

GUIDE TO

# Implementing Play Streets in Rural Communities

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This Guide to Implementing Play Streets in Rural Communities provides guidance and recommendations to community groups, schools, faith-based institutions, or other organizations, on how to plan and put on a Play Street in rural communities based on first-hand experience. Play Streets are a fantastic way to engage youth and families, get people active, and promote community connections. Because Play Streets have rarely been implemented in rural communities, we created this guide to inform each step of the implementation process: what happens before, during, and after a Play Street. We also provide relevant examples, feedback from groups who have hosted Play Streets in rural communities, including challenges they faced and overcame, as well as resources like advertisement templates.

We hope that you use this guide to successfully host Play Streets and that the information we include will help you easily carry out the process as one way to promote safe physical activity and active play for children and families in your community. This guide was made possible with funding from the Physical Activity Research Center (PARC). We thank our community partners in Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas for providing feedback about their experiences implementing Play Streets, which informed our approach to this guide. We also thank our partner ChangeLab Solutions for their contributions to this guide, as well as the following members of our research team: Christina Bridges Hamilton, Tyler Prochnow, Tom Schmid, and Emily Wilkins.

Best regards,



**Keshia M. Pollack Porter**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Keshia M. Pollack Porter".

**Professor**

*Bloomberg School of Public Health  
Johns Hopkins University*




**M. Renée Umstatted Meyer**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Renée Umstatted Meyer".

**Associate Professor**

*Department of Public Health  
Baylor University*



Find the full report and more resources for your community at:  
<https://www.baylor.edu/publichealth/RuralPlayStreetsGuide> and  
<fb.me/PlayStreets4All>  @PlayStreets4All

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# Introduction

Physical activity provides important benefits for children, such as building strong bones and muscles, reducing the risk of obesity, and improving academic performance.<sup>(1, 2)</sup> Rural communities face unique challenges to promoting physical activity, including lack of resources, sidewalks, playgrounds, and parks.<sup>(3, 4)</sup> The absence of these resources and places means there are fewer opportunities for youth and adults living in rural communities to engage in physical activity. Moreover, people living in rural communities are disproportionately at risk for chronic diseases and conditions associated with insufficient physical activity (e.g., diabetes, obesity), with rural children at increased risk for obesity as compared to urban children, and rural children of color at the highest risk.<sup>(5-7)</sup> Nearly four out of five U.S. children and adolescents do not meet national physical activity guidelines, which call for 60 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day and at least 3 days a week of vigorous physical activity, muscle-strengthening activity, and bone-strengthening activity for people ages 6 to 17.<sup>(1)</sup>

Organizing Play Streets is one intervention for addressing some of the challenges rural communities face when it comes to providing and promoting safe places for physical activity and active play. Play Streets refer to the temporary closure of streets for a specified time period (around 3-5 hours) to create a safe, publicly accessible space for children, adolescents, and/or their families to engage in active play. The street closures can be recurring or episodic. In rural communities where it may not be feasible to close down a street, Play Streets also occur in other public spaces such as parking lots or open fields. By providing safe physical activity spaces, Play Streets can provide physical activity opportunities for children in under-resourced communities that lack safe parks and playgrounds.



Implementing Play Streets in rural communities is particularly important because in addition to promoting safe play and physical activity, it also fosters community relationships and connections. Often local organizations such as the health department will partner with an organization hosting the Play Streets, which allows them to promote their resources like health education materials to residents. Play Streets also spark new partnerships by providing community members with the chance to work together through the planning process. Hosting Play Streets in rural communities can be particularly valuable during the summer months to ensure that young children (i.e., pre K-middle school) have a safe, supervised space to be active when they are not in school and do not have regular recess and/or physical education sessions.

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## Who Should Use This Resource?

This guide was created to help rural or small community groups plan and implement Play Streets. It includes guidance, tips, and recommendations for community partners and local organizations, such as faith-based institutions, neighborhood associations, community-based organizations, health departments, libraries, schools, and hospitals, as well as residents, advocates, policymakers, and others seeking to promote health and foster relationships within their communities. Community organizations and businesses will find practical strategies for selecting a location, engaging partners, managing risks, staffing, and promoting a Play Street. Advocates and residents can use the guide to educate decision-makers about the benefits of Play Streets and specific steps they can take to help implement them in their community.

This guide draws from our experiences working with four rural communities—in Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas—to implement Play Streets. Each had experience hosting community or group events, but prior to partnering with us had not implemented Play Streets. Details about these communities, their approaches, challenges, outcomes, and lessons learned are included in this guide.

Users will also find an overview of Play Streets, a detailed planning process, and guidance about what to do during and after the Play Street occurs. The overview should be read before the planning stage section to help spark ideas for Play Street development and to help avoid barriers to implementation. Checklists are located in the appendices, as are samples of a press release and a flyer that can be used to advertise the Play Street. The appendices also offer tools and instructions for evaluating a Play Street, including how to conduct a post survey, video scans, and systematic observations during the Play Street.

# Overview

## What Are Play Streets and How Do They Impact Communities?

Play Streets usually occur during summer months. They are supervised in some capacity and include multiple activity areas using loose or temporary equipment, such as hula hoops, inflatable bounce houses, balls, and sports gear.<sup>(8)</sup> Play Streets

**Play Streets** refer to the temporary closure of streets, that for a specified time period (around 3-5 hours) create a safe, publicly accessible space for children, adolescents, and/or their families to engage in active play (closures can be recurring or episodic).

can be implemented in several ways, allowing communities to adapt and host Play Streets that are most beneficial to their specific community.

Studies show that a high percentage of children enjoyed the Play Streets they attended and that Play Streets provided children with an opportunity to meet physical activity recommendations they would not otherwise meet.<sup>(1, 9)</sup> For example, our research showed that children in diverse rural communities are physically active at

Play Streets.<sup>(10)</sup> We did not see significant differences in child activity by sex, which is important because prior research shows that girls are less active than boys.<sup>(10)</sup> Youth were most active on the bounce houses and other types of inflatables. In addition to increased physical activity levels, Play Streets also created safe play opportunities for children and increased connections between neighbors and communities.<sup>(9, 10)</sup> Several parents who attended the Play Streets in the four rural communities we worked in stated that they met new neighbors while at Play Streets.

