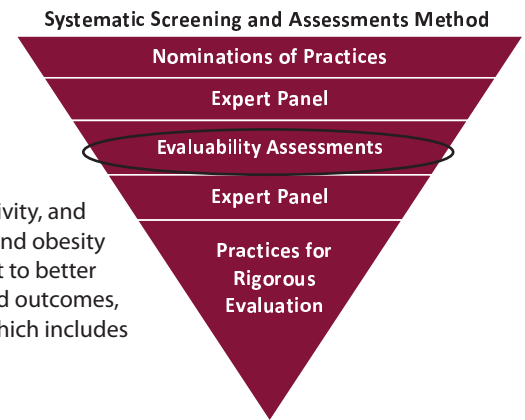


Increasing Physical Activity Through Joint-Use Agreements Spotlight: Virginia

Methods

Evaluability Assessments (EAs) are used as a method to better understand how effective state and community innovative policies and initiatives are being implemented. As components of the Systematic Screening and Assessment Method (SSA), EAs are considered a “pre-evaluation” activity to determine which initiatives may work the best and can help with future evaluation, and which programs and evaluations need strengthening, often saving costs and time.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity used EAs to identify the potential promise of several nutrition, physical activity, and obesity prevention initiatives and their readiness for rigorous evaluation. EAs consist of a site visit to better understand an initiative or policy by assessing implementation, data availability, intended outcomes, and staff capacity. After completing the site visit, feedback is provided to the initiative, which includes future evaluation recommendations.



Kinds of Evaluability Assessments Used

In 2012, CDC used the SSA method to assess the potential promise of five state- and local-level joint-use agreement initiatives. Joint-use agreements (JUA) increase opportunities for physical activity by allowing groups—usually a school and a city or private organization—to share indoor and outdoor spaces for physical activity like gymnasiums, athletic fields, and playgrounds.

Joint-Use Spotlight: Fairfax Co, Virginia Joint-Use Initiative

One of the five initiatives selected for the 2012 CDC Evaluability Assessments project was a *Joint-Use Initiative* in Fairfax County, Virginia.

The Fairfax County Joint-Use Initiative serves the entire county of 1.2 million residents. The initiative is supported through a mix of Fairfax county operating funds, Fairfax County Parks Authority (FCPA) funds, and Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) funds, as well as, public bonds and leveraged private support (both financial and in-kind).

Fairfax County, Virginia, has informally practiced community shared-use for almost 30 years. The county signed a formal memorandum of understanding (MOU) on shared use in 1995. This memorandum has evolved over several years into a more-specific policy that provides guidelines for using fields and gymnasiums throughout Fairfax County.

In 2002, the shared use policy was updated with sections on facilities allocation, liability, specific times of use, and other guidelines. In 2005, the MOU was revised substantially to reflect policies needed to support equitable implementation of the joint-use agreement (JUA) and to clarify the expectations of each entity involved in the MOU. The Fairfax County Neighborhood and Community Services (NCS) agency, FCPA, and FCPS have been operating under the revised MOU since 2005. Implementation of the joint-use initiative is centered in Athletic Services and Community Use Scheduling division of the NCS agency.

Joint-Use Agreement Initiatives Selected (2012)

- Fairfax County, Virginia, Joint-Use Initiative
- Little Rock, Arkansas, Statewide Joint-Use Agreement Grant Program
- Los Angeles, California, A Joint-Use Moving People to Play
- Kingsbury, New York, Joint-Use Agreement for Outdoor Swimming Pool
- Earlimart, California, Earlimart Neighborhood Joint- Powers Agreement

Goals of the Fairfax County, Virginia Joint-Use Initiative

The Virginia JU Initiative has the following goals:

- To ensure equitable access to fields and gymnasiums in Fairfax County for community members— across sports, genders, and income levels.
- To use the facilities as efficiently as possible to maximize availability of fields and gymnasiums to community members.
- To provide safe and beneficial use of facilities.
- To establish policies and programs for promoting physical activity by community residents, especially children and youth.
- To improve overall community health.
- To encourage low-income children and young people to become involved in organized athletic activities.

Program Accomplishments*

- The Volunteer Building Directors (VBD) program trained and used 2,952 volunteers who monitor school gymnasium facilities during 2013. Volunteer building directors contribute significantly to the use of FCPS facilities. Last year, 2,952 volunteer building directors contributed 147,150 total hours. The value of time (~\$22 per hour) volunteered was \$3,237,300. In the absence of these volunteers the community could not use school facilities or would have had to pay for services.
- During 2013, the shared-use system served 270,963 athletic participants, processed 3,124 permits, and worked with 178 athletic organizations.
- The Turf Field Development program has been partially responsible over the past 10 years for converting 64 fields to synthetic turf and adding lights for evening use and has generated \$53.4 million (public, \$40.2 million; private, \$13.2 million).
- Special programs aimed at low-income young people served 5,415 scholarship recipients during FY 2013.
- The VBD, Adopt a Field, and Friends of a Field programs generated substantial in-kind support such as grounds maintenance for the initiative each year.

Considerations for Similar Initiatives

When planning or implementing a similar joint-use agreement, consider the following lessons from Virginia's program:

- **Current business practices.** Existing practices may facilitate or hinder JUA efforts. Fairfax has a long history of shared use initiatives and a centralized online scheduling system that facilitated program implementation.
- **Programmatic support of the shared-use policy.** Programs that oversee volunteers, facilities management, maintenance and outreach can assist the JUA implementation. Fairfax County had several supportive programs that facilitated the implementation of a joint-use initiative. These programs included the Volunteer Building Directors program (VBD), Turf Field Development program, Field Adoption program (FCPA), Friends of Field program (FCPS) and the Youth Sports Scholarship program.
- **Community assessment.** Determine community needs to ensure the JUA meets those needs. Fairfax joint-use initiative offered organized sports to address the lack of these opportunities in middle schools.
- **Funding.** Determine the budget for current and future efforts to ensure sustainability. Fairfax Co. is an affluent community with the ability to access resources and leverage funds.
- **Committed Advisory Group.** An advisory group may provide the platform for vetting decisions and obtaining community input. Fairfax Co. has an Athletic Council that represents the community; works toward access and equity; and works well with the NCS, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors, and the partners (FCPS and FCPA).
- **Clear partner roles.** Each partner should have clearly outlined responsibilities. Policies are created with clear expectations and roles for partners and the NCS. All parties can rely on these policies when questions or issues arise.
- **Support equity efforts.** Devote resources and staff to efforts to enhance the equitable distribution and allocation of facilities. Ensure an advisory group includes diverse representation. Fairfax used its Athletic Council to ensure there is representation from areas of lower income and fewer facilities.
- **Restrictive policies.** Joint-use agreements vary and may have restrictive policies that inhibit use by the general community. Consider JUA language that allows participation from groups of individuals as well as organized entities.

Evaluation Considerations for Similar Initiatives

A rigorous evaluation of similar initiatives should be appropriately conceptualized and implemented. Evaluation activities for a similar program can consider the following evaluation questions:

- What elements of the design and implementation of the joint-use initiative contribute to its effectiveness?
- What are the lessons learned from implementing an initiative after shared-use policies have been established?
- How do key players contribute to JUA implementation?
- What progress has been made toward the goals of the initiative?
- How has the existence of JUAs increased access to physical activity for community members and increased physical activity levels of community members?

Resources

[Fairfax Community Use Memorandum of Understanding](#)

[Finding Space to Play - Legal and Policy Issues Impacting Community Recreational Use of School Property](#)

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