

Walk Audit Toolkit



*Developed by ACEEE as part
of the FY22 USDOT Thriving
Communities Technical
Assistance Program*

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Purpose of the toolkit

ACEEE prepared this toolkit during participation in the [FY22 U.S. Department of Transportation \(USDOT\) Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Program \(TCP\)](#). It is intended to serve as a resource for local governments, community organizations, and other groups that are interested in expanding public involvement in transportation project planning, design, and implementation through conducting walk audits. The toolkit summarizes how to conduct a walk audit, with a step-by-step guide as well as key considerations for success. It also includes three templates for walk audit observation forms that can be adapted to different local contexts.

Overview of walk audits

A walk audit consists of a group or individual walking along a designated section of roadway with the explicit intent of observing conditions that affect the pedestrian experience and documenting their findings. Walk audits can take many forms, but they all share the common purpose of gathering real-world information about the conditions of sidewalks and streets in order to inform local transportation planning and engineering decisions. They should be intentional and well-organized to be most effective.

Walk audits typically include a map and observation form for participants to use to note their findings. Use of a common form for all participants helps standardize input and contributes to the overall quality of the data collected during the walk. Many standard templates exist online for these forms, though they have different focus areas depending on the types of walk audits they were designed to support. Some templates to note include one included in the [Safe Routes to School Partnership](#) walk audit toolkit and [this one from the AARP](#).

ACEEE's walk audit materials draw on insights from these organizations but were specifically developed to support project partners through the Thriving Communities Program. The toolkit provides a concise yet comprehensive step-by-step guide for walk audit leaders, including discussion of best practices for processing the data captured during the event, as well as three one-page observation form templates.



Steps for organizing a walk audit

Step 1: Determine the core goal

Before planning a walk audit, a useful first step for community members and local government staff alike is to articulate a primary goal for the event, as this may influence how the walk is structured. Consider the following questions:

- Are organizers most interested in promoting more community engagement and education about the transportation system?
- Is the walk intended to facilitate an in-depth assessment of a specific street to identify needed improvements?
- Is there a specific destination, such as a school or park, along the route that local leaders are most interested in? Is the walk intended to understand needs to/from this destination?
- Is the walk intended to generate supplemental information for a project that is already in the works?

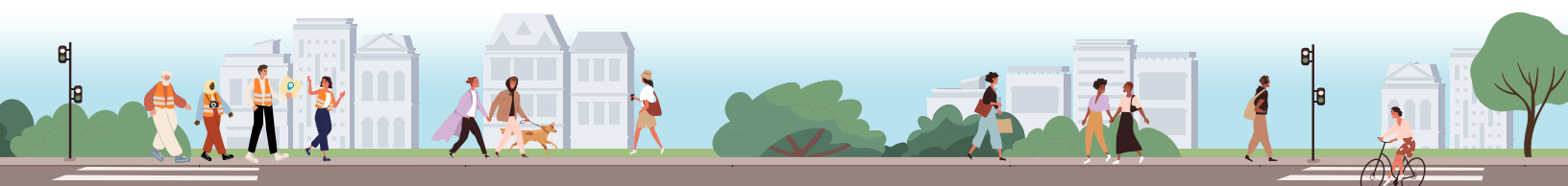
The core goal of the audit will help orient the whole participant group around a shared purpose and generate the most useful feedback for decision-makers in the community. Whatever this goal is, walk leaders should communicate it to walk audit participants ahead of time to ensure that everyone is on the same page about the purpose of the exercise.

The walk audit observation form templates included in this toolkit are designed to be easily adapted to local contexts for walks with a wide variety of core goals. The forms capture both quantitative data and qualitative data on a single sheet.

Step 2: Identify the route/location

After identifying the core goal of the walk audit, the next step is to identify the specific route or location for the event. Most walk audits consist of walking a determined route “out and back,” but as is explained in more detail below, sometimes the audit can be approached as a stationary exercise focused on observing how other pedestrians are using a single intersection—it just depends on the core goal of the exercise.

When choosing a route, consider how frequently pedestrians use the route today, whether it connects to any major destinations like a school or shopping center, whether it has any known pedestrian facilities, and whether there are any existing improvements planned for the corridor. Walk audit walking typically occurs at a slower pace, so the maximum round-trip route length should not exceed one mile.



