



Neighborhood Wayfinding Assessment

How well does your community help you find your way? Are there services you would like to use, like public transit, but find it hard to figure out how to access them? Do you avoid places because the route to those places is difficult to navigate?

By learning more about wayfinding and transportation connections, you can help your community leaders make good choices for spending local dollars on signs and strategies to help you and others find the way to places in your community you would like to reach!

The Wayfinding Assessment Guide was developed in partnership by the CDC Healthy Aging Research Network and Easter Seals Project ACTION.

Introduction

This guide to neighborhood wayfinding describes things to consider when walking, driving, bicycling or taking a bus or train to reach stores, community centers, libraries, parks, trails, restaurants, places of worship, or any destination of your choice!

What is wayfinding?

Wayfinding is the process that people use to navigate within their communities as they move from place to place. Relying on cues and information about the environment, wayfinding allows people to know where they are, determine where they want to go and develop a plan to take them from their current location to their destination. Wayfinding cues include:

- Signs and maps
- Marked pathways
- Landmarks (e.g., sculptures, fountains, distinctive buildings, gardens, benches, rest areas)
- Lighting

Other features that support your ability to find your way and reach destinations include completed sidewalks, ramps at transit stops, and pedestrian signals at crosswalks.



How does a wayfinding assessment work?

A wayfinding checklist can be used to assess your environment. The wayfinding checklist included in this guide can be used on your own or with a group (family members, friends or colleagues) to help you understand how well your community provides wayfinding cues. You can use it for an entire community or a neighborhood, ward or district.

Think how changes would affect your own transportation decisions. If walkways were in better condition or better marked, would you be more likely to walk to the supermarket? If you use a wheelchair or other mobility device, would you use walkways more often if curb cuts were present?

Use the results to take action in your community!

Some cities or counties have programs focused on community improvements or livability. For example, check your town's website or call to see if programs on healthy living, healthy aging, or pedestrian safety and community walking exist in your area. Ask to speak or meet with the coordinator of these programs. Even if such programs do not exist, you can share your assessment results with community leaders (e.g., the local planning, engineering, public works or public health department).

Many communities have specific directions on their government websites or dedicated phone numbers for reporting problems with walkways, signs, crossings and road conditions. In addition to submission forms or contact numbers, see if your community or local safety advisory boards have interactive maps for reporting concerns.

Speak with a council representative about how your neighborhood conducts assessments and encourage your representative to participate in the assessment along with a citizen group.



Image source: www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

How can you get involved in community wayfinding?

When you conduct an assessment using the wayfinding checklist in this guide, you will want to see results. The following steps are ways that you can stay involved in the community improvement process and encourage change.

- Host community workshops on conducting wayfinding assessments and invite a local official or community planner. Consider hosting the event at your public library, senior center, recreation center, place of worship or other facility. Make sure the location is physically accessible and can be reached by public transit.
- Volunteer to join a citizen advisory committee, commission or board that focuses on public health, recreation, urban design, or community transportation.
- Read about community transportation issues and trends. Check national resources for reports and guides. Read local and national blogs on the subject and participate in online forums.

Resources

Find out more about wayfinding through the following organizations:

■ Easter Seals Project ACTION – Resources and publications on livability www.projectaction.org

■ Legible London – Comprehensive wayfinding system for the UK capital www.tfl.gov.uk/microsites/legible-london

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Wayfinding Checklist*

Determine which area of your community or neighborhood you want to survey. In addition to a street name, a boundary may be a physical feature like a river or railroad track.

North boundary:

East boundary:

South boundary:

West boundary:

You may do an individual assessment for each block or an overall assessment for the entire area. Record where you find problems. Mark all boxes that apply to conditions in your survey area.

1. What type of street signs are posted?
 - None
 - All intersecting streets named and posted
 - One or more street name missing
 - Signs visible from both directions of pedestrian travel
2. Are there problems with existing street signs?
 - Dirty or faded
 - Poorly lighted
 - No block number on signs
 - Inconsistent or poor placement
3. Are there other aids to support wayfinding?
 - Directional sign or marker
 - Landmark (e.g.,—statue, unique building)
 - Open or green space
 - Orientation map/kiosk
 - "You are here" aids
 - Text and icons on signs or pavement (e.g., hospitals, schools)
 - Visual or audible aids for people with disabilities

4. Are there problems with wayfinding aids described in Question 3?
 - Poor or inconsistent location
 - Text too small for easy reading
 - Dirty, faded or obstructed
 - Poorly lighted
5. Are street lights installed?
 - None
 - Some (overhead street lights on utility poles with wide spacing)
 - Ample (regularly spaced pedestrian lampposts)
6. What comfort/security features are present?
 - Trees that offer shade
 - Benches & places to rest
 - Bicycle racks
 - Handrails on stairs & ramps
 - Restrooms open & accessible
 - Working drinking fountains
 - Working public phones or call boxes
7. What problems do you see with walkways?
 - Do not continue from one block to next
 - Are too narrow or are blocked
 - Are in poor condition
 - Are not level across driveways/alleyways
 - No pedestrian pathway markings
 - No railings or fences at steep drop offs
 - Curb ramps missing or in poor condition
8. Does the area present barriers or hazards for walkers who...?
 - Use assistive devices (e.g. walkers, wheelchairs, scooters)
 - Have visual impairments
 - Are hard of hearing or deaf
 - Have problems with memory or judgment
 - Tire easily & need to rest

9. What intersection features are present?
 - None
 - Yield signs/Flashing yellow
 - Stop signs/Flashing red light
 - Traffic signal
 - Signals that have green arrows for dedicated vehicle turns
 - Traffic circle, roundabout
10. If pedestrian signals are present, what type are they?
 - Pedestrian "walk" signals
 - Pedestrian push buttons
 - Pedestrian push button accessible for people with disabilities
 - Audible walk signal present
 - Countdown signal present

11. Check crossing times at intersections by crossing at a pace similar to that used by a person using a manual wheelchair or a walker. If countdown signals are present, identify whether the number of seconds to cross is adequate. Length of crossing time includes white "walk" time and flashing "don't walk" time.

List intersections with inadequate crossing times: _____

12. What is the overall crossing risk for walkers with any functional limitations (e.g. vision, memory or mobility problems)?
 - Low (barriers/hazards exist that can be easily avoided)
 - Moderate (barriers/hazards that can be avoided but with difficulty)
 - Severe (barriers/hazards that make crossing inaccessible or extremely dangerous.)

13. If there is a transit stop, what features are present?
 - Stop is clearly marked with a sign
 - Stop is accessible for people using wheelchairs or mobility devices
 - Route information is available

Notes: _____

* Assessment checklist adapted from the CDC-HAN Environmental Audit Tool. See *Guide to Community Wayfinding Assessment*, www.prc-han.org, to learn more about the assessment and see illustrations of checklist items.



Image source: www.pedbikeimages.org / Dan Burden

Whether you are interested in supporting a comprehensive wayfinding program or having better sidewalk connections on the block near your home, understanding what wayfinding is and how it affects your daily travel decisions is important for staying connected to your neighbors, family, friends and the greater community.