### BENEFITS OF PLAY STREETS INCLUDE:



Enhanced safety



Improved health



More physical activity opportunities



Better community relations



Reduced traffic concerns due to road closures



Increased adult supervision



Attendees at the Play Streets we spoke with also had positive comments. Children said Play Streets were “fun...cool...” and being there made them feel “happy!” Some children said Play Streets were a great way for them to connect with their friends over the summer, who they had not seen since the school year ended. Adults also shared positive comments about Play Streets and noted the importance of them being offered at no cost to participants.

“I think it [Play Streets] helps too with the income level...It’s nice to have something that is free...— we can’t afford stuff...I can’t even afford [for] my kids to go to the pool. We can’t afford to send our kids every single day, and it’s expensive...and so we can’t do that. That’s nice that they [Play Streets] are free.”

- PARENT WHO ATTENDED PLAY STREET WITH CHILD



# Planning Stages

## BEFORE THE PLAY STREET

### Selecting a Location

Choosing the location of your Play Street is an important first step that should be carefully considered. Ideally, the location will be publicly available so potential attendees do not face barriers to entering the Play Street. When choosing the location for the Play Street, consider resources such as unused outdoor facility space. This may include an open field or parking lot at a local school or church. Sometimes Play Streets are intentionally placed in a neighborhood or residential area that has no nearby parks or playgrounds, in low-income neighborhoods that lack recreational facilities, or in an area that is prone to violence to create a positive, safe play space.<sup>(9)</sup>



Selecting a location may also require policy considerations such as obtaining liability insurance, permits, and/or entering into or complying with existing formal and informal agreements, such as shared use agreements that help make these underutilized spaces publicly available for active recreation. These model policies can be downloaded as word documents from *Joint Use Agreement 3* at: [changelabsolutions.org/product/model-joint-use-agreement-resources](https://changelabsolutions.org/product/model-joint-use-agreement-resources).

### TYPES OF LOCATIONS:



Faith-based institution grounds



School grounds



City or County property, such as parks or streets

## CONSIDERATIONS FOR ALL TYPES OF LOCATIONS:

- ✔ **Shared use agreement:** To use another entity's property for a Play Street, you may want to—or in some cases be required by the partnering entity to—establish an agreement with the property owner to host the Play Street on their premises. Use the agreement to address requirements for use to help ensure that available legal protections related to “recreational use” can apply, as well as to address a variety of considerations listed below.
- ✔ **Amenities:** Parking lots, bathrooms, playground equipment, and staff—these are just some of the amenities that churches, schools, parks, or other Play Streets locations may have. It is important to discuss and agree on (verbally or in writing) which of these amenities are available for Play Streets users, or if other arrangements need to be made.
- ✔ **Permit:** If you choose to host your Play Street on city- or county-owned land such as a park or street, this may require you to obtain a permit to use the land. Conditions of the permit may include maintaining an appropriate insurance policy for the Play Street.
- ✔ **Protections related to “recreational use”:** Depending on the state, property owners—including private landowners, organizations or businesses, or public entities like schools—may have legal protections that reduce their risk of being held responsible for harms that may happen to users during qualifying Play Streets. Coordinating with host sites can help ensure these protections apply.
- ✔ **Other risk management considerations:** The liability section of this guide lists some considerations regarding risk management, including related laws, reasonable precautions, and insurance. Some locations may have practices (such as regular maintenance and safety signage) and policies (such as staff training and liability insurance) that will make it easier to coordinate a Play Streets on that site. Regardless, a Play Streets hosting organization should take these considerations into account as part of the planning process.

It is important to plan to have access to bathrooms at the Play Street, especially in rural settings where the Play Street is likely not occurring close to where the attendees live. Remember, the Play Street will host many young children and some of them will likely need to use the bathroom during the hours they attend the Play Street. If the Play Street is held at a location that has bathrooms already (e.g., school or church) arrange to make the bathrooms open to the public during the Play Street. If that is not possible, you can rent a portable toilet to have on the premises of the Play Street.

## When to Hold Play Streets

Deciding when to host the Play Street involves consideration of a few things. Think about weather; try to avoid hosting a Play Street during times when it is extremely hot or cold. Since Play Streets often occur during the summer months, avoid the hottest parts of the day, which can start as early as 1:00 p.m. or 2:00 p.m. and extend into the late afternoon. Heavy rain may limit attendance at Play Streets, so it is good to have back-up days in the event of storms. Rain can also make equipment and grass wet leading to potential injuries caused by slipping. Despite the challenges due to rain, as one Play Street organizer noted, “kids can still play in the rain!” Thus, you should watch the weather and determine if the rain or storms warrant cancellation of the Play Street.

Think about the implications of hosting a Play Street on a weekday versus a weekend. Also, while most Play Streets occur during the summer months, one of our community partners hosted a Play Street during the school year in conjunction with a school district community appreciation event. This example demonstrates how Play Streets could add active play to organized events during the school year.

It is best to avoid planning the Play Street on the same day as other community events that could impact your turnout. Or, consider combining Play Streets with other

### **PROMOTING A CULTURE OF PLAY THROUGH PLAY STREETS:**

One of the community organizations that we worked with realized that Play Streets needed to happen and be advertised multiple times before some of the lower-income groups within their community felt comfortable attending the Play Street. If possible, you should consider planning multiple Play Streets from the beginning to build an awareness and culture around Play Streets, allowing all residents to realize Play Streets are for them and their children, and “not just the Jones’ down the street.”

community events to boost attendance and leverage resources. This strategy proved effective for several of the rural communities we worked with. For example, one community organized its Play Streets at the same location and the same time children picked up their meals during a summer feeding program. Another community held one of its Play Streets immediately following a Back-to-School event, so children and families could pick up their school supplies, receive other community services, and then run outside to play. This proved a great strategy for capitalizing on the energy of a popular community event and providing opportunities for children to be physically active. Ideally, when planning Play Streets, try to get feedback from families and children in the community about when they might want a Play Street to occur.