Step 3: Identify level of detail you want to capture in observation sheets

Before the event, leaders should identify the level of detail they want participants to capture during the walk, giving thought to what the preferred approach is on the spectrum of high-level to detailed feedback. Referencing the core goal, it is useful to discuss how the information that participants collect will be used locally. Leaders should also make a plan for how to share observations that are collected that may fall under the jurisdiction of other agencies not participating in the event.

In many cases, walk audits will inform larger planning processes. In these instances, it is a good idea to remind participants to focus on capturing observations that go beyond “quick fixes.” For example, participants should be encouraged to think about the overall experience as a pedestrian on the street, how the existing infrastructure supports or hinders feelings of pedestrian safety and comfort, what types of amenities would make the experience better, and other similar themes. In a nutshell, this means encouraging participants to think on a “project” level rather than on a “quick response” level.

Step 4: Pick a date and time

The next step is to schedule a date and time for the walk audit. When scheduling, leaders should consider the following:

- Relevant traffic patterns (holidays, school arrival/dismissal time, rush hour, etc.) along the route that may affect the “typical conditions” of traffic in the area
- Weather forecasts, making a plan for a rain date ahead of time
- Lighting along the route. If participants will be walking before dawn or after dusk, take extra precautions to ensure everyone remains safe while walking in low-light conditions. Daylight walk audits are typically recommended, unless the specific characteristics of a project call for a walk audit in low-light conditions.

It can also be worth considering holding walk audits of the same route at two different times (morning and evening, for example) or on two different days (weekday and weekend) to capture a broader set of data.

When preparing the schedule, walk leaders should factor in the necessary time for all components of the event. A sample schedule could look as follows, for an event planned for a 1:00 p.m. start time:



| | |
|----------------|---|
| 1:00–1:10 p.m. | Arrival at the site and group assembly |
| 1:10–1:20 p.m. | Introductions, overview of the route, distribution of forms, and role assignments |
| 1:20 p.m. | Walking begins |
| 2:00 p.m. | Walking ends.* Group reassembles at meet-up spot. <i>*The estimated time to walk the route will depend on length</i> |
| 2:05–2:20 p.m. | Collect forms and conduct quick debrief |
| 2:25 p.m. | Dismissal |

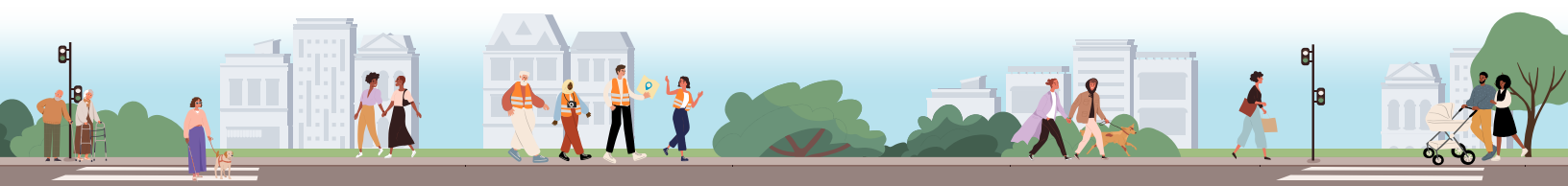
Step 5: Assemble the group

The next step is to assemble the participant group. Groups should be small enough to generally stay together along the route—between 3 to 15 people total is ideal. If the group is on the larger side, leaders can split into smaller groups and have people start the walk from different ends of the route to cover ground more quickly.

When inviting people to participate, leaders should consider how to maximize representation of different perspectives in the group. It is a good idea to invite people who live and work in the immediate area around the corridor, as they will be most familiar with its day-to-day conditions. But walk audits also present an opportunity to bring together participants from different age groups and with different demographics, enriching the feedback that will be collected. People who are used to walking with strollers, carrying groceries, or who use mobility devices like wheelchairs and walkers will be able to share insights that might not be immediately noticeable to a more general audience.

Leaders may also want to extend invitations to elected officials, especially if there is an upcoming opportunity for improvements to a corridor that is being audited. Finally, the invitation language should let participants know how their observations will be used by public-sector staff—is this walk audit in advance of a discrete upcoming project, a larger planning process, or part of another initiative? This can help motivate people to participate.

