Play Streets
BEST PRACTICES
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INTRODUCTION

DO THE KIDS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD have enough safe spaces to play? Would you like to see more? Would your neighborhood benefit from a fun, recurring event where streets are places for people and communities to come together and exercise? We have written this booklet to help community leaders plan and launch successful community Play Streets. Read on to learn more about Play Streets’ benefits and how to start one in your community.

Consider this manual a general framework for how to make your Play Street thrive. Community leaders and community-based organizations who want make a Play Street happen can use this booklet as a planning guide. This document can be used to spread awareness among community members about the positive impacts play streets can have and entice them to support your efforts. In addition to promoting physical activity, Play Streets can build community cohesion, make neighborhoods feel safer and support local businesses. Read on to learn more about Play Streets’ benefits and how to start one in your community.
WHO WE ARE

TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES (T.A.) IS NEW YORK CITY’S LEADING TRANSPORTATION ADVOCACY ORGANIZATION, with a citywide network of tens of thousands of supporters committed to better bicycling, walking and public transit in the five boroughs.

We work with individual communities to make public spaces and local streets safe for all, and push for multi-modal use to be adopted as a policy citywide. T.A. is working for your community to be as welcoming as a playground and winning the changes that make your trip to the store a walk in the park.

T.A. AND PLAY STREETS

From stickball to hopscotch, city streets once offered kids of all ages endless opportunities to play outdoors. T.A. has been at the forefront of reviving this tradition. Play Streets restore this vital element of city life and encourage kids to head outside for healthy active play.

During summer 2010 T.A., the NYC Strategic Alliance for Health (SAfH), Harvest Home Farmer’s Market network and the New York Academy of Medicine hosted and evaluated community-run Play Streets in East Harlem and the South Bronx. T.A. rallied community organizations from across the City behind the pilot program and in 2011 the Bloomberg administration included Play Streets in PlaNYC 2030 as a key strategy to improve open space access for children in New York City. The program is now administered by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, and the health benefits of Play Streets have been endorsed by First Lady Obama’s Let’s Move! campaign.

T.A. continues to guide organizations that want to organize Play Streets and link them to knowledge and resources to make them great. This set of Best Practices highlights wisdom from our experience and that of partners across the city.
PLAY STREETS ARE EXACTLY WHAT THEY SOUND LIKE – streets where people can play. Play Streets reclaim residential streets from cars and repurpose them as play spaces. Sounds similar to a block party, right? They are, but what makes them different is that they reoccur at a regularly scheduled time, such as on a Saturday throughout July and August. Activities may be unstructured, allowing kids to spontaneously play, or well-organized. Neighborhoods determine how they can best serve the community and increase opportunities for physical activity.

Q: How are Play Streets different from other street closures?
A: Play Streets are one of many events that close streets to cars and open them to people. Play Streets are geared towards providing greater access to open space and more opportunities for children to be physically active. They can reoccur over many months, reaching a large number of people and having greater impact on activity rates. Regularly scheduled Play Streets increase participation because their predictability makes it easy for people to plan for them.

Q: Who can organize a Play Street?
A: Play Streets can be organized by community organizations, neighborhood and block associations and schools. The first official Play Streets in New York City were started by the Police Athletic League (PAL) in 1914.
Q: How does the City approve Play Streets?

A: The City has a standard application procedure to secure a Play Street permit from the New York City Department of Transportation (DOT) and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Start as soon as possible since building support takes time. To increase awareness and support you might make a presentation to your block or tenant association and other key community leaders. Keep track of the community support you build. See page 10 for information on permitting.

**SUMMARY**

- Play Streets are repeat events where people turn streets into safe, car-free places to play.
- Play Streets are different from other street closures like block parties because they recur on a regular schedule (example: Thursdays in July and August from 10 am–2 pm).
- Play Streets can be organized by many different groups, such as community organizations, neighborhood and tenant associations, schools and City agencies.
- Play Streets require strong community support to receive a permit!

### DIFFERENT TYPES OF STREET CLOSURES IN NYC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE OF STREET CLOSURE</th>
<th>DURATION</th>
<th>FREQUENCY</th>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>WHERE</th>
<th>ORGANIZER</th>
<th>PERMITTING AGENCY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SUMMER STREETS</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Recurring within a season</td>
<td>Several blocks</td>
<td>Goes through several neighborhoods</td>
<td>DOT, NYPD and Mayor’s office</td>
<td>DOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WEEKEND WALKS</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Recurring weekly</td>
<td>Several blocks</td>
<td>20 commercial neighborhoods</td>
<td>Community Organization</td>
<td>DOT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLAY STREETS</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Recurring (e.g.: Sat for 6 weeks or every day for two months)</td>
<td>1 street block</td>
<td>Several locations (residential blocks, schools)</td>
<td>City and Community</td>
<td>Varies: DOHMH, DOT, or CAU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAR-FREE PARK</td>
<td>2-3 days</td>
<td>Throughout a season</td>
<td>1 roadway in a park</td>
<td>1 location</td>
<td>City and Community</td>
<td>Parks Department</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLOCK PARTY</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Once a year</td>
<td>1 street block</td>
<td>3,000 residential blocks in NYC</td>
<td>City and Community</td>
<td>SAPO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARK(ING) DAY</td>
<td>1 day</td>
<td>Once a year, 3rd Friday in September</td>
<td>1 parking spot</td>
<td>Curbside parking spots throughout NYC</td>
<td>Individual and/or advocacy group</td>
<td>SAPO</td>
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</table>
WHY PLAY STREETS?

