

# Trails for Life

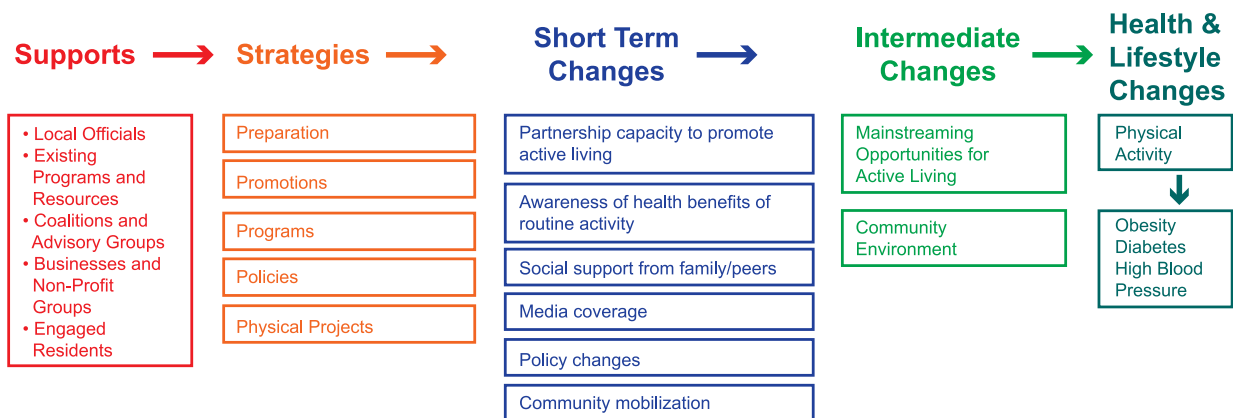
## Evaluation of Active Living by Design | Upper Valley Region of New Hampshire and Vermont 2003-2008

On a Saturday morning in Fall 2008, families set off on bicycle to enjoy a progressive pedaling picnic through the Connecticut River Valley. At designated stops along the way, parents and their children met local food producers, tasted seasonal foods, and connected with other community members. The event, known as the Tour de Taste, was part of a local initiative to increase connectivity between communities and encourage residents to engage in active living.

“Active living” is a way of life that integrates physical activity into daily routines in order to accumulate at least 30 minutes of activity each day. In November 2003, the Upper Valley Trails Alliance received a five-year, \$200,000 grant as part of the Active Living by Design national program ([www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org)) funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. By advocating for changes in community design, specifically land use, transportation, parks, trails, and greenways, the Active Living by Design initiative intended to make it easier for people to be active in their daily routines.<sup>1</sup>

The Active Living by Design Community Action Model provided five active living strategies to influence community change: Preparation, Promotions, Programs, Policies, and Physical Projects. The 5Ps represent a comprehensive approach to increasing physical activity through short-term, intermediate, and long-term community changes. This inclusive model allowed the Upper Valley Trails Alliance and the Trails for Life partnership to address the challenges facing rural communities interested in promoting active living.

### Active Living by Design Community Action Model



As lead agency, the Upper Valley trails Alliance (Alliance) emphasized promoting, protecting, and connecting the numerous trails in the community to increase use and awareness, conserve trails for the future and create an integrated trail network. The Alliance’s Trails for Life initiative sought to improve community health and quality of life in the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire by increasing opportunities for and removing barriers to physical activity. Through the leadership of the Alliance, the Trails for Life partnership combined policy influences and physical projects with promotional and programmatic efforts to increase awareness and use of the region’s growing trail networks and begin a discussion with residents about the importance of creating communities conducive to active living.

<sup>1</sup> The Active Living by Design (ALbD) initiative was established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) in 2001, and its National Program Office (NPO) is part of the University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Twenty-five interdisciplinary community partnerships were selected across the country to demonstrate how changing community design can impact physical activity. Transtria was funded by RWJF to work with the NPO to conduct ALbD evaluation and dissemination activities. This case report draws from Transtria’s evaluation efforts.

Participation in the ALBD initiative had an impact on a number of key partners involved with the Trails to Life project by fostering new relationships and allocating of additional resources to the partnership's efforts. In particular, the Alliance changed significantly over the grant period, maturing as an organization, expanding its reach, and becoming a more visible presence in Upper Valley. Before the grant, the Alliance was a grassroots organization interested in building trails. To date, the agency has expanded its scope to examine reasons why people engage in active living.

---

*“[Active Living by Design] was a really great opportunity. [It] forced the organization to do things that we would have never have done.” -Staff*

---

The project had a significant impact not only on the stakeholders, but more importantly on the residents of Upper Valley. Before the grant, the term “active living” was almost unheard of in the region, but as a result of the Trails for Life initiative, use of these words spread widely. There are now many new resources and opportunities that support physical activity available to community members.