Calendar invitations for the walk audit should be sent about three weeks in advance to maximize participation, with leaders sending reminder messages one week and 48 hours before the walk with final details like the meet-up location and leader phone numbers.



Before the walk

In the days leading up to the walk, leaders should finalize preparation of materials and send a message to participants about what to expect. The two lists below contain tips on what to wear (relevant for all participants) and what to bring (relevant for event organizers).

What to wear

- Comfortable clothing, with layers in case of unexpected changes in weather
- Comfortable, closed-toe shoes
- Hats/sunglasses (the route is not guaranteed to be shaded)
- Bright colors*

**Ideally, the agency hosting the walk will be able to provide safety vests to participants who would like to use them. Some organizations have questioned if seeing a large group in “official” looking vests would make drivers behave differently than normal and skew the results of the audit, so depending on group size, leaders could also suggest people simply wear bright-colored shirts or hats for improved visibility without the potential side effect of being misperceived as regulatory/enforcement officials.*

What to bring

Walk audit leaders should gather necessary supplies before the event, including:

- Clipboards
- Walk audit observation forms & maps
- Sign-in sheet for participants
- Pens & markers
- Nametags
- Phones (for taking pictures)
- Safety vests for those who want them
- (Optional) refreshments for the debrief

If public agencies are attending the event or supporting as leaders, they should help handle material preparation and coordination for other day-of logistics. However, if they feel comfortable, community members should be empowered to be the group leaders for the events to elevate and center resident voices in the planning process.

For a walk audit jointly hosted by a public agency and a community group, public officials should take the lead on identifying a walking route, preparing materials, and arranging any other necessary logistics like parking spaces or provision of safety vests. However, a community member should be the face of communications for the event and take on the “Group Leader” role described below.

If time allows, it is a good idea for leaders to visit the walk audit location ahead of the event to get a good sense of any challenges along the route and identify a good location for a group meetup spot. Participants should also be encouraged to carpool, walk, bike, or ride transit to the meetup spot (as feasible) to minimize the need to find parking.



It is useful to assign some participant roles before starting the walk, such as:



Group leader: Main point of contact for the walk audit event and facilitator of discussion before, during, and after the walk. It's a good idea to share the group leader's contact information with all participants.



Sweeper: Participant who stays at the back of the group to make sure the whole group stays together during the walk. The sweeper should also make sure the whole group is able to clear intersections during crossings and hold people back to wait until the next signal cycle as needed.



Designated mapper: Person who focuses on annotating a map with notes rather than on filling out an observation form. This role is not always needed, but for some projects it can be helpful (for example, a walk audit where leaders want to collect detailed data about on-the-ground pedestrian activity, such as counting pedestrian crossings). Print out an aerial map of the route or intersection being audited and assign one person to annotate the map directly. A marker may be better than a pen for making clear notes on the map.



Designated photographer: All participants are encouraged to take pictures to document their observations during the walk, but it can be helpful to assign someone the role of designated photographer to make sure any notable observations are captured (as well as pictures of the group in action!)



During the walk

Depending on the length of the walking route and the group size, consider breaking into two smaller groups to cover more ground during the allotted time for the walk audit. Smaller groups can start the walk from opposing ends of the route to ensure the full length is covered.

Leaders should set a slow pace for walking, allowing participants plenty of time to make observations, take notes on their forms, and take pictures. Make sure all participants always remain aware of their surroundings, paying close attention to any nearby traffic. If the route includes crossings, try to only cross the street at designated crosswalks (where available) or at intersections, being sure to look both ways and cross quickly and safely.

As the space allows, group leaders should occasionally pause along the route to allow for brief moments of group reflection and discussion. This can help participants notice different things during the remainder of the walk. Prompts can include things such as:



Physical observations. What do you notice about amenities along this route? Are there consistent sidewalks, or are there gaps? What would it be like to push a stroller or roll a wheelchair along this route? Do you notice lights, marked bus stops, clear street signs, etc.? What is missing?



Non-physical observations. Do you feel safe walking here? Is it comfortable? Do you feel more exposed or protected? Notice the noises you hear—what stands out?



