THE ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

TROY

THE FIFTY FUND
COMMUNITIES
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THE ENGAGEMENT GUIDE

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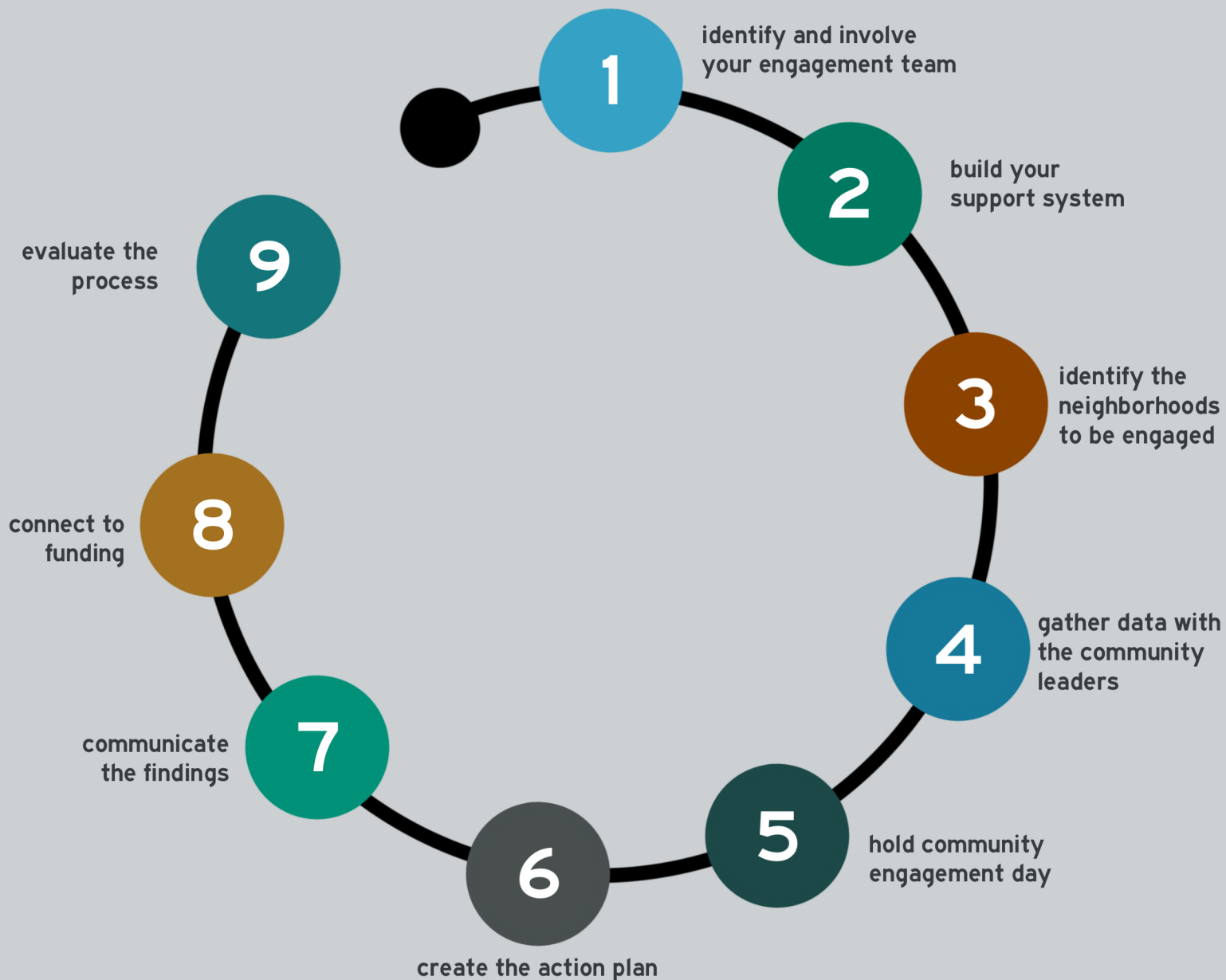
STEP 1 | identify and involve your engagement team

What is an engagement team?

Someone has to provide a conduit for the change; the engagement team serves that role. Engagement team members:

- provide subject matter expertise
- develop plans for gaining community participation
- document the process

The engagement team must work well together but also bring others into the change.

At each step in the process, documentation is important. Many individuals and groups will benefit from an accurate record, including future engagement teams, the subject community, and the larger community of participation.

Your project group will need to develop a mechanism to communicate with each other and your greater community.