PLAY STREETS EXPAND ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE, improve public health, slow motor vehicle traffic and provide a refuge for neighbors to get to know each other.

PUBLIC OPEN SPACE

Play Streets provide much-needed open space and opportunities for kids to play. In NYC, many neighborhoods lack parks and playgrounds. Central Harlem has just 0.3 acres of open space per 1,000 people, five times less than what the Department of City Planning (DCP) recommends. Nearly 179,000 children in NYC live more than a quarter mile from the nearest park and do not have adequate park access. Have you noticed a shortage of playgrounds? Your community is not alone: 97 of 188 neighborhoods in New York City have more than 1,250 children per playground. Play Streets provide safe space for recreation and play.

PUBLIC HEALTH, OBESITY AND ACTIVITY-RELATED DISEASE

Obesity is on the rise throughout the country, and New York City is no exception: 24 percent of kids are considered obese. Three neighborhoods in the city with the highest rates of obesity, diabetes and asthma have District Public Health Offices (DPHO) to try and address this imbalance. The rates of adult obesity in the DPHO areas are 33.8 percent in the South Bronx, 31.4 percent in North and Central Brooklyn (Bedford-Stuyvesant and Bushwick), and 30.9 percent in East and Central Harlem. A major cause of obesity is a lack of exercise. Research shows that neighborhoods with heavy traffic lead to increased obesity among children because parents discourage walking out of concern for safety. Play Streets can promote physical activity and improve public health, especially in communities with less access to parks and playgrounds.

CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Play Streets provide high quality space for children to interact socially. Research indicates that children themselves place a high value on streets as play space, and the sense of independence and spontaneity that street play provides. Childhood development experts regard this kind of play as important preparation for adult life. Research also shows that access to play spaces near home encourages
physical activity. The Center for Disease Control (CDC) found that creating easy access to open space leads to a 25.6 percent increase in the number of people who exercise three or more days per week. Opportunities for kids to exercise close to home have steadily decreased in NYC, as more cars and trucks clog local streets. Play Streets reclaim this space so that children can play in what is often equivalent to a front yard – their street.

**SLOWER CARS AND LESS POLLUTION**

Play Streets reduce traffic in neighborhoods by limiting the space available for motor vehicle travel. Studies show that when less road capacity is available, driving declines, as people switch to walking, biking and public transit. Residential streets are not the appropriate place for heavy car and truck traffic. Play Streets help redirect traffic away from residential blocks and reduce noise and pollution.

**HARVEST HOME PLAY STREETS: EVALUATION OVERVIEW**

T.A. and SAfH piloted two farmers market-based Play Streets, hosted by Harvest Home Farmer’s Market (HHFM) in East Harlem and the Melrose section of the South Bronx. The HHFM Play Streets provided over 1,200 children and their caretakers with safe, car-free spaces to play. A broad coalition of twenty local organizations led a variety of activities across the two Play Street sites that encouraged kids to run, jump, learn new sports, eat fresh and local foods and engage with their neighborhoods.

**Play Streets promote physical activity:**

- **64 percent** of Play Street attendees reported that if not at the Play Street, they would have been engaged in a sedentary activity. (This number was probably higher for children under 10, but was not reflected in the survey since only those over 10 were surveyed.)
- **71 percent** of individuals surveyed walked to the Play Street, an added health benefit.

**Play Streets engage local residents and build community support:**

- **68 percent** reported living within 10 blocks from the Play Street; 83 percent lived within 20 blocks.

**Play Streets and farmer’s markets work well together:**

- **11 percent** of Play Street attendees reportedly learned about it while visiting the Harvest Home Farmer’s Market on the same street.
Kids take turns jumping rope in between NY Road Runner activities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Play Streets are a great way for residents to get involved in their neighborhood – literally in their front yard – and improve the design of their streets and communities. Play Streets provide direct opportunities for people to socialize. Transportation Alternatives’ study Traffic’s Human Toll found that residents on streets with lighter traffic have on average three more friends and twice as many acquaintances as those who live on streets with heavy traffic.31

KEY TALKING POINTS When building support in your community, keep these points in mind:

• 97 of 188 neighborhoods (52%) in New York City do not provide enough play space. Play Streets provide safe space for recreation and play.

• Play Streets are a promising strategy to promote physical activity and improve public health, especially in underserved communities with less access to open space.

• Play Streets provide high quality space for children to interact socially.

• Play Streets reduce traffic in residential neighborhoods.

• Play Streets are a great way for residents to get involved in their neighborhood.

STARTING A PLAY STREET NEAR YOU

OKAY, SO YOU’VE DECIDED YOU WANT A PLAY STREET NEAR YOU. Great! To make one happen you will need to communicate the need for a Play Street and why it will have positive impacts in your community, organize your neighbors to build awareness and support and identify potential locations.