People observations. What do you notice about how people are using this space? How are drivers behaving? Are there people moving around outside of cars? Does it seem like pedestrians or cyclists have a preference for a certain segment of this route?

While some small group discussions during the walk can be beneficial to the overall experience, keep these relatively brief so that the full route can be covered in time. Remind participants that there will be time for a more formal debrief after the walk audit is complete and that all observation forms will be compiled and shared.

Finally, remember to encourage participants to take pictures of their observations during the walk (when it is a safe and appropriate time to do so) and make sure the designated photographer is also capturing the most important observations from the group.



After the walk

At the end of the route, make sure the entire group is reconvened before starting a debrief. Bring the group to a safe, quiet space and collect all observation forms that were filled out during the walk. Plan for a quick (10–15 minute) debrief on the experience. **This is an important step**, because it allows time for capturing observations that may not have made it onto the walk audit forms while they are fresh.

Assign someone to take notes during the debrief conversation so that all comments are captured. Ask people to share their impressions of the route, and what stood out to them as interesting, unexpected, or concerning. If people suggest potential improvements, be sure the notetaker has time to capture each idea so that it can be shared with relevant decision-makers.

Leaders from public agencies may want to ask participants if they would like to be involved in any future planning processes for the area, or if they want to be kept informed about other upcoming walk audit opportunities. Be sure to collect contact information if so, and let participants know how their observations will be used.

By participating in a walk audit, people are generously offering their own time and insights to advance transportation safety work in their community. Leaders should thank everyone for their valuable contributions—this will also make it more likely that these same individuals will participate in future engagement activities.

Processing data

Following the walk audit, make sure that all participants' forms are collected by the appropriate teams to be processed. Scan a copy of each form and save them in a designated folder for ease of future reference.

Create a spreadsheet to enter data captured during the walk. Data entry from manual forms may be time-consuming but it is worthwhile to facilitate future analysis. Make each row in the spreadsheet correspond to a single participant's observation form. As a guide, the spreadsheet should be set up with the following column headers that correspond with questions on the walk audit observation form (for entering data from the "routes" template):

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| → Form number | → Driver behavior observations (a-e) |
| → Date | → Notes on driver behavior |
| → Walk audit location/route | → Amenities observations (a-g) |
| → Overall sidewalk condition rating | → Notes on amenities |
| → Sidewalk observations (a-d) | → Crossing observations (a-f) |
| → Overall comfort rating | → Notes on crossing |
| → Notes on comfort/safety | → General comments |



If working in geospatial information software, it can be helpful to prepare a map project ahead of time that includes aerial imagery from the route along with labeled street names and major points of interest. This map project can be used to enter any data from the observation sheets that is most appropriate to capture as spatial data (for example, if there are locations that participants marked for new crosswalks or other similar repairs).

For walk audits near schools or other locations where participants are marking observations of pedestrian behavior directly onto a map, create a new feature dataset to draw lines representing the observed crossing paths. For each digitized line feature, enter data into the attribute table that includes the following fields, as well as any other information from the forms that is most important for the project purposes.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| → Form number | → Overall sidewalk condition rating from walk audit |
| → Date | |
| → Walk audit location/route | → Overall comfort/safety rating from walk audit |

Digitizing observed pedestrian paths from walk audits can be a great way to inform project planning for new mid-block crossings, as it will help visualize where along the route pedestrians are already consolidating trips even in the absence of a marked crosswalk. Using a “designated mapper” role (as described on page 7 of this toolkit) can help make sure that data isn’t duplicated and that each drawn line represents a unique pedestrian trip. For this type of exercise, each time a pedestrian crosses the street should be documented as a crossing even if it is the same individual making a round trip.



Taking action

After the walk audit has been completed and all the observations have been compiled and analyzed, leaders will have captured a wealth of data that can be used in plans, projects, or advocacy efforts. It can be useful to prepare a summary report that gives an overview of the effort, the people involved, and the observations captured from the event.

Both participants and implementers alike should maintain realistic expectations about responding to the issues raised during the walk audit. Participants should be reminded that it can take time for local officials to have the available staff and resources to dedicate to new projects, and implementers should be reminded that not all of the issues need to be responded to at the same time—in other words, if there are relatively easy “quick-fixes” that people identified during the walk, implementers should take advantage of the momentum from the event and demonstrate their responsiveness by addressing these while still working toward larger improvements to the site that are being planned and integrated into annual budgets.