## Staffing

It is important to have an adequate number of staff and/or volunteers to help with set up, clean up, and during the Play Street to supervise activities. Consider encouraging your staff and volunteers to engage in the activities with the children, jumping rope, hula-hooping, playing sports, or other activities, as this helps more people participate and can promote safety. There should also be at least one staff or volunteer to supervise an activity area that includes an inflatable, to better ensure a safe environment. Staff and volunteers can include people already affiliated with your organization or affiliated with partnering organizations. Several of the communities we worked with also included high school-age volunteers who were able to “earn” volunteer hours and were also “looked-up to” by children attending the Play Street.

### TIPS FOR MORE FUN AND ENGAGEMENT:



Encourage volunteers to be active with children



Recruit high school volunteers



Give volunteers small “door prizes” to encourage children to be active at different stations



Assign volunteers to each activity

## Liability and Managing Risks at Play Streets

Property owners interested in using their land or facilities for Play Streets might be concerned about potential liability if someone is injured. Each state has its own laws governing liability, though typically state law requires property owners to take reasonable precautions to protect users who are legally on their property.<sup>(1)</sup> There is no clear legal answer to what it means to be reasonable and every situation may be interpreted differently. That said, in general, property owners who allow community members to use their property should provide a safe environment, make timely repairs to any dangerous conditions, and warn users of any potential dangers, including those under repair. Property owners who fail to do these things might be found negligent if someone is injured, which means they could be liable for any damages.<sup>(1)</sup>

Some states’ laws may provide legal protections to public and private property owners and public entities who allow public recreational use of their land. Property owners should consult an attorney in their state to understand whether these legal protections



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## **Making Play Streets More Accessible to More Residents in a Rural County**



## PLAY STREET COMMUNITY PROFILE

<b>Community</b>	Oakland, Maryland
<b>Hosted by</b>	Garrett County Health Department
<b>Town Population</b>	2,008
<b>Rurality</b>	County-level Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code = 10.3 (isolated rural)
<b>Demographic</b>	96.3% of children are White, non-Hispanic

The Garrett County Health Department implemented Play Streets for the first time during the summer of 2017. Four separate Play Streets occurred at a local park, which allowed the team to activate a public space with programming for school-age children, including games such as four square, bounce houses, and a color run.

During 2018, when the Garrett County Health Department implemented Play Streets again, they came up with a creative strategy for extending the reach of Play Streets to make them more accessible to more residents. The health department provided a mini-grant to fund community partners to host four Play Streets across the county. This approach

made their Play Streets more accessible to children and families. For example, on a single day, two Play Streets were offered on various sides of the county.

In addition to offering the Play Streets at multiple locations, the partners used another strategy to increase attendance—they coupled their Play Streets with other community events, such as movie night and national night out. This created an active play opportunity at an event that did not typically include one.

The partners also provided a light meal for families at the Play Streets, which benefited attendance.

U.S. Census Bureau. *American FactFinder, Community Facts: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates*. U.S. Department of Commerce; 2010. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

National Center for Education Statistics. Search for Public School Districts. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch>

Economic Research Service. Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes.aspx>

apply. Note, these types of laws do not protect bad actors. Property owners who act maliciously, for example by blatantly disregarding safety or intentionally causing harm, can be held liable for resulting injuries.<sup>(11)</sup>

Regardless of whether a state has an applicable recreational user statute, property owners and Play Streets host organizations can help protect themselves with prudent risk management practices, such as insurance. Before allowing free community access to its facilities for a Play Streets event, a property owner should confirm with its insurance provider that its general liability policy covers such use. Some permits for using public spaces may also require host organizations to carry insurance for a Play Street—though it can be helpful to ask if a property owner (such as a city parks agency) would be willing to use their own insurance to satisfy the requirement. Hosts and land owners can also manage their risk by taking the following reasonable, common sense steps to provide a safe environment for Play Street participants:

#### **PLAY STREETS RISK MANAGEMENT PRACTICES:<sup>(11)</sup>**

- ✔ Conduct a baseline assessment to make sure facilities and equipment are safe.
- ✔ Conduct regular inspections of the property and equipment, including any loose equipment made available through the Play Street programming.
- ✔ Make timely repairs.
- ✔ Post signs (including demarcations of boundaries of the Play Streets area) and warn users of any potentially dangerous conditions or hazards, including obvious issues such as a broken swing or an adjacent pool.
- ✔ Consider whether it is appropriate to have participants involved in organized activities or programs sign a waiver and release of liability form. Although not required, liability waivers can be an effective way of limiting liability in some recreational contexts. Play Street hosts and landowners may consider potential tradeoffs—such as challenges to implementation—when deciding whether liability waivers are appropriate for their Play Street.
- ✔ Have a first aid kit on site.
- ✔ Post traffic control signage and barriers (e.g., if operating a Play Streets in a parking lot or near a road).
- ✔ If bringing in outside equipment, like a bounce house, inspect the equipment before use and follow best practices for operating the equipment (e.g., supervision, securely fastened, etc.).
- ✔ If allowing another party to host the Play Street on your property, provide facility usage rules to establish the activities allowed/not allowed (such as food and beverage serving considerations, whether or not fees can be charged, etc.).
- ✔ Make bug spray and sunscreen available.
- ✔ Visit the Play Street location 1-2 days beforehand to check for any risks, including large fire ant mounds, standing water, or damaged areas.



Supervision is key for reducing risk of injury at Play Streets. Supervisors should always be alert and ready to address things such as tripping hazards and overloaded spaces. Each of these considerations help hosts prepare for worst-case scenarios. Generally, parents who have attended Play Streets have not voiced any concerns about safety. They mainly talk about how safe Play Streets were for their children.

