Project Summary

:: Study Background

The purpose of the Coalitions and Networks for Active Living (CANAL) study is to evaluate the effectiveness of collaborative groups to facilitate the adoption and implementation of policies and environmental changes that promote physical activity. Interviews with 59 collaborative coordinators in 22 states were conducted between May and August 2011 (61% response). We also surveyed key partners through the use of an online survey. We learned about organizational attributes of the groups, structures, community and political engagement tactics and activities, levels of trust among partners, resource availability, and the extent of environmental change and related policy actions in eight areas of improvement: Parks and Recreation; Transit; Streetscaping; Street Improvement; Children’s Play Areas; Plazas; Infill and Redevelopment; and Safe Routes to School.

In this report we showcase the work of Missouri Council on Activity and Nutrition (MOCAN) and provide data for all other groups included in our study.

Key Research Results from 59 Collaborative Groups

- Most groups involved partners from multiple sectors, including planners, elected officials, public health experts, private entities (e.g., health care organizations), media, and non-profit organizations.

- Groups that engaged in media communication, actively participated in the policy process, and engaged with the broader community of stakeholders reported greater policy and environmental change.

- Groups reported the most success in adopting policy in the areas of public plazas, street improvements, streetscaping, and parks and recreation. Complete Streets policy was frequently cited as a supporting policy for these areas.

- While many groups successfully worked on parks and recreation improvements, opportunities remain in other areas, including transit and infill and redevelopment.

- Achieving environmental and policy change requires time, social and political connections, and financial resources.
Environmental and Policy Change

Collaborative: MOCAN

Our primary outcomes of interest were the degree of environmental and policy change achieved. To capture this, first coordinators were asked to list the strategy areas on which they were working. On average, groups worked on five areas.

Table 1. Percentage of groups working on strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy Area</th>
<th>% of all Collaboratives working on strategy (n=59)</th>
<th>MOCAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parks and Recreation</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Routes to School</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Streetscaping</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Improvements</td>
<td>69%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plazas</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children's Play Areas</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transit and Parking</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infill and Redevelopment</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coordinators reported the level of change for each strategy area using a 1-5 rating scale. Ratings for each strategy area were averaged and then normalized by the number of strategy areas identified by the collaborative coordinator to obtain a single score for each outcome. Higher scores represented greater success in achieving change.

Figure 1. Degree of environmental and policy change achieved by all collaboratives compared to MOCAN

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Figure 1. Degree of environmental and policy change achieved by all collaboratives compared to MOCAN.
Group Composition and Stakeholder Engagement

:: Group Composition and Community Engagement Activities

Coordinators were asked about several compositional factors, including tenure of coordinator, age of group, annual funding, and number of active partners. We also inquired about the use of community engagement activities, including measures of needs assessment activities, community events and the use of social media and social marketing.

Table 2. Compositional and community engagement characteristics of MOCAN compared to sample average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composition</th>
<th>All (n=59)</th>
<th>MOCAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Collaborative Age (years)</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Funding</td>
<td>$195,300</td>
<td>$350,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead Agency (Y/N)</td>
<td>76%, Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience of Coordinator (years)</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of Partners</td>
<td>11-30</td>
<td>&gt;50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Community Activities</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Community Event Types</td>
<td>4 of 7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Social Marketing (Y/N)</td>
<td>55%, Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use of Social Media (Y/N)</td>
<td>68%, Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

:: Political and Policy Engagement Activities

The figure below shows how frequently groups engage in a variety of political and policy activities.

Figure 2. Frequency of engagement in political and policy activities
Using PARTNER (www.partnertool.net), we contacted members of GA Safe Routes to School Partnership to learn more about their experiences in this collaborative.

Measures

- Density: Describes the general level of cohesion.
- Degree Centralization: Measures number of ties each member has in relation to other members.

Groups, including density and degree centralization, help us interpret the visual representation of group structure. Density describes the general level of cohesion, and centralization describes the extent to which relationships are centered around specific group members.

Degree Centralization

- Measures number of ties each member has in relation to other members.