### **The Upper Valley**

The Upper Valley region spans the Connecticut River, encompassing over 40 communities in New Hampshire and Vermont. The communities range in population density from very rural to small urban centers, and each has its own government. The communities tend to be very independent, and there is often little communication between the different towns. Four core communities contain nearly half of the 73,000 residents in the area (Hanover, New Hampshire; Lebanon, New Hampshire; Norwich, Vermont; Hartford, Vermont). Residents are primarily Caucasian and higher income.

Upper Valley has experienced unprecedented growth and development. Dartmouth College, the new Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Cold Regions Research & Engineering Lab and a number of manufacturing companies provide a stable foundation for employment and commerce. In addition, biomedical, engineering, and computer software research and development firms continue to emerge.

Geographically, Upper Valley (UV) is very diverse, from the foothills of New Hampshire's White Mountains and the Green Mountains, to the farmlands along the Connecticut River. The Upper Valley is described as an outdoor lover's paradise, with many opportunities for recreation, including hundreds of miles of trails. Despite the abundance of opportunities to be active outside, relatively few people utilize the natural resources available to them. In fact, the rural nature of communities is a barrier to active living as people rely heavily on automobiles for transportation. Most students cannot walk or bike to school nor can adults walk or bike to work—they live too far away. Most of the UV's largest employers are located within the four core towns of the region, yet only a small percentage of employees actually live in these towns. As the economy expands, more people move to the Upper Valley, threatening the very quality of life that attracts them.

As lead agency, the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (Alliance), a non-profit trails organization based in Norwich, Vermont, aimed to protect and expand the existing trail networks in the Upper Valley region. The Alliance's ALBD effort, called Trails for Life, was designed to promote more active lifestyles, through the use of trails, and to assist developers in creating more walkable and bikeable communities. Overall, the staff and partners stressed the importance of significant investments in organizational infrastructure and strong community leadership.

---

*“Events take an inordinate amount of time and energy for a small organization with few volunteers. More people will live more physically active lives if there are a variety of trails, bike routes, and right-of-way easements that make it possible to get from point A to point B. An annual Bike/Walk to Work day is nice, but it doesn't change conditions on the road, which is a real barrier.” -Staff*

---

## Preparation

### Partnership

The Trails for Life partnership formed in 2003 and consisted of a number of local, regional, and state partners from a variety of fields, including planning, development, research, education, health, government, parks and recreation, and trails. Although the partnership became robust and diverse over the five-year grant, engaging the partners was difficult. Specifically, the staff found it challenging to get individuals and organizations to commit to partnership activities, even those as simple as meetings. In the end, actively engaged partners were those with a vested interest in a particular effort.

---

*“A big part of working with partnerships is making sure you can identify a piece of the work that will be their own and that they will be able to make an impact on.” -Staff*

---

Initially, the partnership met quarterly to review goals, strategies, and progress and to discuss the recruitment of new partners. Over time, the partnership meetings occurred less frequently. Eventually, the ALBD Project Director found it was more effective to meet one-on-one with the partners or occasionally get together in small groups of three or four partners to discuss specific programs within the project.

The lead agency, Upper Valley Trails Alliance (Alliance) administered the grant and managed the day-to-day operations of most of the partnership’s efforts. While partners felt that this arrangement worked well, Alliance staff felt differently. The Alliance had limited staff time available to commit to the ALBD work plan and was frustrated by the lack of contribution by other partners. One staff member suggested smaller work committees to help solve this problem.

---

*“I think that the design of how the work got done worked for the circumstances that we had. The meetings that we had were really good brainstorming meetings. And I think the [Alliance] staff took the information from those meetings and went back and kind of did what they could with the time that they had and would reconnect with active people in each community to move individual projects along... It was a quiet partnership, but an effective one.” -Partner*

*“Rather than trying to deal with two dozen people within a partnership, there should be an executive committee to identify a smaller handful of key partners and then have each of those individuals overseeing one piece of the overall project with some other team. Then, occasionally convene everybody in a meeting. Having six or eight people at a table is much more productive than trying to get 24 people together.” -Staff*

---

The partners drew on their skills, interests, and past experiences to prepare them for their work with Trails for Life. Though most did not have health-related backgrounds, they were skilled individuals who contributed to the capacity of the organization.

---

*“This community of people and professionals are perfectly posed to serve as catalysts and mediators and facilitators to develop trails in our communities...” -Partner*

---

Staff and partners identified a number of strengths of the Trails for Life partnership:

- The partnership successfully created new relationships with organizations and individuals atypical for trails-related organizations, including health-focused organizations and schools.
- Partnership meetings generated creative and exciting ideas.
- Partners felt inspired and enlightened because of the information and expertise shared through the partnership.
- Participating in the partnership increased the reach of member organizations.