Your project team

For the STEP-UC project, our team membership looked like this:

NAME	ORGANIZATION	EXPERTISE
Wiley Brooks	ALDOT	Pedestrian patterns & pedestrian-transit connections
Vontra Giles	FHWA	Community planning & pedestrian safety
Kathy Gregory	THE FIFTY FUND	Community engagement & communications
Linda Guin	FHWA	Transportation engineering & pedestrian safety
Stuart Manson	ALDOT	Transportation engineering & pedestrian safety
Rod Turochy	ATAP	Transportation engineering, pedestrian safety, & civic engagement

This team has over 150 collective years of producing change in the area of transportation.

STEP 1

identify and involve your engagement team

Our first meetings were not easy. There were spirited conversations in which divergent opinions about approaches to engaging the community were discussed. Coming to common agreement is very important. One area in which we did not have common agreement was where to begin. The engagement is bottom up; we start IN the community and build up. Many on our team had no experience with that approach and wanted to focus on designing a process that started at the top (planners, elected officials, MPOs...), perhaps because that was a familiar approach. It took three meetings to resolve the gap in ideas.

Ultimately, our process reflected our commitment to the bottom-up approach, but more communication was developed with all stakeholders in deference to the experiences of some of the team members. For example, our team reached out to elected officials and municipal employees earlier in the process than normal. This was a reflection of our team's desire to communicate with all levels of the community. Our meeting minutes reflect the dichotomy of our early efforts. However, by the time we were engaging the community, we were operating at the citizen level.

Also, our reliance on Wiley Brooks as our subject matter expert became so critical that we added him to the engagement team. This maximized Brooks' ability to impact our work and facilitated easier communications by having his input in real time.

STEP 2 | build your support system

Community involvement is essential. The engagement team will need strong advocates for change within the community to help build relationships with the community. Finding people who recognize the potential for change and are connected in the community is critical.

Places to look for advocates:

- folks working in the education system
- transit professionals such as local transit providers
- youth programming leaders like the Boys and Girls Clubs
- folks working for or/and attending centers of faith
- public housing professionals

For the STEP-UC project team, we found a like-minded and strong community partner in Donta Frazier. Frazier is the director of the local transit system in our study community of Troy. In addition, he has strong relationships in Troy and people trust him.

STEP 3 | identify the neighborhoods to be engaged

With your team leadership identified, you can begin to scope out the communities that are priorities for change.

Defining the communities to be engaged is critical to the work of the group. Knowing where to focus data gathering and relationship building will conserve the energy of the group to only those most important areas.

A good way to narrow your community choices is to perform a SWOT analysis for each considered community. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Strengths and weaknesses are internal to the community. Things to consider are the:

- people (volunteers, board members, elected officials)

- physical resources (buildings, equipment, transportation networks)

- financial (grants, funding agencies, other sources of income)

- activities and processes (programs or systems already in place)

- past experiences

STEP 3

Opportunities and threats are usually external factors, things the community can not control, such as:

$ - funding decisions

🏠 - impact of regional or city planning process and decisions

👪 - availability of partnerships

CONDUCT YOUR OWN SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES

S W
O T

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS

STEP 3 | identify the neighborhoods to be engaged

For the STEP-UC project, we centered our consideration around Troy's underserved communities with major trip generators, places like schools, shopping, recreational facilities, and large concentrations of housing. Opportunities were identified to create connectivity by closing gaps among existing pedestrian facilities and upgrade/replace current facilities to be compliant with ADA Accessibility Guidelines.

Combined with publicly available safety data, we were able to consolidate our selections down to a few communities to include:

- Segars Street & adjoining streets including the public housing development
- Knox Street & adjoining streets including the public housing development
- Aster Avenue/Hubbard Street including the public housing development
- Elba Highway between Enzor Road and Forest Acres Drive

STEP 4 | gather data with the community leaders

With your target area defined, it is time to collect data with your community leaders. At this point, determine your learning goals and how the data will be collected. Resist the urge to determine your teaching goals at this time. Focusing on what your group needs to know will provide better data (it is the focus) and stronger relationships (we are listening; people generally like to be heard). The point of this stage is to test the team's assumptions in the SWOT analysis and deepen our understanding of the community. It is time to collect ground-level data. There is no substitution for "street beating".

For the STEP-UC project, we decided to walk every corridor and collect street-level data with our community leaders. We also wanted to pilot "the walkaround guide (Troy version)" with the community leaders to validate the questions.

THE WALKAROUND GUIDE

FOR COMMUNITIES ASSESSING WALKABILITY

THE FIFTY FUND
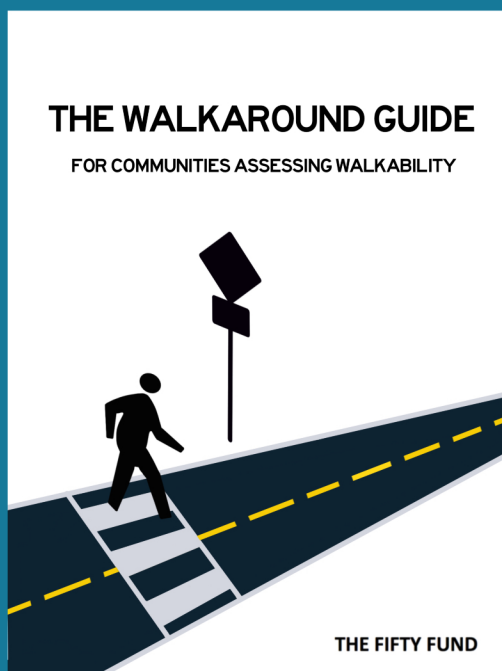
STEP 4 | gather data with the community leaders

In an effort to document our process and record street conditions, a production crew traveled with the team. Our team was recordkeeping in written form already but wanted a greater platform for sharing our ideas. Since THE FIFTY FUND regularly uses videography, it was a natural fit.

With our learning goals developed, the engagement team and community met for the first time and combined efforts. The STEP-UC Troy team was formed. The entire street network within the defined study area was walked and conditions were recorded with video and via the walkaround guide. As a result, one site was dropped from consideration and the walkaround guide was modified. More importantly, we became a team; we worked together.

In fact, when a team member became lost, the entire operation ground to a halt as a serious search ensued. When reunited, we discovered the wayward team member had identified another potential area for consideration. We now call it the "fact finding detour." Good teams make the best of every opportunity. This team was no exception.

STEP 4 | gather data with the community leaders

During a three-month period, team members visited Troy four times to gather information from the community including meetings with elected officials, community advocates for active transportation, youth leaders, and transit professionals.

STEP 5 | hold community engagement day

Now, it is time to join ranks with the identified communities and jointly assess the area for change. Planning is very important for community events. Comfort and safety at the event rests with the team. Every effort should be made to demonstrate to the community that you are serious about the work. Being vigilant about safety and prepared for the situation are great ways to demonstrate your seriousness.

Things to consider bringing along:

- water

- shade canopy

- snack food

- sunscreen

- first aid kit

- data collection tools (such as maps, clipboards, and pencils)

- retroreflective vests

STEP 5 | hold community engagement day

On the community walk day for the STEP UC Troy team, we walked

- Knox Street & adjoining area within the public housing development
- Aster Ave/Hubbard St & adjoining area within the public housing development
- Three Notch St was driven through as it was not feasible to walk safely in our group

In each community, we arrived with:

- customized walkaround guides
- maps
- clipboards
- pencils
- #stayinyourlane t-shirts
- journals
- retroreflective vests
- water
- snack food
- sunscreen
- digital level
- First Aid kit

Community participants walked with the STEP-UC Troy team. Using the Walkaround guide, the group was able to map pedestrian facilities that exist and locations where pedestrian facilities would be useful. In addition, condition assessments were noted, including locations where ADA compliance was an issue.

STEP 6 | create the action plan

During community engagement day(s), a lot of information on existing conditions and improvement needs will be collected. The next step is to do the thought work needed to organize and synthesize that information into a document that can be shared and can guide the improvements – change – sought by the community.

At this point, issues that were identified by members of the community and the engagement team during the community engagement day should translate into action items in the form of recommended infrastructure improvements. These improvements can range from performing simple maintenance activities to construction of new facilities.

The STEP-UC Troy team took the information gathered during the walkaround – notes taken in The Walkaround Guide, pictures, video footage, and other recollections – and started developing the action plan. The team reviewed the information collected and began to formulate specific improvement ideas. For example, sections of existing sidewalk that were found to have several deficiencies from an accessibility perspective (e.g., driveway aprons in the walking path that are so steep as to result in unacceptable cross-slope) were identified for replacement.

STEP 7 | communicate the findings

The list of improvements created in the previous step now needs to be turned into cohesive products that can used to communicate the findings. Those findings include what was found (documentation of existing conditions) and what is needed (recommendations for improvements).