We used Social Network Analysis to map relationships (also known as ties) among members of the collaborative group. Structural attributes of groups, including density and degree centralization, help us visualize how group members relate to each other. Density describes the general level of cohesion, reported as the proportion of ties present in the network in relation to the total number of possible ties in the entire network. Centralization describes the extent to which relationships are centered around specific group members, reported as a proportion of ties each member has in relation to other members.

:: Network Structure

We used Social Network Analysis to map relationships (also known as ties) among members of the collaborative group. Structural attributes of groups, including density and degree centralization, help us visualize how group members relate to each other. Density describes the general level of cohesion, reported as the proportion of ties present in the network in relation to the total number of possible ties in the entire network. Centralization describes the extent to which relationships are centered around specific group members, reported as a proportion of ties each member has in relation to other members.

:: Network Maps

**Network Configurations: Examples**

- **Low Density**
  - High Degree Centralization
  - Fewer members are connected to each other directly, and instead they are connected through central members who control information flow.
  - Density: 0.42
  - Centralization: 0.59

- **Mid Density**
  - Mid Degree Centralization
  - Most but not all of the members recognized each other by name. Member relationships are organized around 3 to 5 central members. This structure allows for less redundancy in information exchange.
  - Density: 0.80
  - Centralization: 0.24

- **High Density**
  - Low Degree Centralization
  - Highly cohesive (i.e., very dense) group where almost all members recognized each other by name. Distribution of responsibility and power is equally distributed between members.
  - Density: 1.00
  - Centralization: 0.00

**Network Configuration: MOCAN**

Most members recognized one another by name. There appears to be a core group of members in the center and others are organized around the periphery. Information flows through the core group to the periphery.

- Density Score: 0.75
- Degree Centralization: 0.31

**Figure 3. Comparison of network maps with varying density and degree centralization scores**

From the figures above, we learned that different network configurations work for different groups. Groups can organize in a way that works best for their members and the context in which they are working. Groups can be effective with both tightly knit (i.e., high density) or loosely constructed (i.e., low density) configurations.
:: Member Perceptions

Members were asked to indicate the collaborative’s most important outcome and whether the group has been successful in achieving their goals. Members of MOCAN indicated that the group has been somewhat successful in achieving their goals and the majority (50%) of members selected changes to or formation of policy as the most important outcome of MOCAN.

Perceived Success (1-5)
1 = not successful
2 = somewhat successful
3 = successful
4 = very successful
5 = completely successful

Figure 4. Perceived success

:: Which is the most important outcome for MOCAN?

- Engaging in activism or advocacy 12.5% (n=1)
- Partnering with policy makers to author policy documents 12.5% (n=1)
- Engaging with elected officials and community leaders 25.0% (n=2)
- Changes to or formation of policy 50.0% (n=4)

Figure 5. Outcomes identified as “most important” by members of MOCAN
The PARTNER survey asked members to identify other members in the collaborative with whom they work and then asked subsequent questions about trustworthiness and organizational value for each collaborative member identified. Overall trustworthiness was measured by reliability, mission congruence, and openness to discussion. Overall value was measured by power and influence, level of involvement, and resource contribution.

Figure 6. Measures of VALUE among members of MOCAN compared to average for all collaboratives in sample

Figure 7. Measures of TRUST among members of MOCAN compared to average for all collaboratives in sample
Members were also asked to identify their most important contribution to the collaborative. A variety of member contributions reduces redundancy and increases the group’s ability to work collaboratively towards a common goal that no one organization could achieve individually.

**Figure 8.** Contributions identified as “most important” by members of MOCAN members

### Implications

This research provides insights into the structures and activities of collaborative groups and the environmental and policy approaches they utilize to advance an active living agenda. Our research suggests that active living collaboratives are translating the evidence on environmental and policy approaches to promote active living from research to practice. A diverse, multi-sectoral collaborative expands the influence of the group and their ability to make decisions that move the work of the group forward. Groups who organize a greater variety of community events and use social media and social marketing achieve higher levels of environmental improvements and related policy change (Litt et al. 2013).

Groups are most effective in making improvements to the built environment and changes to the policy landscape when they dedicate substantial resources to engage their memberships, the broader community and decision-makers in the work of the collaborative.
Acknowledgements

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References