1. DETERMINE THE NEED

Have community groups, schools or parents expressed interest in having a safe place for their children to spend time outside? Are local playgrounds or parks overflowing and lacking capacity? Is there a high rate of childhood obesity in your neighborhood? Do kids not get enough physical activity? Could your community benefit from a fun, recurring event that demonstrates how streets can be used differently? The first step in getting a Play Street is identifying the local need.

2. ORGANIZE: BUILD COMMUNITY AWARENESS AND IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

After identifying the need you and your neighbors want to address, amplify your voice by building a strong base of support. Talk to neighbors and block or tenant...
associations. Reach out to your Community Board and potential community partners, such as schools, libraries or religious organizations. Local businesses and business groups (such as a Business Improvement District (BID)) might also be able to donate resources. Permits are easier to obtain when there is strong community support.

3. CHOOSE A PLAY STREET LOCATION
While building support, consider Play Street locations. Is there a community organization on a local block that may want to help host the event, or that already serves as a neighborhood destination?

What streets in your neighborhood have a lot of foot traffic and not too much vehicle traffic? Is there a local park that frequently overflows into the street? Is there a community gathering spot near a community center? When searching for the best Play Street location, consider:

• Existing Foot Traffic
Well-placed Play Streets can grow quickly in popularity if they are on streets that already have heavy pedestrian foot traffic. The presence of many neighbors walking through and socializing with each other helps to make the street both livelier and safer.

• Nearby Residential and Community Hubs
Lively, well-visited Play Streets draw visitors by being near local landmarks such as community centers, residential buildings, community gardens and streets near popular retail stores and restaurants. For example, the Harvest Home 104th Street Play Street benefited from the local foot traffic generated by the farmer’s market, Union Settlement Association (a community service provider), and the NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA) Washington Houses all located on the street. As a result, SAfH and T.A. connected with several child care providers located at Union Settlement, NYCHA and other nearby organizations by meeting their staff on the street as they walked to work. This helped boost the number of kids who visited the Play Street and allowed community members to promote the event via word of mouth.

• Nearby Popular Parks or Playgrounds
Play Streets complement existing parks that are too small to meet local demand for play space. This is especially true if the park does not have a large open space for kids to play games that involve balls or a lot of running around.

• Street Trees and Shade
A hot summer day can dampen even the liveliest of streets. Make sure that there are at least some street trees for shade in order to help keep the temperature of the Play Street a little cooler, and to limit sun exposure as kids play.
• **Access to Water and Bathrooms**
  If possible, pick a Play Street with access to a bathroom and a drinking fountain (or a place where organizers can fill up large water jugs). Again, this makes parks and community centers good target locations.

• **Motor Vehicle Traffic Volume**
  Though you want your street to be busy and lively, arterial or major connector streets will not be approved for closure on a recurring basis. A major factor in whether the DOT and your community will approve a Play Street is how much it disrupts neighborhood traffic.

4. **PICK A DAY, TIME AND DURATION FOR THE EVENT**
  When are kids free? What days and times are community partners available to contribute resources? When are your volunteers able to spend time on the street? How long in the season should this run? Consider what times and days will attract the most participants.

5. **GET A PERMIT**
  Any event that closes a street to vehicular traffic requires a City-issued permit. You will need to apply for a Play Street permit several months before summer starts. Play Street permits in New York City are awarded by the NYC DOT, and the process begins with filing an Expression of Interest application with the NYC DOHMH. To file for the permit you will need to get the permission of your local community board and police precinct. The process is similar for Play Streets at schools.

**DOHMH Play Streets Guide for Community Groups**

DOHMH includes a users' guide with its Play Street Expression of Interest application. The *Guide for Community Groups* outlines the application process and the criteria a street must meet to be closed. It explains who can apply and lists deadlines for each part of the application. The guide also includes suggestions for approaching your local Community Board for support and marketing your new Play Street in your neighborhood. To receive a copy of their guide, see DOHMH’s contact information on page 25.

• **Liability Insurance**
  When applying for your permit, consider if there is an organization that has insurance who can support your event. The DOHMH application does not require liability insurance, but it can still be valuable.
• Farmer’s Markets with Street Closure Permits

One of the biggest challenges in starting up a new Play Street is getting a street permit from the City. Partnering with existing farmer’s markets which have approved permits to close a street regularly, is one way to ease the process. The Harvest Home Farmer’s Market Play Street greatly benefitted from this approach. If your local farmer’s market closes an entire block to traffic each week but only uses part of the street space, it may be possible to partner with the market. You will still need the support of your local Community Board and police precinct.

Farmer’s market-based Play Streets can benefit farmers and city residents. Farmer’s markets generate foot traffic, which raise awareness about the Play Street while Play Streets can introduce new customers to the market. Farmer’s markets also provide a great space for kids and their families to learn about healthy eating.