---

*“The active living partnership allowed us to reach out to other organizations and people that we may not have connected with and that also helped elevate our organization and the whole concept of active living.” -Staff*

*“What I really liked was the gatherings of the partnership where many ideas were generated.” -Partner*

*“It’s a great way to broaden your reach and efficiently get your message out.” -Partner*

---

Staff and partners also noted a number of challenges to working within the Trails for Life partnership:

- The main challenge was getting the partners to buy into the project sufficiently to actually take on responsibility for getting things done.
- While individuals and organizations called themselves partners, few actively participated in Trails for Life projects.
- Potential partners were not brought together as a group before the start of the ALbD grant to discuss expectations.
- Meetings had limited attendance.
- The Alliance did not always have the staff, time, resources, or support to implement all of the ideas that emerged at partnership meetings.

---

*“What seemed hard, maybe because of staffing and time limitations, was implementing all the great ideas that emerged from those gatherings. They were really well organized and we focused on each area of the partnership and each area of the grant and a lot of great people came together, but it was hard to get people involved in implementing the stuff.” -Partner*

---

Upper Valley Trails Alliance was supported by a partnership of local community organizations and individuals, listed as follows.

Members of the Upper Valley Trails for Life partnership	
Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center</li> <li>• New Hampshire Celebrates Wellness</li> <li>• White River Family Practice</li> </ul>
Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bernice A Ray School</li> <li>• Dartmouth College</li> <li>• Dresden School District</li> </ul>
Parks & Recreation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hartford Parks and Recreation</li> <li>• Lebanon Parks and Recreation</li> <li>• National Park Service Rivers &amp; Trails Program</li> <li>• Norwich Recreational Council</li> </ul>
Urban Design, Planning & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hanover Zoning Board</li> <li>• Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission</li> </ul>
Community Leaders, Policy- & Decision-makers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Hampshire State Senate</li> <li>• Vermont State Senate</li> </ul>
Advocacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Upper Valley Trails Alliance*</li> </ul>
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excel Sports</li> <li>• Gardner, Fulton &amp; Waugh</li> <li>• Geographic Data Technology</li> <li>• King Arthur Flour</li> <li>• Robert A White of SVE Associates</li> </ul>
Community & Faith-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Montshire Skating Club</li> <li>• Upper Valley Land Trust</li> <li>• Vermont Youth Conservation Corps</li> </ul>

\*Organization that served as lead agency during the ALbD grant period

### **Leadership**

The lead agency of the Trails for Life partnership was the Upper Valley Trails Alliance (Alliance), an established network of nearly 200 trails groups, parks and recreation departments, trail users, volunteers, landowners, and local organizations. The Alliance was founded in 1999 when a multi-community needs assessment identified a need to create more opportunities for all residents to enjoy the beautiful Upper Valley landscapes. The agency’s mission was to advocate for the use, maintenance, and development of trails in the Upper Valley through education, outreach and stewardship.

The Alliance was a great asset to the Upper Valley region and helped bring the different communities together. Because the region was so large, with many distinct communities, there was often a lack of communication across the different towns within the Upper Valley. The Alliance successfully brought together over a coalition of local trail advocates to promote active lifestyles through trail use in all seasons and to connect people and places through a regional trail network.

---

*“The [Upper Valley Trails Alliance] provides that regional perspective. Sometimes I have to say that in my job I get pretty focused on the 45 square miles of the town of Hartford. [But with the Alliance], 10 or 11 communities on the Vermont side of the river or that are working together looking at how what we do in one town affect another.” -Partner*

---

The lead agency faced opposition when it began to experience mission drift. While the agency originally focused on trail maintenance and development, the ALbD funding caused a shift toward programming. In response, the agency worked to realign its goals with its true mission.

---

*“The \$200,000 coming into [the Upper Valley Trails Alliance] was a big chunk of money, and it redirected the whole organization for at least two or three years. [The Alliance] was more of a trail-focused organization, and with Trails for Life there was still the trail element, but it was becoming more just active living—looking at communities and sidewalks as opposed to the trails that connect to the sidewalks. The integration of all the transportation finally is happening now, which is a good place for us, but for a while there, it was like the trail piece and the connection to the people that actually maintain and build trails was being lost. So much time had to be put into managing and developing programming that was associated with the active living program...” -Staff*

---

The Executive Director of the Alliance served as the Project Director of the ALbD grant. This role carried many responsibilities, including staff, finance, board management, partnership building, and fundraising. Several individuals filled this position throughout the project period. The frequent changes and gaps in leadership impaired the partnership’s capacity, as it took a significant amount of time and energy to manage the program and grant. In addition, frequent staff turnover made it difficult to maintain relationships with partners.

---

*“One of the major challenges that we had was the partnership from the beginning didn’t have enough human resources or money in the project for human resources.” -Staff*

---

Originally, there were no staff members aside from the Project Director. However, there was too much work associated with Trails for Life for just one individual, and the Project Director hired three summer interns to assist with the project. The Project Director soon realized that hiring a part-time staff member to work on Trails for Life year-round would be a better investment. During the grant, the Project Director was supported by a number of paid staff, including a part-time Project Assistant, a Trails Stewardship Director, a Project Coordinator, and a Marketing and Development Director. Project responsibilities, including administrative tasks, office maintenance, and outreach, were shared among the staff members, who divided the responsibilities based on interest and skills.

### ***Funding and Resources***

The Upper Valley Trails Alliance was extremely successful in leveraging RWJF funds to gain additional resources. The Trails for Life partnership held two successful donor events and participated in a nine-month Fundraising Institute training program sponsored by the Corporate Fund of New Hampshire. Trails for Life also reached out to a number of local, state, and national funding sources to expand the resources available to support and nourish its active living efforts.

Financial and in-kind support came from the following sources:

- Barrette Family Fund
- Byrne Foundation
- Children’s Fund of the Upper Valley
- Connecticut River Joint Commissions
- Frank and Brianna Sands Foundation
- Friends of Upper Valley Trails Alliance
- Hammil Family Foundation
- Harvard Pilgrim Health Care Foundation
- LL Bean
- Mascoma Savings Bank Foundation
- Ottauquechee Health Foundation
- Stone House Farm Fund
- Town of Community Foundation
- Vermont Recreation Trails Fund
- Vermont Youth Conservation Corps
- Norwich
- Upper Valley Community Foundation
- Upper Valley Trails Alliance members
- Vermont

While the community had the financial capacity and philanthropic spirit to support the project, the region had a large number of non-profit organizations that competed for donations. At times, this created challenges as the partnership looked for other sources of funds.

---

*“There is a tremendous amount of individual philanthropy in this community... There are a lot of smaller foundations, but there’s a huge population of non-profits in the Upper Valley. I mean really a lot of small organizations doing a lot of really good work. So the competition for grant dollars is really high...” -Staff*

---

### **Community Supports and Challenges**

As one staff member remarked, the general lifestyle interests of the Upper Valley residents fit well with the goals of Trails for Life. The great natural resources of the region, coupled with the health-conscious citizens, created a supportive environment. Some local businesses even showed their support by offering monetary incentives to those who rode their bikes instead of driving. The Upper Valley community was generally supportive of Trails for Life efforts. The partnership held a regional forum to which community members flocked. They wanted to understand how their voices could be heard and their ideas implemented.

---

*“[Upper Valley] is generally a community that wants to be active and just needs encouragement and ways to be active i.e. winter activities that are accessible or a walking guide to describe where to walk.” -Partner*

---



While the Upper Valley was tremendously rich in recreational resources, including multiple trail networks, residents faced many barriers to active living. The region's six-month winters were perceived as a major barrier to physical activity. In addition, residents often were not aware of the recreational opportunities and trails in their own communities. Though each community had its own network of paths, they were rarely connected to allow residents to move easily between communities. Likewise, many town centers lacked sidewalks, and bike infrastructure was lacking.

---

*“The weather forecasts on the television around here are often saying, winter storm warning, best to stay inside, stay off the roads... and often what we do is counteract that with, ‘It’s fun to be outside, celebrate winter, it’s fun to be outside, celebrate winter.’ The mantra is: Celebrate; don’t hibernate!” -Partner*

---



When working on trail construction, there were occasionally community members who opposed the partnership. Some did not like the idea of strangers using the trails, while others opposed the idea of trails in their neighborhoods altogether. One staff member was particularly skilled at convincing those skeptics that trails were worthy investments.

---

*“Some landowners really get it, and some of them it just takes some convincing. There’s still the classic northern New England thing, ‘nobody can tell me what to do with my land.’ So [staff member] is actually amazing at going and talking to people and just has a knack for having them let their guard down enough that they’ll open their ears to hearing about what a trail means.” -Staff*

---

Political support for Trails for Life varied throughout the Upper Valley, but, overall, the region's political leaders backed the partnership's efforts. The partnership's service area in Upper Valley included forty different jurisdictions, each with its own government and political players. Thus the partnership worked with many different political entities, from local city councilmen and mayors to state representatives. This made larger policy changes more difficult. The Trails for Life partnership had more success garnering political support in towns where it was active.



## **Community Assessment**

In order to better understand the needs of the community, the partnership conducted a number of assessment and evaluation activities, including feasibility studies, community forums, baseline assessments and mapping.

The Upper Valley Loop Trail Feasibility Study assessed the implications for developing a rails-to-trails connection for pedestrian and bicycle travel, using a railroad bridge that spanned the Connecticut River between Lebanon, New Hampshire, and Hartford, Vermont. Likewise, the partnership hired a consultant to assess all of the trails in the conservation areas for accessibility development projects for the Conservation Area Trails Feasibility Study. The partnership also added data to two New Hampshire communities' GIS database of trails and continued development of a mapping tool to enable printable comprehensive GIS-based community trail maps.

