

TOOLKITS

Health: Starting a Walking Team

**50+ EXERCISE:
THE FACTS**

This summer, as President Obama and Congress work together to enact health reform that reduces health care costs for families, businesses, and government; guarantees choice of doctors, hospitals, and insurance plans; and assures quality affordable health care for all Americans, we hope that you will promote healthy lifestyles in your community – a key to avoiding costly disease and improving the nation's health.

A brisk, half-hour walk five or more days a week can reduce the risk of developing:

- Cardiovascular disease
- Diabetes
- Obesity
- Osteoporosis
- Arthritis
- Some cancers

The 30-minute daily walking routine also boosts brain power, helps control weight, requires only modest investments of time and money, increases productivity, and – because of its benefits, promoting alertness and health – a walking regimen may lead to reduced health care costs. At a rate of 74 percent, AARP members who are active say that walking is their most regular type of exercise.

Research shows that walking itself promotes physical activity. Since walking is also an "entry level" form of exercise – i.e. people who develop daily walking routines are likely to eventually practice yoga, go biking, or join in other athletic pursuits – AARP believes walking programs are the first step to push greater numbers of 50+ Americans to keep fit.

So, if starting a walking group doesn't sound like a volunteer activity to you, think again. Your efforts can have a tremendous impact on the health and well-being of your community. Alternatively, you may choose to keep your act of service small, by asking a friend or neighbor to walk with you on a regular basis. Even this one simple act can make a world of difference. So, don't wait, get walking!

This summer, commit yourself and a team of your friends, family, and neighbors to help increase healthy exercise habits and join United We Serve. This tool kit will give you the basics to recruit a team, organize your group, and make an impact this summer.

GETTING STARTED

While no two projects will be the same, successful projects will share a few common practices. We encourage you to incorporate the following elements into your service project:

- Create a team with your friends and neighbors to share the effort;
- Set outcome-based goals and track your progress to those goals;
- Celebrate your successes together.

The Challenge: Many community-based organizations do not have enough capacity to manage a large number of volunteers, so they need you to organize yourself in coordination with them. This tool kit is designed to either help you organize a group and be a positive addition to a community-based organization, or, if such an organization does not exist, to be a well-organized independently-run group that fills a needed gap in the community.

A step by step guide to getting started and executing service activities follows. Please let us know how your project goes and what you learn by telling your story at [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov).

STEP ONE: IDENTIFY LOCAL PARTNERS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your area. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions.

- Call your local community senior center and ask how volunteers can help with summer programming.
- [“Get a guide to finding local partners”](#)
- Ask the existing organizations if they’d like to invite their members to join your walking team.

STEP TWO: BUILD A TEAM

Teams can help to support and motivate members and hold each other accountable. Teams build community. Ask your family, friends, colleagues, neighbors, and faith group members to walk with you.

- Host a house meeting or potluck to choose a project, set goals, recruit volunteers and plan next steps.
- [“Get a guide for hosting a house meeting”](#)
- Post your service opportunities on [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov) to recruit new volunteers.
- **Important note: Safety must always come first!** Before goals are set and a team is finalized, it is important that all members of the team complete a basic health assessment. A sample form can be found at <http://easyforyou.info/downloads/EASYScreeningToolHardCopyFINAL040308.pdf>.
- **Any members with health concerns should talk to their doctor before participating in the program.** As team coordinator, you should keep in mind the health and activity level of your participants as you help set goals and keep them motivated.

STEP THREE: SET A GOAL

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Commit as individuals and as a team to a walking program. Set your goals high to stretch yourself. Then keep track of how you are doing and designate someone to be responsible for updating the group on how you are progressing toward your goals. You'll be surprised at how much you can do when you commit, focus, and follow through.

- [“Get a goal-setting guide”](#)

STEP FOUR: START WALKING

The key to effective service is planning. Organize your materials, make confirmation calls and, if you have time, read supplemental materials before you volunteer.

- [“Get a tip sheet for your service activity”](#)

STEP FIVE: REPORT AND CELEBRATE SUCCESSSES

Your team members, the community, and the President want to know about your successes and hear your stories. Share your accomplishments by reporting your results. We will highlight the best stories throughout the summer. Tell us about your successes and what you have learned, or just tell your story of service at Serve.gov.

FOLLOW UP**SPREAD THE SERVICE**

- After every event, thank your volunteers and participants, sign them up for the next event, and ask them to commit to inviting a friend to the next event.

FINDING LOCAL PARTNERS: 50+ WALKING TEAMS

Check out the organizations already doing good work in your community. Many existing service groups have identified community needs and built the expertise to provide solutions. Get plugged in with them!