## Safety at Play Streets



*...[Play Streets are a place] where kids can wander and not have much supervision and they're all together, and you've got the parents there."*

- PARENT WHO ATTENDED PLAY STREET WITH CHILD

## Getting the Word Out!

Advertising the Play Street is one of the most important parts of the planning process because it helps ensure that people will know about the Play Street and plan to attend. Reach out to the community during the planning process, including key members of the community such as religious leaders, business owners, law enforcement, and other emergency services. Some of these community members can help spread the word about the Play Street, supply the Play Street with resources (e.g., water and snacks, games), and even stop by the Play Street to play with kids and their families.

Start promoting the Play Street well in advance of its date, ideally at least several weeks prior to the date, to ensure families and children have adequate time to plan ahead. Use community resources such as schools and faith-based organizations to spread the word about the Play Street through their email distribution lists, websites, and social media platforms, including Facebook pages, Instagram, and Twitter. Consider

### INFORMATION TO INCLUDE IN PLAY STREETS ADVERTISEMENTS:



Date



Time



Location



Brief explanation of the Play Street



Use exciting language (e.g., fun and games for kids and families)



Free for all



Rain date



Future Play Streets dates



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## Using Play Streets to Encourage Activity Among All Ages and Foster Community Connections



## PLAY STREET COMMUNITY PROFILE

<b>Community</b>	Warrenton, North Carolina
<b>Hosted by</b>	Coley Springs Missionary Baptist Church
<b>Town Population</b>	1,040
<b>Rurality</b>	County-level Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code = 10.2 (isolated rural)
<b>Demographic</b>	65.8% of children are African American

At their first Play Streets, the implementation team at Coley Spring Baptist Church noticed that parents and guardians who attended were not engaging in physical activity. The team observed that adults were mostly sitting while kids played basketball and volleyball, jumped rope, and participated in other physical activities.

To encourage adults to be active during their Play Streets as well, the team created a plan to add line dancing to their next Play Streets. They set up a sound system and asked a local church member to lead the line dancing activity at their second Play Streets. By offering activities that are appealing to school-age children, such as basketball, hula hoops, and bounce houses/inflatables, and an activity appealing to the adults, the team hoped to encourage more active participation and less sedentary behavior. At the third Play

Streets, several children also participated in the line dancing with adults, which led to adults and children interacting together for other activities and games, such as musical chairs.

The implementation team was also intentional about inviting local law enforcement officers to attend Play Streets and encourage youth to interact with them. For example, law enforcement officers who attended played basketball with African American males, which one of the organizers noted was important to help youth see law enforcement in a positive light as opposed to people who only show up “when something bad had happens.” Within this community, Play Streets provided an opportunity for kids and adults to engage in physical activity and supported intergenerational connections.

U.S. Census Bureau. *American FactFinder. Community Facts: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates*. U.S. Department of Commerce; 2010. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

National Center for Education Statistics. Search for Public School Districts. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch>

Economic Research Service. Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes.aspx>

contacting your local newspapers, radio, and television stations to let them know about the Play Streets. Clearly indicate that people of all ages and abilities are invited and that Play Streets are free-of-charge. Coordinate with schools to have Play Streets flyers sent home with kids is another great way to ensure that kids will attend. If your Play Street is planned for the summer when schools are out, send flyers home with kids through local schools before they close for summer break. Templates for a flyer (Appendix A) and a sample Media Release (Appendix B) are included in this guide.



## Planning Your Play Street Activities

When deciding what types of activities to have at the Play Street, think about your expected turnout and your staffing capacity. This will help ensure that you do not have too few resources for the community to use or too many resources for your staff to safely supervise. Also think about providing food and water for those who attend the Play Street and tents to provide shade.

Play Streets typically include loose equipment such as hula hoops, jump ropes, chalk, ring toss, sports equipment, and/or other yard games children may not have access to at home. When purchasing equipment try to obtain items that can be reused across multiple Play Streets or for other community events. Consider partnering with another organization in your community that has access to play equipment. These partners could include health departments, schools, parks and recreation departments, churches, or libraries.

Consider having bounce houses or other types of inflatables (e.g., sports oriented, obstacle course, jousting, water slides, climbing walls) at the Play Street. Nearly all the Play Streets in rural communities had inflatables and children said they were the most fun activity at the Play Street. If you choose to have inflatables and they must be rented, be sure to make arrangements well in advance of the Play Street and consider

access to a power supply or necessary fuel. All inflatables must be secured to the ground to prevent them from tipping over or blowing away. Cords that are attached to the generators that power inflatables could pose a tripping hazard. Try to set up inflatables so that power cords are positioned out of the way. When deciding where to set up inflatables, it is also necessary to consider the weather. Do your best to position inflatables in a cool or shaded space. Remember that inflatable material can easily get too hot in the sunlight and could hurt children.

### **TIPS FOR BOUNCE HOUSE & INFLATABLE SAFETY:**

If you do not supervise each of the bounce houses at your Play Street, you introduce the risk of overloading the equipment which could cause the bounce house to collapse. Child-sized bounce houses can easily tip over when larger children attempt to use them, supervisors must take appropriate action to make sure that equipment intended for young children is only used by young children.

## **Create a Play Street Planning Map**

It is a good idea to pre-plan where each activity will be set up at the Play Street. Drawing a planning map of your Play Street helps give you a sense of where each activity will be located, allows you to share that vision with your team members, and helps facilitate set up on the day of the Play Street. Things to consider when drawing a planning map:

- ✓ Location of activities relative to the location of streets with traffic to better ensure that children do not run out into traffic.
- ✓ Closeness of lighting, if the Play Street is hosted in the evening.
- ✓ Location of electric outlets if they will be needed for equipment, such as inflatables or a sound system to provide music.
- ✓ Closeness to permanent structures that could be incorporated into the Play Streets activities, such as a playground or basketball court.
- ✓ Location of the bathrooms.

## **Planning for Feedback**

It is important to understand what works and which parts of the Play Streets attendees enjoyed the most or least. To get this type of feedback, you will need to plan ahead of time. One way to do this is to create a sign-in sheet that will allow you to document the number of attendees at the Play Street and note any characteristics of interest to your organization (e.g., sex, age, accompaniment by family member(s)). Some of the community organizations we partnered with also collected contact information from people willing to provide feedback after the Play Streets were over. Feedback is essential to creating a fun and safe place for your children and families to actively play and be physically active, which means you need to plan before the Play Street for ways to follow-up with community members that represent diverse groups within your community.



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## **Bringing Play Streets to Choctaw Children Where They Are**



## PLAY STREET COMMUNITY PROFILE

<b>Community</b>	Talihina, Oklahoma
<b>Hosted by</b>	Choctaw Nation Health Services Authority
<b>Town Population</b>	1,006
<b>Rurality</b>	County-level Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code = 9.0 (other small rural)
<b>Demographic</b>	58.0% of children are American Indian

The Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma Health Services Authority Play Streets implementation team was intentional about wanting all children in their community to have access to Play Streets. This led the team to plan and host Play Streets at four distinct locations throughout the community during 2017 and to host one of their Play Streets in a second town in the county during 2018.

The team's approach for ensuring access to their Play Streets was to identify areas in the community where children would already be and add a Play Streets at or adjacent to that location. Two of their Play Streets were planned in coordination with existing community events. This approach was key to reaching more children since families were already traveling to these locations and helped to reduce barriers related to transportation.

In 2017, one Play Streets was located on a street within a tribal housing community near the Boys and Girls Club; one was held in a local church's field and parking lot immediately following a vacation Bible school; another was held immediately following a large Back-to-School bash sponsored by Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma hosted at the Choctaw Youth Center; and one Play Streets was held just outside the local town library building.

In 2018, Play Streets were again hosted in partnership with a local vacation Bible school and the Back-to-School bash. The team also held a third Play Streets in a second town at a church that served as a summer camp "pick-up" location to provide active play opportunities for families and children who lived nearby before the bus came for camp pick-up.

U.S. Census Bureau. *American FactFinder, Community Facts: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates*. U.S. Department of Commerce; 2010. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

National Center for Education Statistics. Search for Public School Districts. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch>

Economic Research Service. Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes.aspx>

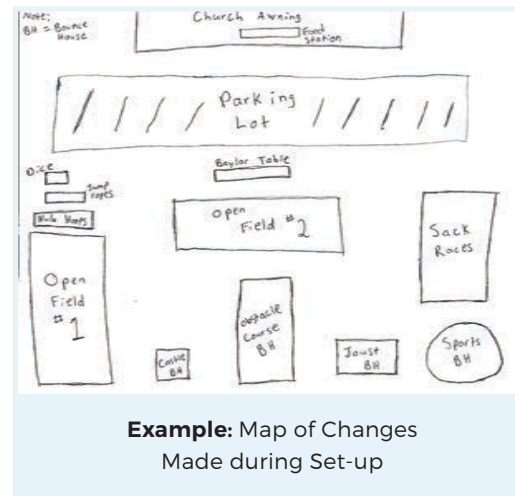
## DURING/DAY OF THE PLAY STREET

### Set Up and Clean Up

On the day of the Play Street, be sure to allow enough time (about 45-60 minutes) to set up the equipment before your advertised Play Street start time. If it is your first Play Street and you have brand new equipment for the Play Street, consider the time it may take to unbox and assemble some items. If you drew a planning map before the Play Street, share this with your team and use it to simplify the set-up process. Your team can follow the map to arrange the Play Street activities, but changes may need to be made during set up.



**Example:** Planning Map



**Example:** Map of Changes Made during Set-up

If you have arranged to have rented bounce houses or other inflatables at the Play Street, try to make sure that the rental company will arrive early enough to fully set it/them up before the start of the Play Street. Make sure those attending the Play Street know where bathrooms are located, which can be communicated using signage. Ensure that all staff helping during the Play Street know this information as well.

Throughout the Play Street, ensure that staff and volunteers are supervising participants. Clean up must occur at the end of the Play Street. This includes collecting loose equipment, taking down tents and tables, and picking up trash. Try to avoid taking down and/or putting away equipment early to encourage the community to stay engaged in the Play Street for the entire time.

### How Did the Play Street Go?

On the day of the Play Street, collecting data can help measure the success of the Play Street. You can collect attendance records using a sign-in sheet to help understand the impact and reach of the Play Street, asking about characteristics that are important to your community or organization (e.g., age, sex). You can also document the number of attendees, staff, and volunteers, as well as which activities were present. A sample



evaluation form and survey for the implementation team to use to document the Play Street (Appendix C) are both in this guide.

Think about asking participants questions that will help you understand what they liked or did not like about the Play Street, what could have been done better, and how they think the Play Street was a good or not-so-good thing for their kids and the community. Think about asking attendees how they learned about the Play Street and what they would be doing if they were not at a Play Street (i.e., watching television, playing at a park, etc.). Other questions to consider asking include: What are your overall impressions of the Play Street? Would you want there to be another Play Street in the community? These questions can be asked in the form of a short survey that participants can fill out at the Play Street. While it may seem as though it could be difficult to get people to fill out a survey, it is worth trying. The information you gather can help inform the success of future Play Streets by providing insight about how community members feel about Play Streets.

Using tools like the System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC) is another way to collect information about how your activities and the spaces were used at your Play Street. SOPARC is an observation tool that can easily be used by downloading the iSOPARC app onto an iPad. You can collect data about how people are participating at the Play Street by scanning different sections or areas of the Play Street and counting the sex, age group, and activity level of everyone present in that location at different times during the Play Street. Detailed instructions for how to conduct SOPARC are described in Appendix D. Using SOPARC may be especially useful if you have an academic partner who is helping to evaluate the impacts of the Play Street.

We also developed an accessible process for conducting video scans as an alternative to SOPARC. The video scans can help Play Street organizers get a sense of how the various spaces are being used, which activities are popular or not, and where children are most active. Methods for how to conduct video scans are included in Appendices E and F.

### **TIP FOR MORE FUN AND ENGAGEMENT:**

When supervisors (teen or adult volunteers) engage with children and youth during a Play Street, there is more active participation among attendees than when supervisors simply observe. Encourage those supervising your Play Street to play with children and generate excitement and interest. Children often look up to teens and adults and become interested in what they're doing. For example, as was seen in one of the communities we partnered with, when children see a teen or adult jumping rope, they also become interested in joining the activity.



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## **Serving the Community through Food and Active Fun: Partnership with a Summer Feeding Program**



## PLAY STREET COMMUNITY PROFILE

<b>Community</b>	Cameron, Texas
<b>Hosted by</b>	Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service–Milam County
<b>Town Population</b>	5,457
<b>Rurality</b>	County-level Rural-Urban Commuting Area (RUCA) code = 7.1 (small rural core)
<b>Demographic</b>	47.9% of children are Latino

The Play Street implementation team with the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service in Milam County, TX, planned strategically to identify a location that would be accessible to the large number of Latino families residing in their community. After speaking with community partners about possible locations, the team identified a non-profit summer feeding program as an ideal partner. The summer feeding program was already serving Latino families throughout the summer using a pavilion on the grounds of a local elementary school that was located within walking distance of low-income housing.

Play Streets were planned to occur immediately before and following the lunch pick-up times to provide program participants and other children residing in the community with an opportunity for fun active play. However, after the first Play

Streets, the team learned that some summer meals participants and nearby residents did not feel as if “they” were invited to the Play Streets and did not realize there was no cost. To address this challenge, the organizers created new flyers in both English and Spanish and sent them home with summer meals participants. The flyers advertised the dates and times for each of the remaining Play Streets and explicitly stated that the Play Streets were “Free!” and for all children.

Hosting multiple Play Streets and this key communication effort increased awareness and acceptance among local families. This was apparent in 2018 when more summer meals participants stayed and played at the Play Streets rather than picking up their lunches and immediately returning home. Play Streets are valued by the organizers and residents and are continuing in 2019 outside of our involvement.

U.S. Census Bureau. *American FactFinder. Community Facts: ACS Demographic and Housing Estimates 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates*. U.S. Department of Commerce; 2010. [https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community\\_facts.xhtml](https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml)

National Center for Education Statistics. Search for Public School Districts. <https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch>

Economic Research Service. Rural-Urban Commuting Area Codes. <http://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/rural-urban-commuting-area-codes.aspx>

## AFTER THE PLAY STREET

### Debrief

After the Play Street, take time to debrief with your staff and volunteers. Listen to what they have to say about how the Play Street went. Did they notice anything interesting? What was their overall impression of how the Play Street was received by the community? Ask staff where improvements could be made. Did any problems arise? Were there equipment, food or drinks, or activities provided at the Play Street that were popular?

### Collect Feedback and Review Data

Additionally, seek feedback about the Play Street from the community through door-to-door surveys, online surveys, and/or focus groups. Appendix G includes more details about how to gather community feedback. It is also important to gather feedback from attendees about what they enjoyed and if they have any suggestions for the next Play Street. Plan to ask for and receive feedback from school-age children, not just adults, since they are the primary participants at Play Streets. Ask children which activities they enjoyed and if there was anything that was not at the Play Street that they wish would have been there. Ask those who did not attend the Play Street why they did not attend. Did they not know about the Play Street? Were they unable to attend because of the day of the week and/or time it was held?

Review your sign-in list to see if the number of attendees was lower or higher than expected. If attendance was lower than you were expecting, ask the following questions to discover why: Were the advertisements not clear and/or not distributed well (i.e., in the right places)? Was the date or location of the Play Street a factor? Were there other community events happening at the same time as the Play Street that drew away from turnout? On the other hand, if you had more people than expected, try to find out why that may have happened. Did community members spread news about the Play Street by word-of-mouth? Did people at the Play Street contact friends and family and tell them to stop by? Did bystanders walk by the Play Street and decide to stick around?

If you collected survey data from participants, make sure to review the data to learn more about the impact the Play Street had on



*Children...[who live in apartments] don't have a backyard to play in or many outside toys or that kind of stuff. So for them to be able to go and do a bouncy house or slip n' slide or anything like that was fun for them..."*

**- PLAY STREET ORGANIZER**

them. What did participants say they would have been doing if they were not at the Play Street? What were participants' overall impressions of the Play Street? Did participants indicate that they would enjoy having another Play Street?

If you conducted SOPARC observations, information on resources to help you analyze the data are included in Appendix D. If you filmed video scans of the Play Street, be sure to review them and use the footage to discuss what went well and where improvements could be made for your next Play Street. Additional information about these video scans are in Appendix E.

The decision to host another Play Street will largely depend on resources and the information you collected and reviewed. Engaging community members will help increase the sustainability of Play Streets. Encourage community members to help volunteer at the Play Streets to help them feel like they can take ownership of what is happening in their community. Consider asking community members from different organizations and neighborhoods that will most likely have children or families interested in attending Play Streets or fostering play for youth and families. Some examples of organizations to involve in Play Streets include: local churches and other faith-based organizations, fire departments, EMS, law enforcement, extension offices, Mayor's offices, health care providers and/or systems, local libraries, schools, local colleges, and public health offices. Also involve residents with children living in surrounding areas.




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# Summary of Research to Inform the Guide

The information used to develop this guide was collected from a project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, through the Physical Activity Research Center (PARC) (<https://paresearchcenter.org>). PARC is a collaboration of four leading universities building the evidence base for policy changes and practices that will help make physical activity part of everyday life for all children.<sup>(12)</sup> PARC focuses on strategies that can help children in lower-income communities, often part of diverse ethnicity groups, who typically have fewer opportunities to be active. Members of the PARC team have implemented Play Streets in four diverse rural areas and have learned from the community partners about the facilitators and barriers of implementing Play Streets.<sup>(13)</sup>

We completed a systematic review of the peer-reviewed and “grey” literature to document what we know about Play Streets and their impacts on play for children, physical activity levels, and communities.<sup>(8, 9)</sup> We took the findings from these literature reviews and selected elements to adopt and adapt for rural communities. We partnered with four rural communities—in Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, and Texas—each with a history of hosting community events, but with no prior experience implementing Play Streets, to organize and host Play Streets during summer 2017. The communities received mini-grants of \$6,000 to use to purchase equipment for free play, rent equipment, and purchase snacks (we encouraged healthy snacks) for four Play Streets during summer of 2017. We studied how each community implemented the Play Streets, including how they were advertised, available activities, and when they were held. We used a popular and valid tool for observing physical activity, called SOPARC (System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities), and pedometers to measure how active kids and adults were at the Play Streets. We also offered each community limited resources (\$500 per Play Street) to take what they learned in 2017 and implement Play Streets in 2018.<sup>(14)</sup> We found that community organizations, parents, and school-age children enjoyed, had fun at, and appreciated Play Streets in their community.<sup>(15)</sup> We also found that school-age children were physically active while at Play Streets, across communities, age groups, and sex.<sup>(10)</sup> For more information about Play Streets, including details from our research findings, please see the reference list.

Find the full report and more resources for your community at:  
<https://www.baylor.edu/publichealth/RuralPlayStreetsGuide> and  
[fb.me/PlayStreets4All](https://fb.me/PlayStreets4All)  @PlayStreets4All

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# Appendix A

## PLAY STREETS FLYER TEMPLATE



Come out to [community name]'s

# Play Street



**Date & Time**  
**Location**

**Free for all!**

Fun and games for everyone!  
There will be bounce houses, jump ropes,  
soccer, and more!





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# Appendix B

## PLAY STREETS MEDIA RELEASE TEMPLATE

When writing a media release, keep it to 300 – 500 words, be concise, and answer who, what, when, where, why, and how.

**Headline:** Make your headline catchy and interesting while including information that a Play Street occurred and where it occurred. Bold the headline.

**Example:** [Insert Play Street location] Hosts a Play Street to Bring Fun Activities to the Community

**Lead:** In the lead paragraph, introduce the Play Street. Where did it happen? Who hosted it? When did it happen? What is a Play Street? Why did it happen? How did it happen? Mention the need for Play Streets in rural communities.

**Example:** In [Play Street location], [hosting organization] hosted a Play Street for the community to enjoy on [date]. The Play Street was held in/on [temporarily closed street, parking lot, open field, etc.], and for [x amount of time] provided a safe space for anyone to play. There is a need for Play Streets that provide safe places to play in rural communities. The Play Street was specifically held to provide children who lack access to safe parks and playgrounds with a place to be active. The Play Street was made possible with the help of [mention any support from community partners, funders, etc.].

**Body:** In the body paragraph, expand on your introduction of the Play Street. You can explain what happened at the Play Street (e.g., did those who attended appear to enjoy it?; was there a lot of interaction among people at the Play Street?; did the Play Street appear to be successful?; did anything surprising happen at the Play Street?). You can also include quotes from people who helped host the Play Street and/or people who attended the Play Street as long as you can cite those people. Remember to be concise.

**End Paragraph:** In the end paragraph, include background information about the hosting organization and/or event. You can describe the mission of the hosting organization and/or what the organization is primarily responsible for besides Play Streets. You can also describe any background information about past Play Streets in the community if applicable.

**Contact information:** Lastly, provide contact information at the end of the media release.

**Example:** For further information contact [name, email, phone number].

# Appendix C

## EVALUATION TEMPLATE AND POST-EVALUATION FORM

The template below is an example of what can be measured and some simple outputs that might be helpful. Please modify this for your setting.

A post-Play Street evaluation form can also be used to collect general information about your Play Street, as well as details about your staff, participants, vendors, resources, activities, and strategies for engaging the community. The form can be entered into an online platform (e.g., Google or SurveyMonkey) or can be printed and used in hard copy format. The form is available at <https://www.baylor.edu/publichealth/RuralPlayStreetsGuide>.

Play Streets (PS)	PS1	PS2	PS3	PS4	PS5	PS6
<b>Details</b>						
Date of PS						
Location						
Start Time						
End Time						
<b>Number of Staff</b>						
Professional Staff						
Youth Workers						
Volunteers						
<b>Number of Participants</b>						
Children						
Teens						
Adults						
Older Adults						
<b>Activities (list each activity in its own cell, place a 1 if used or 0 if not)</b>						
Hula Hoops						
Basketball						
Jump Ropes						
Inflatables						

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# Appendix D

## METHODS FOR USING SOPARC

The System for Observing Play and Recreation in Communities (SOPARC) is a valid, reliable tool that is traditionally used to understand how people are physically active in permanent settings such as parks. SOPARC can also be used to understand people's activity levels in temporary settings such as Play Streets. Methods for using SOPARC are thoroughly documented and described elsewhere. Training materials and instructional resources can be accessed using the following links:

<https://activelivingresearch.org/soparc-system-observing-play-and-recreation-communities>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCLTwIGV7rfoPcMNOXigjbw>

[https://www.rand.org/health-care/surveys\\_tools/soparc.html](https://www.rand.org/health-care/surveys_tools/soparc.html)

[https://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications\\_and\\_Research/Research/Papers/SOPARC-Report.pdf](https://www.nrpa.org/uploadedFiles/nrpa.org/Publications_and_Research/Research/Papers/SOPARC-Report.pdf)

Important considerations specific to using SOPARC at Play Streets are outlined below.

1. Unlike a park or a permanent play area, Play Streets are designed by the implementers and target areas or activity areas in a Play Street can change. Using a planning map can be helpful; however, we found that extra time is needed before SOPARC can begin to establish target areas for observations.
2. Due to the flexible and fluid nature of Play Streets, additional target areas can “appear” or “disappear” during a Play Street. SOPARC observers should be aware of this and allow time to add extra target areas as needed when conducting SOPARC observations. Any target areas that “disappear” during a Play Street should continue to be observed for the remainder of the Play Street to document this change.

Additional information describing these considerations is available in one of our publications.<sup>(16)</sup>

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# Appendix E

## METHODS FOR COMPLETING VIDEO SCANS OF PLAY STREETS

To complete video scans at a Play Street, follow the steps and tips outlined below:

1. First, divide the Play Street up into target areas that are smaller, more manageable areas to scan. Tip: It may be helpful to draw a map of these target areas. Use markers and barriers such as trees, curbs, and lamp posts to make it easier to remember the boundaries of each target area. When you are establishing target areas, think through a path in which you could easily move from one target area to the next until you cover all of them. This path will be the order in which you scan each individual target area during every round of a video scan.
2. After establishing your target areas, take the time to walk through your video scan path before you film the first video scan. This will help you realize what, if any, target areas may require you to get closer. For example, when filming shaded areas such as pavilions you are often required to move right up to the edge of the roofing because it is hard to make out who is under the pavilion when far away due to poor lighting.
3. Target areas such as bounce houses might require you to walk while you film instead of stand in one place and pan in order to capture everyone. In this case, start at the left end of the target area and walk to the right end.
4. At the beginning of every video scan, state the date and time the video is being recorded.
5. Always start on the same target area and follow the same path in every video scan.
6. Always film ALL target areas in every video scan even if no one is present in the target area, the target areas has become unusable (e.g., a car is parked in the area), or if equipment has been removed from the area.
7. If an area at the Play Street that you have not previously filmed becomes a target area (e.g., equipment and people moved into the area), begin filming the area and continue to do so for the rest of the Play Street.
8. Do your best to film every video scan in one video file. If you decide to break up a video scan across more than one video file, make sure to restate the date and time at the beginning of each video. Tip: If you break up the video scan and do not restate the date and time, it will be difficult to remember which video files belong together for the same video scan when you go back and review the footage.
9. Film each target area by scanning from left to right. Do not pan back after you have scanned an area. Do one sweep and move on. Do not move too fast that you cannot make out who is in a target area, but do not linger on a target area.
10. During each video scan, you should narrate what you see at each target area. Note the sex, age group (children, teen, adults, and seniors), and activity level (sedentary, moderate/walking, and vigorous) of each person you capture.
11. Conduct a video scan every thirty minutes.
12. Keep in mind that the video scans are a way to get a visualization of the Play Street and capture all activity. Film each target area with the idea that when you review the videos, you want it to seem like you are present at the Play Street. The video needs to be steady, the footage needs to be visible (not too dark), and you need to be able to make people out (do not film too far away).
13. Be consistent!

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# Appendix F

## FOLLOW-UP FOR VIDEO SCANS

After your Play Street, you should gather your planning team and review video scans of the Play Street if you filmed any. In reviewing the video scans, there are a number of questions you should ask and discuss to reflect on the Play Street.

Questions that can lead discussions include:

1. How many children and adults were active in the scans?
2. Where were children, teens, and adults active in these scans? (i.e., what activities and areas saw more activity.) Be sure to also distinguish which activities/areas were more popular among each age group if applicable.
3. Were there activities/areas where girls were more active?
4. Were there activities/areas where boys were more active?
5. Were there areas that were not really used? If so, why do you think this was? (Tip: An area may not have been used due to conditions such as lighting or heat. For example: If an activity was not well lit, people may have been unable to use it. If an activity such as a bounce house was located in direct sunlight, it may have gotten too hot for people to be on it.)
6. Were unused areas or less frequented areas supervised or just there? (Tip: If no volunteers/staff were supervising and/or facilitating an activity, people may not have developed an interest in participating in it.)
7. Could supervising unused or less frequented areas with an older teen or adult and having them get involved in the activity with youth help the space be better used?
8. If a space was not used well, do you want to have the activity at your next Play Street, or do you want to replace it with a different activity?
9. Were there spaces where people just sat around versus being active? Are these important spaces to keep for your next Play Street and why?

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# Appendix G

## METHODS FOR GETTING COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

In order to evaluate your Play Street and decide if there is demand in the community for more Play Streets, you need to go out into the community and gather feedback from both people who did and did not attend the Play Street. Methods for how to do this are outlined below.

1. One way to gather community feedback is to conduct focus groups. You can plan for a focus group on the day of the Play Street. Ask people who attend the Play Street to provide contact information if they are willing to be a part of a small group discussion about the Play Street after it has occurred. Focus groups should be held for both adults and children. Questions you can ask at the focus group include:
  - a. How did you find out about the Play Street?
  - b. What did you like best about the Play Street?
  - c. What did you like least about the Play Street?
  - d. Was there anything not at the Play Street that you wish would have been there?
  - e. Would you go to another Play Street?
  - f. Would you like for there to be more Play Streets? How often would you like them to be?
  - g. Did the day and time of the Play Street work well for you?
  - h. Did the Play Street give you a chance to be more active than you would have been otherwise?
  - i. What would you have been doing if you were not at the Play Street?
  - j. What do you usually do to be active?
2. Another way to gather feedback is by sending out an online survey link to those who attended the Play Street after it has happened. This will require you to collect contact information (email addresses) from people, or hand out pieces of paper with the URL for the survey on them. You can ask questions such as those listed above.

3. You can also conduct door-to-door surveys in your community. This method would help capture people who did not attend the Play Street and would allow you to understand why some people did not attend. To do this, you should create hard copies of survey questions and you will need to go out into the community and knock on doors to get feedback. Have survey questions ready for both people who did and people who did not attend the Play Street. You can ask those who attended the questions listed above. You can ask those who did not attend the following questions:
  - a. Were you aware that there was a Play Street in the community on [date and time]?
  - b. Have you heard of Play Streets before?
  - c. Were you unable to attend the Play Street because of the day of the week or time it was held? If so, what would a better day and time be?
  - d. Did you see any advertisements for the Play Street and/or hear about it from others?
  - e. What were you doing on the day and time of the Play Street instead of attending?
  - f. Would you be interested in attending a Play Street if the community hosted another one?
4. If your Play Street was held at a location such as a church or was put on by/with the help of an organization such as a church, you can use this to your advantage to gather feedback. In this case, you can hold discussions or hand out surveys when people associated with that organization get together after the Play Street. It is likely that if a Play Street is held by a church, many congregation members will attend. You can use a church function after the Play Street to ask for their feedback.