A number of community meetings were held to engage residents in the planning process. For example, a "Trails Connect" community forum was held to gain resident input for developing a long-range plan to connect all towns and communities with a multi-modal network of trail and transportation corridors to enhance active living and recreational and commuting opportunities.

The partnership conducted a mid-point assessment meeting of the partnership to review accomplishments and set priorities for the second half of the ALbD grant. Likewise, the partnership used qualitative feedback forms to explore participants' satisfaction with programs.

---

*"We learned some really good things: what worked and what needed to be improved upon, and we took to heart the feedback that we got." -Partner*

---

## **Policies and Physical Projects**

Policy changes have created the possibility for the partnership to be successful, and more importantly, have set the stage for a continuing community focus on active living goals. Trails for Life struggled but did make strides in developing policies at many different levels to support active living. However, much of the partnership's efforts were directed toward trail-related projects, including trail construction and maintenance and street design projects. Policy influences and physical projects, related partner, staff and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are as follows.

### **▶ Master Plan Development**

- Trails for Life became involved in the development of several Upper Valley towns' master plans.
- The partnership helped the City of Lebanon develop a master trails plan, including securing funds and holding community forums to solicit resident input.

### **▶ Committee Participation and Advocacy**

- An Alliance staff member was appointed to the Bicycle and Pedestrian Steering Committee as part of the Town of Hartford's master plan development process.
- A representative from Trails for Life attended a statewide meeting of bike/pedestrian and trail groups hosted by Vermont Bike and Pedestrian Coalition to coordinate advocacy efforts.
- The partnership was represented at the Strategic Planning Session of Connecticut River Scenic Byway Council as a trails representative.
- A partnership representative attended a meeting of City of Lebanon Parks and Recreation regarding replacement of the Route 4 Bridge over the Connecticut River and the need for bike/pedestrian infrastructure.
- Partnership members participated in a transportation focus group of Ottauquechee-Two Rivers Regional Planning Commission to discuss future transportation needs and policy.
- The partnership participated on a steering committee and helped develop a recreation management plan to support mixed uses of snowmobile trails.

### ► *Street Design Projects*



- The partnership assisted a local group in preparing a sidewalk plan for Norwich, Vermont, and successfully sought initial funding for implementation at the annual Town Meeting.
- The partnership worked with the Hanover Mountain Bike Committee and Hanover Conservation Commission to initiate planning and layout of new bike paths in that community.
- In Norwich, Vermont, Trails for Life partnership and the Safe Routes to School community task force instituted the program, which led to the construction of a new sidewalk leading to the local elementary school.

### ► *Trail Maintenance and Development*



- The Upper Valley Trails Alliance took the lead role in Trails Connect, a major regional trail planning effort to link the towns at the heart of the Upper Valley via a loop trail.
- The partnership was the driving force behind the King Arthur Trail, a new off-road path to the new school athletic fields in Norwich, Vermont.
- The Alliance was responsible for the plowing and maintenance of the Lake Morey Ice Skating Trail (at two miles the longest ice trail in the United States) and plowed and maintained a one-mile skating loop on Dewey's Mills Pond in Hartford, Vermont

## Challenges

Staff, partners, and communities members noted a number of challenges to developing and implementing policies and physical projects:

- Because the Upper Valley region was composed of many different communities, there were many different jurisdictions to negotiate.
- Each town had its own laws, land use regulations, and master plans, making it difficult to create regional policy change.

---

*“Each town has its own laws as well for permitting and for they have each of their own land use programs and their own master plans so there’s a lot to look at and make sure you comply with all those details.” -Staff*

*“Sometimes you need physical projects to serve policy and sometimes vice versa. It’s been difficult for us to have sweeping policy change...” -Staff*

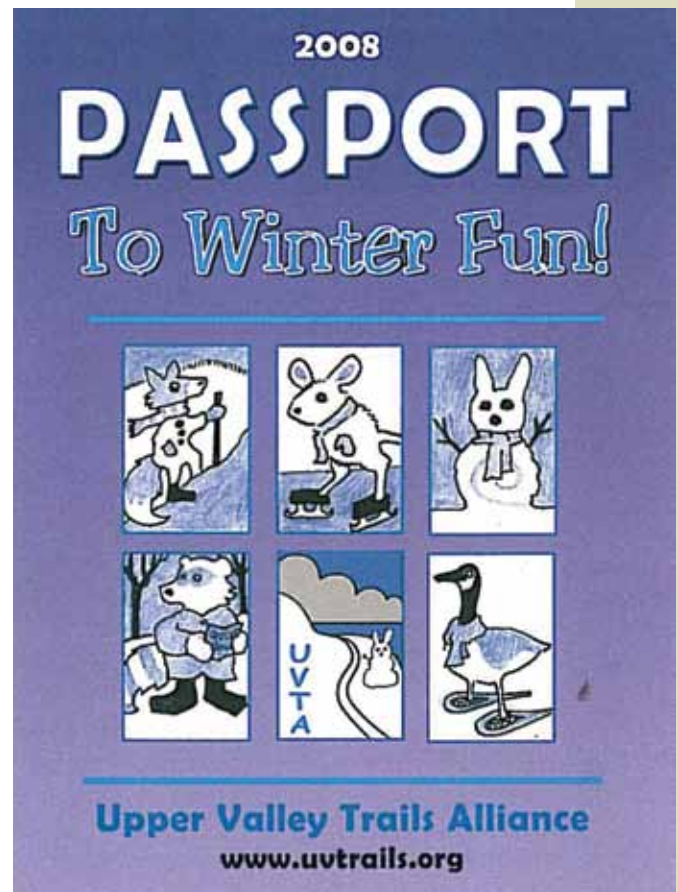
---

## Programs and Promotions

The Upper Valley communications activities were very local in scope, and promotion strategies varied greatly. Tailoring the active living message to appeal to many different audiences was one task of the partnership. Programmatic and promotional efforts, related partner, staff and community implementation activities, and associated challenges are as follows.

### ► *Passport to Winter Fun*

- The six-week Passport to Winter Fun program was designed to encourage children and their families to remain physically fit during New England’s long winter season.
- It emphasized outdoor activities, such as sledding, skiing, building snowmen, or just playing in the snow, and included indoor physical exercise.
- Participants tracked the days on which they engaged in at least one hour of physical activity in a booklet resembling a travel passport, which was distributed through elementary schools, at recreation centers, to home-schooled children, and through the Children’s Hospital at Dartmouth.
- The students progressed through several milestones (ten, twenty, or thirty days of physical activity) at which they received their choice of a healthy incentive prize.
- Students who reached the final achievement level became “Polar Bear Achievers” and received a special t-shirt and white Polar Bear, donated by Vermont Teddy Bear Company. Family members that were active with their “Polar Bear Achievers” also received a special prize.



---

*“I think this program was one more way to raise awareness about the importance of physical activity and about the many wonderful opportunities in this area that children have to be active. I know for some children it was their first cross-country or skating experience, but hopefully not their last.” -Partner*

---



### ► **Prescription Walking Program**

- In an effort to increase awareness of the importance of physical activity to health, the partnership launched a Prescription for Physical Activity Program, in collaboration with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center.
- Trails for Life developed an active living brochure for distribution to patients by their physicians that contained information about the recommended amount of activity, health benefits of being active, tips on working activity into the day, and a prescription form for physicians to use.
- The partnership held one-hour information sessions in which physicians were educated about the program, reminded about how regular exercise could help many patients, and received information about how to present the program to patients.
- Trails for Life paid one of the physicians at the Medical Center to help recruit and educate other physicians about the Prescription Program.
- The program was very popular among Dartmouth physicians and successful with patients at the Medical Center.
- After noting the strength of the original prescription walking program, Trails for Life supported the startup of a second prescription walking program at White River Family Practice in Hartford, Vermont.

---

*“People who come in to the Internal Medicine Department at Dartmouth-Hitchcock who are overweight, have health problems and need to get exercise, instead of just saying, “You make sure you go out and get exercise,” they actually get a prescription. So, on the back of this you see there’s a prescription for physical activity that goes along with this book. And these are easy to difficult, probably more general walking trails than hiking trails in the Upper Valley.” -Staff*

---

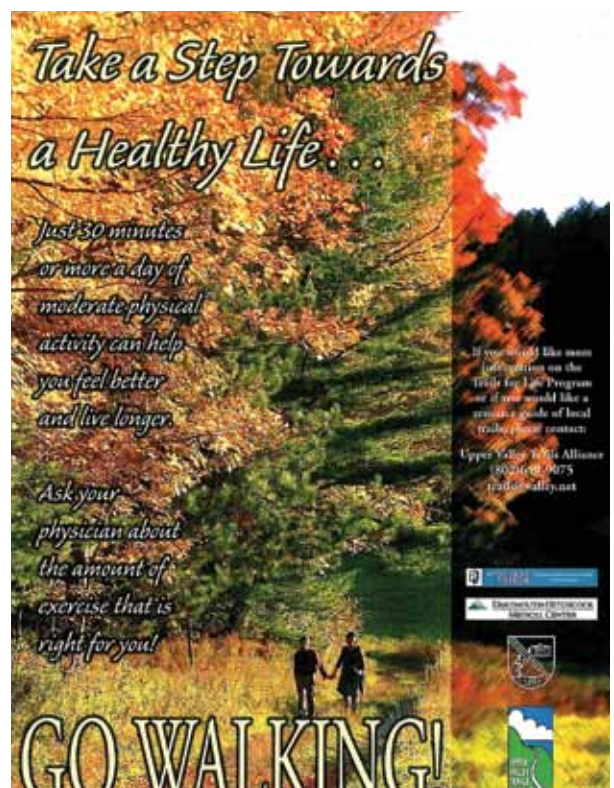
### ► **Trails/Walking Resources**

- The partnership produced a Winter Trail Guide for adults, providing 15 locations for winter activities, ranging from cross-country skiing to ice skating with tips for maximizing enjoyment and safety.
- Several walking maps were created and distributed, including maps of the Centerra Marketplace, the Lebanon business park, and the communities of River Junction, Wilder, and Quechee.
- Go Walking! A Guide to Walking in the Heart of the Upper Valley, a 76-page guide to more than 20 trails and walking routes in the Upper Valley, served as a resource for residents and program participants.

---

*“Most of the trails are already existing resources that we’ve just been part of inventory, letting people know where they are because that’s really one of the limiting factors. A lot of people don’t know where the local trails are and if they do they only know their town.” -Staff*

---



### ▶ **Tour de Taste: A Pedaling Picnic**

- Held in the Fall, this progressive meal by bicycle encouraged families to try biking and introduced them to local farms and other sources of food.
- Participants enjoyed the scenic ride, met local producers and community members, and sampled delicious, local, harvest bounty at designated meal stops and farms along the route.
- Participants chose from three different routes, from the longer, challenging ride to the shorter, family-friendly ride.
- The event was well-received and had a very good turnout.

### ▶ **Worksite Walking Programs**

- In collaboration with the Dartmouth's Health Awareness Program, Trails for Life coordinated lunch-hour outings for Dartmouth College staff to engage office workers in physical activity and introduce them to nearby trails.
- A similar program called Wednesday Walks for Wellness was launched for employees of Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, in collaboration with the hospital's Health Improvement Program.

---

*“A few people told me that they had never been on anything but sidewalk or their yard... So people need that bridge, somebody to take them on that first time to find out that this isn't such a scary thing you know and they can do this on their own.” -Staff*

---

### ▶ **Bike To Work Day**

- The Upper Valley Trails Alliance worked in partnership with Upper Valley RideShare to organize and publicize local activities associated with the National Bike and Walk to Work Day event held every May.
- Special activities included free breakfasts at more than a half-dozen locations throughout the Upper Valley for non-motorized commuters, with prize raffles for human-powered commuters.

### ▶ **Presentations**

- Trails for Life participated in numerous health fairs, staging booths or tables and made several presentations at local, state and national conferences.
- The partnership attended trail fairs to promote the region's trail networks and the health benefits of physical activity.
- Trails for Life sponsored a well-attended presentation by Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*, which addresses the need for children to be outdoors, active, and exploring nature.
- Trails for Life partnered with New Hampshire Celebrates Wellness to sponsor the Livable, Walkable Communities Toolkit event to obtain input on how to enhance the bike- and pedestrian-friendliness of the community as future development occurs.
- The partnership collaborated with the City of Lebanon to sponsor the first Community Trails Forum as part of ongoing trails master planning for that community.
- Trails for Life delivered a presentation at the National Trails Symposium as part of a workshop on trails, active living, and health.

### ► **Outreach**

- While Trails for Life did not have an official website, the lead agency's website was the home of the partnership's online news.
- The website offered many resources, including information about upcoming Trails for Life events and the partnership's newsletter, Trail Tales.
- A monthly e-mail calendar of trail and active living events throughout the region was distributed to interested parties.
- The partnership also developed an active living website in collaboration with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center to support the prescription walking program and provide other health information to patients.

### ► **Media**

- Many of the partnership's projects were featured by local television and newspaper, and the prescription walking program obtained national publicity through the Associated Press.
- A weekly Trails for Life newspaper column focused on trails, trail care, and active living.
- Trails for Life was featured in a sidebar in an article in Eating Well magazine about physical activity in Finland.

### ► **Other Promotional Efforts**

- Organized twice annually, Walk/Bike to School Days encouraged children to bike or walk to school for a day.
- The partnership coordinated Winterfest at Lake Morey, a winter festival offering diverse outdoor activities from skiing and skating to igloo building.
- A Skate-a-thon challenged residents to see how far they could skate on the longest ice trail in the country.
- The Upper Valley Trails Alliance sponsored an Upper Valley Trails Day to get people out on trails, as well as construct and maintain trails, with well over 200 people taking part in 20 events throughout the Upper Valley one year.
- The partnership worked with the planning committee for the Prouty Century Bike Ride and Challenge Walk, a major fundraising event for Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center, to identify a "woods walk" off-road trail option for participants.
- The partnership collaborated with the Vermont Health Department in planning and organizing "Get Moving Vermont" days on successive weekends in three different communities where walks, health screenings, and information on active living were offered.
- Trails for life participated in the official opening and dedication of a new trail in Norwich, Vermont.
- The partnership engaged 10 medical school students in trail maintenance as part of Dartmouth Medical School's "Common Good Day."

### ► **Other Programmatic Efforts**

- "Trail of the Month" walks encouraged physical activity and introduced people to nearby trails.
- The partnership, in collaboration with Excel Sports, organized three Nordic walking workshops to introduce residents to the use of lightweight walking poles as a way to increase the intensity of exercise from walking.



## **Strengths and Challenges**

While the Passport to Winter Fun and Prescription Trails programs were very popular, they were not without challenges. The partnership encountered some challenges with the Passport to Winter Fun, mainly connecting with individual schools and engaging busy teachers.

---

*“The one challenge, specific to the Passport to Winter Fun Program, is trying to bring programs into schools and making sure that teachers don’t feel like it’s going to be something new that’s going to be adding to their plate of work and having them do any of that stuff. That’s the general situation in any school, whether it’s active living or any program. If you try to bring something new to the school you have to make sure it’s really fit well with the curriculum or they’re going to feel that it’s more work that you’re asking them to do.” -Staff*

---

For the prescription program, Trails for Life staff noted that changing physicians’ behavior was a difficult task. As one staff member noted, while physicians recognized that physical activity was important, it was challenging to convince them to prescribe activity.

---

*“The most interesting thing to me was that the hardest people to convince were the doctors themselves. I went to another medical practice in the area at their invitation to present how the prescription program worked at Dartmouth-Hitchcock and how they might be able to implement something similar and one of the responses we got was well I would feel kind of silly writing a prescription for a, for physical activity. The most interesting thing to me was convincing the physicians not that physical activity is important, they all seem to get that. But to get them to feel comfortable with the idea of making this in one way or another equivalent to anything else that they might prescribe. Getting the medical people to you know be willing to do that was the challenge.” -Staff*

---

## **Sustainability**

Local and regional partners remained committed to active living and expressed desire to continue working with the Upper Valley Trails Alliance and supporting its efforts after the ALbD grant period ended. The Alliance’s Board of Directors took responsibility for fundraising and building the agency’s membership, while the Alliance sought other funding sources to build long-term sustainability for a number of programs, policies, physical projects, and promotions. The agency was able to leverage funds from other health foundations because its involvement in Active Living by Design demonstrated a clear link between health and the built environment. In addition, the Alliance fortified its position as a regional leader for trail maintenance and development.

---

*“Although [Upper Valley Trails Alliance] is focused within this region, other people outside of our region are picking up on what we’re doing and hearing about the programs associated with active living and realizing that they like the chance to bring them to their area.” -Staff*

---

One staff member remarked that physical projects were the most important aspect of the partnership’s work. Changing the physical environment helped eliminate many barriers to physical activity. This, the partnership hoped, would lead to an increase in active living.

## Acknowledgements

This evaluation and report were developed under the leadership of Laura Brennan, PhD, MPH, Principal Investigator, Transtria LLC, and Ross Brownson, PhD, Co-Principal Investigator, Washington University Institute for Public Health. Support for this evaluation was provided by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (#57649). Transtria LLC led the evaluation and dissemination activities from November 2006 to December 2009. For more information about the evaluation and dissemination methods, activities or results, please contact Laura Brennan (laura@transtria.com).

Our team is grateful for the collaboration and support from the staff at Upper Valley Trails Alliance and the Trails for Life partnership in the Upper Valley region of Vermont and New Hampshire.

With special thanks to the many individuals who have contributed to these efforts from Transtria LLC (Anna Alexandrov; Joanna Bender; Shruthi Bhatt; Yolanda Campbell; Julie Claus, MPH; Kathryn Coniglio, MPH; Kate Dickman; Kate Donaldson, MPH; Melissa Hall, MPH; Courtney Jones, MPH; Shannon Keating; Allison Kemner, MPH; Benjamin Krause; Amy Krieg; Lisa Meng; Lauren Middendorff; Luke Odom; Regina Quadir, MPH; Laura Runnels, MPH; Elsa Taricone, MPH; Cindy Thomas, MPH; Sarah Weiner), Saint Louis University School of Public Health (Elizabeth Baker, PhD, MPH), Active Living By Design (Rich Bell, MCP; Phil Bors, MPH; Mark Dessauer, MA; Joanne Lee, LDN, RD, MPH; Mary Beth Powell, MPH; Sarah Strunk, MHA; Risa Wilkerson, MA), National Park Service (Helen Mahan), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Laura Leviton, PhD; Jamie Bussel, MPH), University of North Carolina Gillings School of Global Public Health (Kelly Evenson, PhD), University of California at Davis (Susan Handy, PhD), Wholonomy Consulting (Katherine Kraft, PhD), San Diego State University and Active Living Research (James Sallis, PhD), and Innovative Graphic Services (Joseph Karolczak).