

Title: Challenges and Best Practices for Vacant Lot Transformations That Promote Physical Activity

Authors: Melika Belhaj¹, Melany Puente¹, Farozan Ansari¹, Sosha Barnett¹, Cyrena Matingou¹, Kevin Michaels¹, Adam Paberzs¹, Alison Grodzinski¹, Jacklynn Hawkins¹, Natalie Colabianchi¹, Margaret Dewar¹, Justin Heinze¹, Heatherlun Uphold², Richard Sadler², *PRC-MI Community Advisory Board, Marc Zimmerman¹, Roshanak Mehdipanah¹

Affiliation: ¹University of Michigan, ²Michigan State University

Learning Objective: By the end of the presentation, participants will be able to discuss preliminary qualitative findings on barriers and facilitators to vacant lot reuse projects that increase physical activity.

Objective: The formative phase of the Prevention Research Center of Michigan (PRC-MI) Vacant to Active (V2A) program, funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, utilizes qualitative research methods to document challenges and best practices of vacant land reuse for physical activity.

Methods: In this phase of the study, we conducted qualitative interviews (n=30) with community-based organizations, government officials, and philanthropic foundations. Interviews spanned 10 states with a large representation of interviewees from Flint, MI (n=13). An interdisciplinary team of public health and urban planning professionals analyzed the interviews using thematic analysis with inductive and deductive coding on urban environment, community engagement, partnerships, land use, and zoning.

Results: Preliminary findings highlight the importance of community engagement and resident involvement in project planning, implementation, and maintenance. Furthermore, an identified theme of incremental change as the gradual movement of lots through stages such as vacancy, demolition, pocket park, housing development or state parks, indicates a pathway to long-term activation.

Conclusion: These findings will inform the development of a Flint-specific resource guide and toolkit co-created with Community Advisory Board partners. In the implementation phase, we are partnering with the Community Foundation of Greater Flint's Neighborhood Small Grants program to assess whether the resources, along with technical assistance and a peer network, influence project impacts on neighborhood safety, physical activity, and housing stability.

* PRC-MI Community Advisory Board: Aaron Neeley, Cade Surface, Carma Lewis, Christina Kelly, Emily Stetson, Jack Stock, Janell O'Keefe, Kenneth Cabine, Lynn Williams, Melissa Hertlein, Michelle Kachelski, Nichole Anderson, Sarah Hayosh, Thomas Hutchison, Tonya French-Turner, Yvonne Lewis