6. CONTACT TRANSPORTATION ALTERNATIVES:
WE ARE HERE TO HELP!

T.A. can help you navigate the permitting process, build local support for your Play Street and find programming. T.A. is dedicated to advocating for healthy and sustainable transportation choices and has worked with residents from around the city to calm traffic on their blocks and reclaim street space for people for almost 40 years. For more resources, see the Reports section on page 30.
BUILDING LOCAL SUPPORT

1. Pull together a core group of organizers to lead this initiative

Planning and executing a Play Street is a lot of fun, but also a lot of work. Make sure you have a core group that is able to commit their time and energy to making the Play Street happen. The composition of this core group can vary by the goals and resources of your neighborhood. Perhaps it’s a coalition of neighbors with a common interest, or a subset of members in a tenant association. It can also be a committee that joins residents with representatives of local community-based organizations. One way to build a group of core organizers is to have a community outreach meeting.

If several different organizations will be involved, make sure that you clarify what each group’s role will be – i.e. Who will apply for the permit? Who will recruit programming partners? Will all decisions be made democratically, or will groups be in charge of particular tasks? Every Play Street partnership will be different, but all partnerships benefit from clarity at the outset.

2. Hold local outreach meetings

Outreach meetings in your neighborhood will help with volunteer recruitment as they provide an opportunity for residents to find out what a Play Street is, how it will work and how they can support it (e.g., by volunteering, lending equipment, getting the word out to neighbors, etc.). This also provides an important forum for people to share concerns and to suggest activities that cater to neighborhood needs.

3. Build community partnerships

Strong local networks are key to organizing a Play Street. Even if individuals and groups cannot offer activities, supplies or volunteers, they may have connections to other people and groups who do. Reach out to residents and local merchants to let them know what is going on, and to pull in neighborhood expertise.

Community Boards often keep lists of local service organizations and nonprofits – this can be a good start as you search for groups who can help make your Play Street an exciting place to be. Also, don’t underestimate the talents of your neighbors. Activities at Play Streets don’t have to be fancy to be fun. The teens next door might be amazing at teaching double-dutch to younger kids. Or the lady downstairs could be a great storyteller!
4. RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS
Managing the day to day operations of a Play Street is often more than one person can handle alone. Volunteers can help with outreach and scheduling, leading activities, set up, clean-up and serve as eyes and feet on the street to ensure the Play Street is a safe space.

These may be the same people in your core organizing group, or they may be people who can only volunteer once. A dedicated group of volunteers is crucial to the success of a Play Street. Volunteers lead activities, set up, clean up and serve as eyes and feet on the street to ensure the Play Street is a safe space. Volunteers can be individual neighbors, local youth and adult volunteer groups. Teen leadership programs at the YMCA and local churches are often looking for ways to get involved in the community, as are senior citizen groups and school PTAs.

SUMMARY
- Develop a core group of Play Street organizers with clearly defined roles.
- Hold community meetings to build awareness and get your neighbors involved.
- Tap into local organizations and leaders. Work with the Community Board to connect with them.
- Recruit volunteers among neighbors, teen groups and local service organizations.

Uptown Martial Arts Academy volunteered to lead karate classes
SINCE 2008, THE 78TH STREET PLAY STREET in Jackson Heights, Queens has extended crowded Travers Park into the street, bringing it to life with games, food and music. In 2010 the Play Street was held 24 hours a day, seven days a week in July and August on 78th Street between 34th Avenue and Northern Boulevard.

In 2011 the schedule was extended through September, and it proved so popular that in 2012 it was approved by the DOT to become a year-round pedestrian plaza that is permanently closed to traffic.
The 78th Street Play Street was originally organized by a partnership between three neighborhood groups who wanted to demonstrate the need for more parks in their community: the Western Jackson Heights Homeowners Alliance, JH Green and JHBG/Friends of Travers Park (the first two groups have since merged to become the Jackson Heights Green Alliance).

The lead organizations reached out to businesses and elected officials. In their first year, they received a range of support from large corporations that donated supplies, including Home Depot, and local coffee shops that donated food and drinks for the Play Street. Elected officials—including City Councilmember Daniel Dromm and State Senator Jose Peralta—helped interface with city agencies, provided direct assistance in the form of entertainment (paying for a bouncy castle, for example), paid people to supervise the street (Summer Youth Employment Program) and hired cleaning services through the Doe Fund.

We approached Dudley Stewart, one of the organizers, to find out how they gained such strong support for their Play Street:

- Make sure you have Community Board (CB) support before approaching anybody. Establish a relationship with your CB if you haven’t already.
- Document your street’s activities and media coverage, and present them in an attractive format which lets people know you are a professional organization.
- Do as much outreach as possible, all the time. People will gladly help out once they find out about it and realize it is an all-volunteer effort. Find local bi-lingual speakers who can help translate outreach documents into other languages.
- Develop a good relationship with your local elected officials.
- Publicize a sample program calendar so people know what’s going on at the play street.

“Do as much outreach as possible, all the time.”

DUDLEY STEWART
MANAGING LOGISTICS AND TURNOUT

Play Streets grow and evolve fairly organically on lively streets, but they do require some added equipment, preparation and outreach. (See also “Set-up to Breakdown, Step by Step” on pages 22-23.)