The team should develop a report that describes the steps leading up to the walkaround (such as the purpose and scope of the study and members of the team), observations made during the walkaround, and the list of recommendations that address needs identified during community engagement day. Pictures of existing conditions and graphics that show the recommended improvements are an essential part of the report.

The report can be shared with:

- community leaders

- elected officials

- city engineers

- planners, etc.

Community leaders could also speak about the report at a City Council meeting or other community event.

STEP 7 | communicate the findings

The team wrote a report to convey the story of the walkaround and attached the specific recommendations for the Knox and Hubbard communities as appendices. Sections of the report provide background on the communities, define a purpose and scope, document the site visits (who, when, where, and how), and identify recommended improvements.

Knox Community Recommendations Report

Where can we improve?
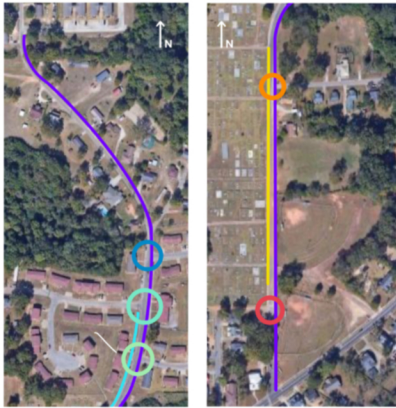
KNOX AND HUBBARD COMMUNITY PEDESTRIAN AND TRAFFIC SAFETY STUDY
September 2021
Troy, Alabama

Report presented by:
The STEP-UC Team

Report prepared by:
Rod E. Turochy, Ph.D., P.E.

S. Rose Cir. at N. Knox St.

Current Condition

Add crosswalk across N. Knox St.

Add crosswalk across S Rose Cir. at N. Knox St.

Add pedestrian crossing signs with an arrow plaque for north and southbound traffic

Install curb ramp on the northeast, southwest, and southeast corner

What could it look like?

STEP 8 | connect to funding

Funding will be needed to see the recommended improvements come to fruition. It all takes money! The good news is that some of the recommendations may be so low-cost (such as installing a new sign or restriping an existing crosswalk) that they can be absorbed into the locality's regular maintenance activities. However, some improvements desired by the community may cost much more (such as constructing new sidewalks).

Community leaders and local officials can work together to identify funding opportunities, such as specific federal or state grant programs. Resources may include the Alabama Transportation Assistance Program at Auburn University, the Alabama Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration, the local transit system, etc.
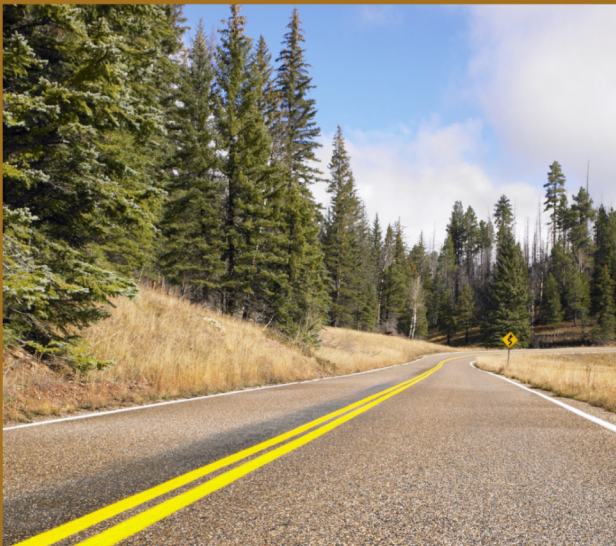
STEP 8 | connect to funding

The transportation agency background of several team members led to several ideas for funding the proposed improvements. The "Alabama Transportation Funding Guide" pages on the ATAP website were also a helpful source of ideas. The Transportation Alternative Set-Aside Program, or TAP, appears to be a very applicable grant program to fund the community's improvement recommendations.

TAP is a federally funded program, managed by ALDOT's Local Transportation Bureau, focused primarily on pedestrian and bicycle facilities. Additionally, several of the evaluation criteria for applications submitted to this program, such as "Improves Transportation Options in Underserved Communities", "Meets the Needs of Non-Motorized Users", "Public Involvement and Community Support", and "Public Involvement and Community Support" all appear to be relevant.

STEP 9 | evaluate the process

While the whole process is still fresh in mind, the team should reflect on the process they used to this point. There may be some aspects that were done well, to where they could be repeated in other communities. However, there may be some items that could be improved upon. A frank assessment of the process can allow for continued improvement.

What did we do well?	What could we improve on?