



STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS THROUGH EVALUATION

The Greensboro Downtown Greenway's Journey

The [Downtown Greenway](#) is a four-mile paved walking and biking trail that defines the city center of Greensboro, North Carolina. The Downtown Greenway was envisioned in 2001 as part of a master plan commissioned by Action Greensboro, a community development non-profit established by six local foundations, including a local health foundation.

The objectives of the project include encouraging economic development and increasing the tax base for the city of Greensboro, while improving the quality of life for citizens by enhancing urban landscapes that promote fitness, connectedness, and well-being. As of fall 2021, three miles of the Downtown Greenway are complete, with the final mile scheduled to be completed in 2023.



NAVIGATING THE PROCESS

Safe States Alliance released its [Strengthening Partnerships between Business and Public Health: A Roadmap for Advancing Community Injury and Violence Prevention](#) (Roadmap) in 2020, and shortly after, the Downtown Greenway was one of three seed grantees awarded funding to pilot the tool and showcase the translation of best practices into real-world settings.

Having already successfully moved through the ["Connect"](#), ["Plan"](#), and ["Perform"](#) stages described in the Roadmap, the Downtown Greenway was well positioned to apply the recommendations from the ["Evaluate"](#) section. Until 2020, the Downtown Greenway had primarily focused on tracking measures related to economic development, but there was interest in expanding their data collection to begin monitoring health-related outcomes and investigating the impact of their work on injury and violence prevention outcomes in the community as the project neared completion.



“ This project has changed the way we think about interacting with our community. We have formed new partnerships and new approaches to telling our story to the community. *Dabney Sanders*
Action Greensboro ”

The **“EVALUATE”** section of the Roadmap highlights the importance of including measurement and evaluation as a priority across multi-sector collaborative work. It emphasizes the need to think logically and strategically about evaluation, creating a measurement plan that includes measures of interest to both health and business partners.

KEY PARTNERS



Business Improvement District



City Government



Transportation



Foundations



Non-Profits



University

Rather than selecting and collecting data on a handful of measures of current interest, the Downtown Greenway employed and worked collaboratively with the University of North Carolina Greensboro (UNCG) to assemble a multi-disciplinary evaluation team to design a robust evaluation plan. The goal was to engage the community, forging new partners along the way, while identifying metrics of interest and potential data sources to ultimately enhance the capacity of the Downtown Greenway to do continuous evaluation on a variety of measures.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



Message Framing Connects Community Investment and Public Health Outcomes

Since its inception in 2001, the focus and purpose of the Downtown Greenway was for economic development; therefore, the evaluation team had to be intentional with message framing to connect community investment to public health outcomes. By using a collaborative and inclusive approach, the evaluation team has broken down language barriers between different partners and highlighted benefits of the partnership to both sectors in ways that are meaningful and relevant.



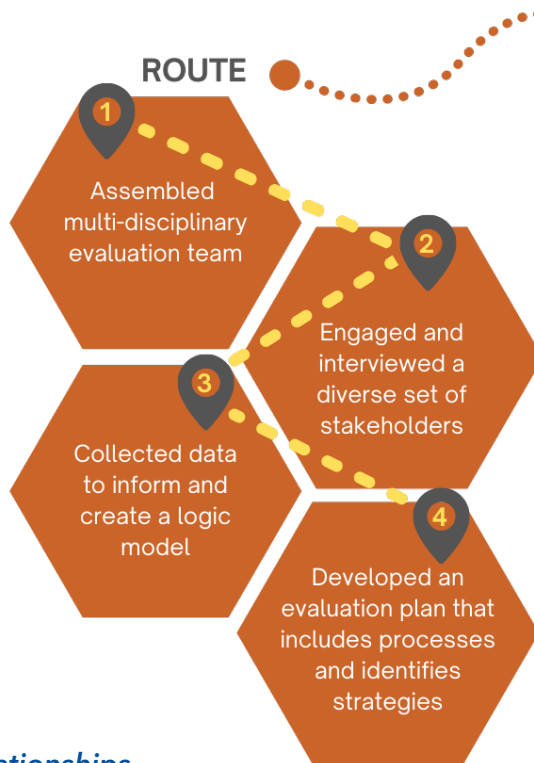
Establishing Intentional Relationships Pays Off

The Downtown Greenway evaluation has gained interest and excitement from city officials, foundations, businesses, residents, and students. The process of being intentional and creating relationships is opening doors of opportunity with organizations like the Ford Foundation, as well as creating the potential for a 'living research lab' in which UNCG students and professors from across disciplines will be able to utilize the evaluation results and see the value in the cross-sectionality of the data available.



Planning for Success is an Investment

The Downtown Greenway partnership invested significant time and effort into developing a comprehensive evaluation plan that tells the story and reflects the values of the community. This also established the partnerships to implement and sustain the work long term, as opposed to taking a short-term approach of jumping into evaluating a few specific measures. This process took time, but in the end, partners cultivated community support and buy-in, created a repository of data points and sources, and identified strategies to sustain and integrate future evaluation activities.



DESTINATION

- Time invested in stakeholder interviews reinvigorated and elicited the values of the community, building excitement about the evaluation and interest in the final plan.
- Capacity for collective and continual evaluation of the Downtown Greenway was enhanced through the process.
- Stakeholder engagement strategy created an opportunity to collect data while also sharing information about the Downtown Greenway.
- A repository of data for the Downtown Greenway was built to support future evaluative work.
- The collaborative evaluation process has sparked interest in better understanding and funding for evaluation activities from foundations in Greensboro.



Using a Multi-Disciplinary, Collaborative Evaluation Approach Increases Buy-In and Sustainability of a Project

The Downtown Greenway evaluation team followed the principles of collaborative evaluation in the design process. This included establishing a cross-disciplinary team and bringing in nontraditional partners to ensure the data would be robust and valuable across sectors. A benefit to this approach was the creation of relationships and interest among stakeholders who will then be engaged to carry out the plan.



The road to strengthened partnerships is not one-way. It must be a continuous process where partners cycle between steps as their work progresses. While the Downtown Greenway focused on applying the recommendations from the Evaluate section, the interdependency of all the Roadmap steps (e.g., connect, plan, share) became clear. Through the creation of the evaluation plan, they also shared successes, which connected new partners to the project and led to planning future activities. This journey has created positive relationships that will advance community health for many years to come.



“ We recognized that there were other measures that would be meaningful to other partners. Working with local university representatives, we have engaged a wide range of project stakeholders in helping us identify what measures of success are most meaningful and preparing a documented approach to monitor key metrics that address the many dimensions of benefits this project will bring.

*Johanna Cockburn
Greensboro Department
of Transportation* ”

GUIDE POSTS

Impact of COVID-19 on Program Activities

As an outdoor recreational option, the Downtown Greenway has experienced increased use over the last 18 months. This may have contributed to the community's awareness and interest in talking about it. It will also likely impact the results of future evaluation activities. Due to COVID guidelines, many of the interviews were done virtually, creating both the opportunity to engage a diverse set of stakeholders and limiting the ability to identify and interview regular users.

Health Equity Considerations

Greensboro, and particularly the neighborhoods surrounding and connected by the Downtown Greenway, is very diverse. Evaluators were intentional in selecting stakeholders to interview, ensuring a balance in geography and demographics like gender, race, ethnicity, and age, as well as end users and beneficiaries. Leaders of the chronically under-served neighborhoods are seeing the Downtown Greenway and the impact data as a way forward; essentially erasing boundaries that kept neighborhoods divided and reducing fears of crime. To ensure diversity and inclusion, future plans for evaluation include creating an advisory board of residents within the Downtown Greenway that engages regularly with the evaluation team.



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