For any improvements that result from observations gathered during a walk audit, local transportation professionals should be proactive about sharing communications and updates, even if they are seemingly small, with walk audit participants as well as community members and local businesses near the site of the audit. Proactive and ongoing communication is a key part of building trust between government officials and community members.

Finally, to facilitate future walk audits, event organizers should gather to reflect on what went well and what could be changed and to document how information gathered during the walk audit was used.



Form #: _____

Walk Audit Observation Form: Route

Location: _____ Date: _____ Start time: _____ Group leader: _____

1. Rate the overall sidewalk condition: (Poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (Excellent) OR ____ no sidewalk present

2. Circle all of the following you observe: a. Sidewalk gaps b. Uneven sidewalks c. Blocked sidewalks d. Narrow sidewalks

3. What is your overall level of safety/comfort walking here?: (Very unsafe/uncomfortable) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very safe/comfortable)

4. Are some portions of the route more comfortable/safe than others? Describe if so: _____

Notes on comfort and safety: _____

5. Do you notice any of the following driver behaviors? Circle all that apply:

a. Speeding b. Running stop signs c. Running red lights d. Failure to yield e. Aggressive driving f. N/A Other: _____

Notes on driver behavior/car traffic: _____

6. Do you notice any of the following amenities along this route? Circle all that you observe:

a. Street trees b. Marked bus stops c. Benches d. Street lights e. Public trash cans f. Public art g. Pedestrian-scale signage

Notes on amenities: _____

7. What do you notice about crossing the street?

a. Street is too wide to comfortably cross b. No pedestrian signal is available c. Crosswalk is overly faded or unmarked
d. No ramps at crossings e. Marked crosswalks are too far apart f. The traffic signal is too short to allow for a safe crossing

Notes on crossing the street: _____

8. What would make this a better place to walk? Any other observations/comments?

Form #: _____

Walk Audit Observation Form: Intersection

Location: _____ Date: _____ Start time: _____ Group leader: _____

Rate the overall sidewalk condition: (Poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (Excellent) **OR** ____ no sidewalk present

Circle all of the following you observe: a. Sidewalk gaps b. Uneven sidewalks c. Blocked sidewalks d. Too narrow sidewalks

Do you notice any of the following driver behaviors? Circle all that apply:

a. Speeding b. Running stop signs c. Running red lights d. Failure to yield e. Fast right turns around corners f. N/A

Notes on driver behavior/car traffic: _____

Is the crosswalk marked? Yes No Yes, but overly faded **Are there ramps on all corners?** Yes No

Is there a pedestrian signal present? Yes No **If yes, does it allow for sufficient time to cross the street?** Yes No

Notes: _____

What do you notice about how pedestrians and other non-motorized users use this intersection?

a. Crossing when there isn't a pedestrian sign b. Crossing mid-block instead of using designated crosswalks c. Crossing diagonally
d. People have to wait a long time to cross e. People seem rushed when crossing

Notes on pedestrian behavior: _____

What do you think would make this intersection feel safer? Other observations and comments:

Form #: _____

Date: _____

Walk Audit Observation Form: School

School name: _____

Start time of walk: _____

Overall sidewalk condition:

(Poor) 1 2 3 4 5 (Excellent) OR ___ no sidewalk present

Circle all of the following you observe:

a. Sidewalk gaps b. Uneven sidewalks c. Blocked sidewalks d. Too narrow sidewalks

Do you notice any of the following driver behavior near this school? Circle all that apply:

a. Speeding b. Running stop signs c. Running red lights
d. Failure to yield e. Fast right turns f. Distracted driving

Notes: _____

Are students walking or biking to school separated from car and bus drop off locations?

Yes No

Where do you notice students crossing the street? Use the map to mark observed paths that students take while crossing as well as any other noteworthy observations.

Notes: _____

Do you think that students walking to this school have a safe route to use? Why or why not?
What improvements would make the experience better?

Rank the overall feeling of comfort/safety walking near this school:

(Very uncomfortable/unsafe) 1 2 3 4 5 (Very comfortable/safe)



Form #: _____

Walk Audit Observation Form: General Notes

General notes & observations:

Questions/follow up items: