, and Communications Activities

GP RED is currently moving forward with communications strategies, including:
- Alignment and partnerships with other related initiatives and organizations
- Recruitment of academic partners for publications and peer review testing
- Preparation of additional explanatory and promotional materials for the various focus areas.
- Inclusion of HCRG activities in the bi-weekly GP RED digital newsletter to the full contact list
- Special HCRG releases to the full mailing announcing the various focus area offerings
- Recruitment for additional Beta Sites for the HCRG Toolkit™ community template testing
- Implementation of the HCRG Healthy Communities Certification™ Process
- Updating of the GP RED website HCRG section at www.gpred.org
- Providing educational sessions and materials at association conferences and upon request

As interest in the initiatives to increase activity and reduce obesity through community action grows, more agencies are becoming active in the movement. We invite anyone interested to participate.