There are many ways to find local partners for walking teams. You could start a walking team within an existing group you are part of. If you'd like to reach out to invite others to join you, consider calling your local senior center, community center, or Parks and Recreation Council center.

It will be helpful to provide background on the local service landscape to the attendees of your house meeting. A few phone calls can produce all the information you need to know your options.

SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT:

Hi, my name is _____ and I'm interested in starting a summer walking team program in the community.

- Is there a way I could promote the walking team at your center?
- Are there existing groups of seniors or others I could get the word to?
- What would be the best way to do that?
- If we wanted to use your facility as a meeting place for a kickoff meeting, who would I talk to about that?
- Do you have any other suggestions of community organizations I could contact to promote the walking team?

House Meetings

Purpose:

House meetings are a valuable tactic for recruiting volunteers and building a team. House meetings allow community members to share their concerns and join together to work for progress. Within the room, you already have all the tools you need to enact change on a local level. Every attendee can contribute time or resources or leadership abilities.

Your house meeting will help you identify your leadership team. The people that are committed enough to come to your house meeting should be considered potential leaders of the initiatives being implemented in their communities.

As a house meeting host, invite people from your social network to participate in a discussion about your community, pressing needs, and potential solutions. House meetings often engage people new to service and unclear about next steps. Serving with the support of a team will increase the ease and comfort of many new volunteers.

Building community through house meetings is a critical step toward the President's ultimate goal, which is to support everyday Americans in a grassroots effort to improve lives and strengthen communities.

A House Meeting

Goals

- Choose and plan a service project for the summer.
- Set measurable group and personal goals for your United We Serve project.
- Identify 5 attendees to be team leaders.
- Plan the next meeting of the leadership team and identify next steps for each leader.
- Obtain commitments from all attendees to volunteer on a regular basis from June 22 – September 11.

Host Duties

- Before
 - To have **20** people attend, you will need to invite **50**. Brainstorm a list of **50** people to invite. Include your friends, family, members of your faith group, colleagues, book club attendees, etc.
 - Make calls to the **50** people on your list to invite them to your house meeting. Remember that phone calls are much more effective than a mass email.
 - Post your house meeting on Serve.gov and invite local residents interested in volunteering to attend.
 - Browse Serve.gov to see what needs in your community aren't being met and which organizations you might be able to partner with. Take some preliminary steps to identify local partners already working in the community.
 - Prepare necessary materials.

- During
 - Be prepared to give a short explanation of why you became involved/what inspired you to serve.
 - Consider how you most want to serve your community. President Obama has identified four target areas for summer service: health, education, community renewal, and energy and environment. What does your community most need?

- After
 - Thank attendees and get their pledge to serve this summer.
 - Organize a follow-up volunteer leadership meeting with your new team to take next steps.

House Meeting Planner

Use this brainstorm sheet to think of those you want to invite, including those who have never volunteered before or may be new to Untied We Serve.

Name	Phone #	Invited (Y/N)	Committed (Y/N)	Confirmed (Y/N)	Notes
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Name: Please print the invitee’s full name.

Invite: Please mark **yes, no, maybe** or **left message (LM)**. This will help you track who you need to contact and who you should be calling for confirmation. The only real invitations are when you speak with someone directly.

Commit: Please mark **yes, no** or **maybe**.

Confirm: Please mark **yes, no** or **left message (LM)**. You’ll need to call every invitee who said yes or maybe, and every invitee who only got a left message. Please do not assume that **anybody** will come without a confirmation the day before your meeting. It can’t hurt to give people a quick reminder, and you need to know how many people will be at your meeting to make that meeting as effective and enjoyable as possible.

House Meeting Agenda

*****Before starting the meeting, have everyone sign in and appoint a timekeeper who will keep each section running on time.*****

- 0:00-0:10 **Host welcome and introduction**
- Host of the meeting introduces themselves and welcomes attendees.
 - Host shares why (s)he was inspired to organize the house meeting and the purpose of the meeting.
- 0:10-0:25 **Attendee introductions**
- Go around the room and ask each person to introduce themselves and share their reason for wanting to serve this summer.
- 0:25-0:45 **Choose a project**
- Host introduces three or four project ideas and opens up the room for discussion.
 - Discuss what projects will work best in your community.
 - Group votes on project choice.
- 0:45-0:55 **Set goals and identify leadership**
- Ask which attendees are interested in being volunteer leaders – they should stay after the meeting for 15 minutes and commit to a weekly planning meeting from June 22 - September 11.
 - Ask each attendee to consider personal summer goals and make a realistic but ambitious summer commitment.
- 0:55-1:00 **Conclusion**
- At the end of the meeting, the group should have:
 - At least one project to commit to for the summer.
 - A leadership team.
 - Pledges from each attendee to participate.
- 1:00-1:15 **Leadership team meeting**
- Meet with volunteer leaders to set weekly meeting and divide responsibilities.
 - Fill out attached worksheets.

Leadership Team Worksheet

The members of my team include:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Our weekly leadership meetings occur every _____ at _____.

Who are 5 other friends and family members who you will call to enlist in your group’s project? Make these calls during the leadership team meeting, if possible:

Name	Phone Number	Email

Setting Goals and Tracking Progress

Breaking Down Your Goal

What is your group's project?

Who are your local partners?

What is your group's goal? (ie, how many lbs of donated food will you secure, how many hours will you spend reading to kids, how many homes will you audit?)

How many weeks do you have until the National Day of Service and Remembrance on September 11th?

What will you have to average per week between now and September 11th to reach your goal?

How many volunteers will you have to recruit on average per week to reach that goal? How many hours would you guess they have to work? If it's not clear at first, you should be ambitious and then adjust your recruitment goal as you go.

Tracking Progress to Goals

Our team will report progress to goals every _____ to _____.

_____ will share our progress to goals with all team members by email/phone calls every _____.

We will also share our story and accomplishments at serve.gov.

SETTING GOALS: SUMMER WALKING

Setting goals and having a plan to meet them will help you form and maintain your walking group. Plan to get together as a group once a week to keep your group motivated and to ask them to report their progress.

These three easy, yet very important, steps will help with goal setting. Ask group members to:

1. **Set a start date:** If you're truly ready, don't wait! Take advantage of your enthusiasm and keep that momentum going. Pick a start date and record it on the Personal Action Plan.
2. **Tell friends and family:** You need support, and the people who care about you can provide it. Telling others about your plan also reinforces your commitment to yourself.
3. **Write down your goals:** Think about your goals and what you must do to meet them. Make sure to prioritize your new commitment to being active among your other activities. Consider what adjustments you'll need to make in your schedule to make walking a priority.

What will you do to help your walkers stay motivated?

SET CONCRETE GOALS

Setting goals helps you be accountable to yourself and also increases accountability within a group. Clear goals at the beginning of a project will also help you determine how your project will work and what role group members can play. Once goals are set, you can track your progress, compare your results with other group members, and figure out what works best so everyone can meet (or exceed) their goals.

Set a service goal for June 22 – September 11 and hold yourself accountable. Commit as an individual and as a team to increase health exercise habits this summer. Then keep your commitment. Let's see what we can do together!

- We will walk _____ minutes a day.
- We will walk _____ days a week.
- We will walk _____ steps a day.
- We will increase our steps walked per day by _____ percent.

Part of setting good outcome goals is thinking about how you will achieve them. As a group or an individual, think about process-based goals as well to map out how you will hit your goals above:

- We will start walking on _____ (date).
- As a team, we will recruit _____ walkers to join us.
- As an individual, I will recruit _____ people to join me.

TRACK PROGRESS TOWARD GOALS

- Set a weekly or biweekly deadline to report progress. For example, "Our team will report progress every Friday. The person responsible for reporting results for your team is _____."
- Make sure every group member is in the loop. Designate a group member to track and share the results. For example, "Our team will share our progress with all members by email/phone calls every week. The person responsible for sharing progress is _____."
- Keep track of your progress. Score sheets like the one below can be helpful.

Week	# minutes walked	# of steps taken	# additional walkers recruited
June 22			
June 29			
July 6			
July 13			
July 20			
July 27			
August 3			
August 10			
August 17			
August 24			
August 31			
September 7			
Total			

TIPS: STARTING A WALKING TEAM

Walking with seniors can be as simple as partnering with your local senior center for one-on-one walking or building a large community team.

Calling All Walkers: Starting a walking team needn't take much time or effort. Here's what you need to do:

Advertise: Post fliers in your local library, recreation, community center, senior center, health club, cafeteria at work, or place of worship. Take advantage of free calendar listings in local newspapers or newsletters. The fliers should invite interested walkers to a meeting, and give people a day, time, and place. Choose a public meeting place like the library or neighborhood coffee shop. You also could include a telephone number for people to contact you.

Hold a meeting: At your first meeting, listen to what the group has to say. Then decide together:

- How many times a week the group will walk
- Where you will walk
- What time you will meet and how far you will go

You might want to scope and map out several different routes. You can increase the distance as you go along.

You'll also want to set some guidelines:

- Will you walk if it's raining or snowing?
- Does the group want to walk both indoors and outdoors?
- Do you want to ban cell phones and headphones during walks?
- Do you want to have regular meetings?
- Will members call one another if someone can't make it, or will the group just walk with whoever shows up? You can make the group as formal or informal as you like.

Other things you might want to discuss include dressing for the weather, warming up and cooling down, and recording and tracking progress.

Finally, demonstrate proper walking techniques: arms swinging, chest high, stomach in, back straight, and rolling from heel to toe on both feet.

Before the meeting ends, create a telephone tree so team members can contact each other. Include email addresses.

Get organized: Once your team is up and walking, you might want to get more organized. Here are some of the things you can do:

- Give your team a name and have T-shirts or visors made.
- Elect officers.

Material provided by AARP as part of its Create the Good® initiative. To learn more go to CreateTheGood.org.

Provided by The Corporation for National and Community Service

- Enter charity walk-a-thons, community parades, or 5K races together.
- Have coffee or lunch after your walks. Spin off a dinner club or book club. Organize an all-day or weekend walk to explore a new place (a historic site, big city, part of the Appalachian Trail).
- Start a newsletter.
- Organize a community walk to get others interested in walking. You can partner with a local hospital or other community organization to increase support and participation.

These kinds of activities can help your team stay interested and motivated. Motivation might start to dwindle over time, but this is normal. People often find that one of the biggest challenges they face with any fitness program is sticking with it over the long haul.

Staying Motivated

If your team decides to hold occasional or regular meetings, you can turn them into opportunities to motivate yourselves and each other by:

- Inviting a local speaker to talk about fitness and healthy eating
- Finding and sharing articles or Web sites on walking and sample walking logs to record progress
- Setting weight-loss goals
- Sharing success stories
- Recognizing group members who have lost weight or improved their health by walking
- Making a list of all the benefits of walking, and posting and reviewing them at each meeting. Mention that walking can reduce stress, help prevent heart disease, improve sleep, and help you maintain or lose weight.

Remember that your continued enthusiasm as the team's leader is very important. Talk about how walking has improved your life. Encourage interested members and welcome new walkers. And most of all, be a role model by being a committed walker.

Additional Resources

AARP 10-WEEK WALKING PROGRAM, Program Coordinator's Guide Download the PDF guide by cutting and pasting this link you're your browser:

http://assets.aarp.org/www.aarp.org/articles/health/2008_walking_guide.pdf

This 10-week walking program model begins with a kickoff event where participants gather to get fired up to commit to increasing the amount they walk for 10 weeks. The kickoff includes educational presentations on setting goals, how to walk the right way, how to wear a step-counter, etc. The kickoff also allows for people to find walking buddies or groups to walk with and to get the EASY Screening Form filled out. Motivation tips and fun ideas such as scavenger hunts and a 10 week celebration event are also included.

AARP [Step Up to Better Health](http://aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com/default.asp)

Inspiring program to help you increase the number of steps you take each day, no matter how active you are now.

<http://aarp.stepuptobetterhealth.com/default.asp>

AARP [Get Fit on Route 66](http://aarp.getfitonroute66.com/)

Fun, nostalgic trip down America's most famous highway lets you choose from 66 activities, including walking. Visit the Route 66 Diner for recipes or try the Backseat Driver feature where friends can opt in to see each other's progress.

<http://aarp.getfitonroute66.com/>

AARP Staying Motivated

A variety of AARP articles to help you stay the course and keep walking.

www.aarp.org/health-active/walking/

[Rails-To-Trails](http://www.trailink.com/)

Walk, run, or cycle your way to better health and fitness on the nation's network of 1,200 community rail-trails. The Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has a free online database that can help you find a trail near you.

www.trailink.com/

[Sierra Club](http://www.sierraclub.org/)

The Sierra Club has group outings that include day hikes, bird-watching trips, canal walks, peak scrambles, and forays into natural areas of major urban regions. Find a chapter near you.

www.sierraclub.org/

[American Volkssport Association](http://www.ava.org/)

Find walking events, clubs, workshops, and special programs. The group's network of 450 clubs organizes more than 3,000 noncompetitive walking events each year in all 50 states. You can search for a club in your area.

www.ava.org/

WalkSport

Information on mall-walking programs.

www.walksport.com/

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center (PBIC)

PBIC is a national clearinghouse for information about health and safety, engineering, advocacy, education, enforcement, access, and mobility for pedestrians (including transit users) and bicyclists. Provides information on how to get involved in making your community more walkable and ideas for promoting walking at work and in the community.

www.walkinginfo.org

Books

[*Walking for Fun and Fitness*](#) by Jerald D. Hawkins, Sandra M. Hawkins, Wadsworth, December 2000

[*Walking Magazine The Complete Guide To Walking: for Health, Fitness, and Weight Loss*](#)

by Mark Fenton, The Lyons Press, February 20

CELEBRATE YOUR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Your work this summer matters and should be celebrated. Remember to go to [Serve.gov](https://www.serve.gov) and tell us your summer story of service.

Also, be sure to keep track of what worked for you this summer and what could be improved. You can learn from this service project when you organize your next service project!