1. SECURE EQUIPMENT AND STORAGE SPACE

Tables and chairs for volunteers and visitors are recommended, along with cleaning supplies to sweep up the street, soccer balls, jump ropes and street chalk. In choosing a Play Street location look for nearby places to borrow or store equipment. At both farmers market-based Play Streets we borrowed folding tents from HHFM, and stored yoga mats at the nearby HHFM office. At the 104th Street Play Street, Union Settlement lent folding tables, chairs and brooms, while at the Forest Avenue Play Street we borrowed a broom and dustpan from a corner bodega. This helped to reduce the number of items we had to transport to the Play Street each week and kept equipment costs down.

2. CONTACT YOUR LOCAL POLICE PRECINCT EARLY AND OFTEN

It can take a while to build relationships with busy officers at your local precinct, so contact them early in the process to win support for your Play Street. The support of your local police precinct is essential to the success and safety of a Play Street. Local police precincts can promote and enforce the car-free aspect of Play Streets, allowing kids to play without worrying about traffic or retrieving a ball from under a parked car.

Keeping cars off the Play Street zone requires a lot of outreach and flyering of “No Parking” signs along the street. This should be done two days before a Play Street, and again the day before to replace fallen or removed signs. The police precinct will provide you with signs, making the street closure more effective.
3. PUBLICIZE AND PROMOTE YOUR PLAY STREET

Create an activity schedule and publicize it widely (along with general Play Streets information). This provides a “preview” to potential visitors and informs people of who to contact to volunteer. Promotion could include a combination:

- Fliers/posters throughout the neighborhood and emailed to partner organizations
- Websites (your organization’s and your partners’)
- Social media (sites like Facebook, Twitter and even LinkedIn) can help you reach new audiences and identify new partners
- Local newspapers and blogs, and radio and television stations
- Newsletters (local businesses and organizations)
- And of course... word-of-mouth!

4. HOLD A KICK-OFF EVENT

A new street closure may not immediately be viewed as an invitation to play. Kick-off events have proven to be successful at introducing a new Play Street to neighborhood residents and community leaders.

Kick-off events are larger, more wide-reaching events held on or before the first scheduled Play Street. They set the stage for the Play Street location as a positive, inviting space. Kick-offs should invite the entire neighborhood to the Play Street and provide extra programming and activities to ensure a positive first impression. They also provide opportunities for elected officials and partner organizations to voice support and promote themselves and the work that they do.

NO PARKING: LESSONS LEARNED

Harvest Home 104th Street Play Street: East Harlem

The 23rd Police Precinct was an essential ally in the weekly effort to keep cars out of the Play Street. The precinct provided “No Parking” signs to post on the street for weekly Thursday closures and police barricades to close the street to motor vehicles. The officers initially hesitated to tow cars that ignored the “No Parking” signs. After witnessing the positive impact of the Play Street, the officers agreed to tow cars parked on the Play Street to a nearby parking lot each week. Play Street organizers also promoted their National Night Out event at the Play Street to strengthen its relationship with the precinct.

Safety improved significantly with the precinct’s support. During the first few weeks of the Play Street, barricades kept cars from entering the Play Street area but drivers would still leave their cars parked within the Play Street zone. Gradually residents took the “No Parking” signs more seriously, and moved their cars out of the Play Street area to avoid being towed.
LESSONS LEARNED: Outreach to local families, day camps and large residential buildings

Visits from day cares and day camps are often a good way to catalyze a new Play Street as they are composed of large supervised groups of local kids. Many day camps are looking for local outdoor places to take their kids. They are also good venues for advertising Play Streets that happen on the weekends or during after-school/after program hours. And for weekday Play Streets, they can quickly fill up a Play Street and demonstrate to local residents that this is indeed a fun, active place to play!

Having a lot of day-campers can present the issue of making sure community residents know that the Play Street is open to everyone, not just kids in camp t-shirts. It’s also important to ask day camps to let Play Street organizers know when they’ll be coming so that groups can be staggered throughout the day.

The Vanderbilt YMCA was a great case of a day camp partnership at the Harvest Home Play Street in summer 2010. In addition to just bringing kids for part of the day, they also funded activities like yoga and provided youth volunteers that benefited their campers as well as all visitors to the Play Street. The East Harlem Tutorial camp also provided consistent youth volunteers.

Large residential buildings such as New York City Housing Authority developments are a centralized way to reach out to a large number of local residents. Large residential buildings often have tenant committees that can let their residents know about Play Streets, and also may be willing to offer volunteers or other resources.

5. CONSIDER PROGRAM EVALUATION

Keep track of who attends, what works and what doesn’t to improve your Play Street. Evaluation measures could include daily head counts, or the more structured observational measures developed for the Harvest Home Play Streets in 2010. This data will help you plan logistics and programming to meet the local demand for your Play Street. All stakeholders should agree on evaluation measures at the beginning to maximize its usefulness. T.A. has developed a Data Toolkit to help you gather this data (see the Reports section on page 30).

SUMMARY

- Plan for equipment needs; borrow what you can from your neighbors
- Involve your local police precinct in making your Play Street safe and car-free
- Publicize and promote your Play Street through flyers and kick-off activities
- Evaluate your Play Street to demonstrate its’ success
PLAY STREETS ARE NOT NEW TO NEW YORK CITY, but because traffic is constant on our residential streets, an open street no longer immediately symbolizes a place to play. Programming draws people into the street, entices them to stay and shows that streets serve more than vehicles; they can be safe places to play. Play Street program partners can:

**ACTIVATE THE STREET**
When a street closure is new and unfamiliar to a community it may not immediately be viewed as an automatic invitation to play. Scheduled programs and activities invite people onto the street.

**PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY**
Programmed activities like running relays, pick-up soccer and jump-rope get and keep people moving. Physical activity is an important aspect of health when it comes to obesity and diabetes prevention. Many of the partners who can help to activate the street also create opportunities for physical activity.
ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY
A variety of events help engage and attract a diverse range of community members as well as build new relationships among neighbors. Many visitors notice Play Streets when walking by, or hear about it from friends and co-workers. Put simply, Play Streets give neighbors something to talk about.

• A schedule of events geared to both youth and adults helps attract a variety of people. Parents can listen to music and local performers while their kids learn new games.

INSTITUTIONALIZE OPEN STREETS AND PLAY
Scheduled events help people know what to expect from the Play Streets and determine when to visit. A well-organized Play Street also imparts professionalism and a sense of safety. The more successful and well-used, the more likely the play street will continue into the future and expand its hours.

• A great long-term goal is for communities to be able to turn Play Streets into year round events. To do this, people must view Play Streets as successful and beneficial to the communities they are in.

A mix of activities is important for attracting a diverse crowd to Play Streets. A sample mix might include:

- Arts & Crafts
- Dance/Aerobics/Yoga
- Educational Workshops
- Group/pick-up sports: running, soccer, rugby
- Performances by local artists (music, dance, theatre)
- Other interactive cultural demonstrations
Many organizations across New York City are willing to provide programming for free or at low cost. T.A. maintains a Program Partner Resource Guide with a directory of organizations that are interested in Play Streets programming (See transalt.org/playstreets). Be sure to:

**Schedule Program Partners Months in Advance**
Partners should be involved in more than the just the day-of events. Reach out to organizations from the moment you begin applying for your permit and schedule events early in the planning process.

Planning and scheduling activities for your Play Street should begin in winter or early spring. Many activity providers finalize their summer schedules before June so plan ahead to ensure their availability. Host meetings with your partner organizations before each play street to confirm scheduling commitments and follow-up afterward to discuss new ideas and identify opportunities for improvement.

**Schedule Continuous Activity**
Maintaining a continuous level of activity is essential to keeping people engaged in the Play Street. Just as important as having activities planned is spreading them out. Make sure you do not have any “dead-zones” in your Play Street’s schedule or too many activities going on at the same time. At the beginning of the planning season, create a template weekly calendar that you can easily update with new events.
WASHINGTON HEIGHTS PINENHURST AVENUE CASE STUDY

PROGRAMMING AND PREPARATION

SINCE 2011 ASOCIACIÓN DE MUJERES PROGRESISTAS (AMP) has closed Pinehurst Avenue between 179th Street and 180th Street in Washington Heights, Manhattan to host ZonaRecreo, a fun-filled, high-energy, balanced schedule of events the whole family can enjoy. Their success urged AMP in 2012 to add an additional Washington Heights site as well as a new Play Street in the Bronx.

A key to AMP’s success has been a mix of health, fitness and educational activities, all infused with the local culture of the neighborhood:

- **DanceXercise** is AMP’s premier family-oriented program that combines physical fitness with dance techniques.
- **Little Cravings & Pretty Little Things**, a catering company committed to healthy food choices, conducts healthy cooking demonstrations at the play street.
• **CHALK (Choosing Healthy & Active Lifestyles for Kids)** is a collaboration between Community Pediatrics at New York-Presbyterian Hospital and Columbia University Medical Center, focused on developing and disseminating a message that promotes healthy lifestyles. CHALK sponsors the community-based “Vive tu Vida/Live your Life” campaign and provides hula hooping and hopscotch activities.

• **New York Road Runners (NYRR)** creates and supports free fitness and character-building programs for children in underserved communities throughout New York City and at many Play Streets. Their running-based physical education programs and obstacle courses not only teach kids to run, but also about setting and achieving goals.

Carmen Acosta of AMP is the lead organizer for **ZonaRecreo** and shared with us the following lessons learned:

- Research funding opportunities and make sure to meet deadlines.
- Connect with people early; keep clear meeting records with notes on what each organization can offer.
- Explore resources in your neighborhood and reach out to schools and youth programs.
GETTING STARTED

This checklist can help you think through the planning and outreach needed to organize a Play Street.

LOGISTICS: Consider each of these aspects as you plan your Play Street.
- Co-organizers/volunteers
- Community partners for activities
- Outreach meetings
- Outreach materials (flyers, email lists)
- No Parking signs & parking enforcement logistics
- Tables, Chairs, Tents
- Play equipment

PLANNING AND SUPPORT: Reach out to the following community organizations and City agencies to request support.
- Transportation Alternatives
- Built Environment Program, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- Community Board
- NYPD Precinct Community Affairs Officer
- City Council Member
- Parks Department
- Nearby Residential Buildings
- Local merchants or BID
- Residential and Commercial Property Owners
CONTACT INFORMATION

Transportation Alternatives
- E-MAIL: playstreets@transalt.org
- PHONE: 212-629-8080
- 127 West 26th Street, Suite 1002, New York, NY 10001

PERMITTING AGENCIES

Built Environment Program, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
- For a Play Streets Expression of Interest Application:
  E-MAIL the Playstreets Coordinator at: playstreet@health.nyc.gov
- OR WRITE TO:
  Playstreets Coordinator
  RE: Playstreets Expression of Interest
  Built Environment Program, NYC Dept. of Health and Mental Hygiene
  120 Wall Street, 25th FL, Box CN46W
  New York, NY 10005

Community Board
- To find your board and its contact info: CALL 311,
- Call and ask which committee deals with street closure permits
- Meet with that committee

NYPD: Local Precincts
- To find your precinct: CALL 311,
- Call the number provided and ask to speak to the Community Affairs Officer

COMMUNITY PARTNERS AND OUTREACH

City Council
- To find out who represents you: CALL 311,
  OR VISIT: council.nyc.gov/html/members/members.shtml
- Contact their district office, and ask who to speak with about your proposal

New York City Parks Department
- Contact the Parks Department if your Play Street borders on any NYC Parks property; CALL 311 for contact information

Residential Buildings
- Plan a community outreach meeting to speak with residents of the street
- Hang posters and deliver fliers to residential buildings to publicize meetings
Local Merchants
• If your neighborhood has a business or merchants association or a Business Improvement District (BID), reach out to them. BID contact info can be found at: www.ci.nyc.ny.us/html/sbs/html/neighborhood/bid.shtml

Property and Building Owners
• Building superintendents should have contact information for the building owners; if there are any large buildings on the street, reach out to the owners in advance

NEXT STEPS
T.A. is working for Play Streets citywide and can use your support. Good luck with your planning process and please keep in touch!
Funding can be a challenge for Play Streets. Below is information on grants that Play Street organizers can apply for to support their events. These grants are not directly associated with the Play Street program.

**Citizens Committee for New York City**
Citizens Committee awards grants to groups of neighbors working collaboratively to improve their communities. The grants are specifically for groups based in low income neighborhoods across the city. CCNYC does not award grants to individuals, agencies with paid staff, religious, fraternal, or partisan organizations. More information:  http://www.citizensnyc.org/grants.html

*Citizens Committee Grants:*
- **New Yorkers for Better Neighborhoods Awards:** Citizens Committee awards grants of $500 to $3,000 to grassroots community groups in economically under-resourced neighborhoods to work on creative community improvement projects that bring neighbors together.
- **Love Your Block:** Citizens Committee, in partnership with the City of New York, awards grants of $1000 to volunteer-led community groups seeking to beautify their neighborhoods. Selected groups also benefit from receiving special services from city agencies.
- **Change By Us:** Citizens Committee, in partnership with the City of New York, is awarding a limited number of grants to volunteer-led community groups to work.

**New York City Council**

- **Discretionary Funding**

- **Kickstarter partnership**
  The NYC City Council selects community projects in low-income neighborhoods to feature on crowd-funding website Kickstarter. For contact information and the list of eligible neighborhoods, see:  http://www.kickstarter.com/pages/NYC
# APPENDIX II: SET-UP TO BREAKDOWN, STEP BY STEP

Here’s a snapshot of Play Street preparation for one week at the 104th Street Play Street in East Harlem, which was permitted for Thursdays through July and August.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TUESDAY</th>
<th>WEDNESDAY</th>
<th>THURSDAY AM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two days before</td>
<td>One day before</td>
<td>Play Street: 10am–2pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confirm participation with Play Street activity providers. Get cell phone numbers for last minute contingencies (e.g., weather, illness).</td>
<td>• Call local police precinct to confirm a tow truck for Thursday morning.</td>
<td>9AM OR EARLIER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Post &quot;No Parking&quot; signs on utility poles and cars.</td>
<td>• Meet local precinct officer at site to supervise towing of cars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Call local police precinct to confirm a tow truck for Thursday morning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Schedule large groups of visitors (i.e., kids at day camps) to balance the number of kids and volunteers/staff throughout the Play Street hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Print fliers to distribute Thursday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Print fliers to distribute Thursday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Purchase supplies (street chalk, water cups, hula-hoops).</td>
<td>• Put up posters and signage to advertise Play Street.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

9:30AM
- Set up tents, tables, folding chairs.
- Fill water jugs or make signage directing people to water.
- Assign responsibilities to volunteers (e.g., supervise jump rope area, referee pick-up soccer, keep water jugs filled, sign-in arriving kids).
- Activity providers also arrive to set up.
- Put out jump ropes, hula hoops, street chalk, soccer goals for free-play area.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THURSDAY ctd.</th>
<th>FRIDAY Day after</th>
<th>Ongoing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THROUGHOUT THE DAY (10AM-2PM)</strong></td>
<td>• Sign-in day camp providers and parents/caregivers at check-in/info table.</td>
<td>• Thank programming providers, volunteers and local precinct via email or phone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Circulate groups of kids through different activities.</td>
<td>• E.g., every 15-20 minutes get kids to rotate from one activity to the next.</td>
<td>• Recruit new program providers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Watch out for loose balls and chase them down!</td>
<td>• Set up and tear down equipment and reallocate street space for changes in activities (e.g., set up yoga mats at 10:45am for 11am yoga session, take down soccer goals to make room for 12pm rugby clinic).</td>
<td>• Outreach to local daycare providers and schools to encourage camps and individual caregivers to come visit the Play Street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• End of Play Street: 2PM (1 HOUR)</td>
<td>• Fold tents and return tables and chairs to local community center.</td>
<td>• Advertise the Play Street through local community channels (list-servs, fliers at community events, etc).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Empty water jugs.</td>
<td>• Pack and store play equipment.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX III: REPORTS AND VISUAL MEDIA

As you plan your Play Street, check out these resources for inspiration.

Transportation Alternatives’ Reports
T.A. produces reports on the benefits of cycling, walking and transit. The following can help to bolster your Play Street efforts. All reports can be found at: transalt.org/playstreets

• **Play Streets: A Case Study**
  In summer of 2010 T.A. partnered with the NYC Strategic Alliance for Health (SAfH) and Harvest Home Farmer’s Markets (HHFM) to host two community-run Play Streets – one in East Harlem/El Barrio and one in the South Bronx. By partnering with HHFM we not only promoted physical activity for kids, but encouraged eating healthy, fresh food. This case study chronicles the success and challenges of bringing together community organization and neighbors to make these Play Streets happen.

• **Evaluation of the Harvest Home Play Streets**
  The 2010 Harvest Home Play Streets were evaluated by the New York Academy of Medicine via observational methods and brief surveys with Play Street visitors. This evaluation describes the population who benefited from Play Streets and their feedback about the positive impacts the Play Street had upon physical activity and community safety.

• **Play Streets Program Partner Resource Guide**
  In 2011, T.A., SAfH and the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene surveyed play street organizers to learn about programming best practices. As a result we began compiling a living directory of organizations that are interested in offering programming at Play Streets, and invite you to add new organizations to this list.

• **Play Streets Data Tool Kit**
  Documenting the community and health benefits of your Play Street can help you convince organizations and local leaders to support your Play Street and assist you in planning logistics and resources for next year. This toolkit walks you through simple and creative ways to tell the story of your Play Street.
• **I Walk in My Street (Play Streets and Weekend Walks):**
  In the summer of 2008, several streets across New York City were opened to people instead of cars. T.A. documented three community-driven street events – Summer Space on Montague Street in Brooklyn, the 78th Street Play Street in Queens, and Williamsburg Walks on Bedford Avenue in Brooklyn. The results paint a picture of a city desperate for more public and community space, and New Yorkers ready to make the most of what they have.

• **Streets to Live By**
  Many problems in New York City, from public health to environmental sustainability can be solved at street level. This report analyzes the potential economic and quality-of-life benefits that an expanded livable streets initiative could bring to New York City.

**StreetFilms**
These short films illustrate what a Play Street or street closure in action looks like, how they are maintained and how neighbors organize to get one

**PLAY STREETS**
- Harvest Home Forest Avenue Play Street in the South Bronx (2010): youtube.com/watch?v=_iHhwWs424FU

**OTHER TYPES OF STREET CLOSURES**
- Pedestrian Plaza in NYC: streetfilms.org/queens-corona-plaza-a-community-place-rises/
- Parking Day: streetfilms.org/parking-day-2009-nyc
- Block Party: streetfilms.org/block-party-nyc
- Summer Streets in NYC: streetfilms.org/summer-streets-2009
- Sunday Parkways in Chicago: streetfilms.org/sunday-parkways-chicago
- Ciclovia in Bogota: streetfilms.org/ciclovia-en-espanol

**STREETS AND COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS**
- Livable Streets study in San Francisco: streetfilms.org/revisiting-donald-appleyards-livable-streets
- Reclaiming Streets in New York City: streetfilms.org/fixing-the-great-mistake-autocentric-development
REFERENCES

i Find your Community Board at: nyc.gov/html/cau/html/cb/directory.shtml
Community Boards are local representative bodies. There are 59 throughout the City Community members can apply to be Board members and are selected by the Borough Presidents and local City Council Members. Board members must reside, work, or have some other significant interest in the community. Boards have an important advisory role in addressing land use and zoning matters, the City budget, municipal service delivery, and many other matters relating to their communities’ welfare. (Source: Mayor’s Community Affairs Unit)

ii NYC Department of City Planning: Community District Profile for CD 11. Benchmark information from PlaNYC.

iii The Trust for Public Land: “No Place to Play.” Available online: tpl.org/content_documents/no_place_to_play.pdf


v Ibid.

vi New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene: EpiQuery, Community Health Survey 2009, Overweight and Obesity, a816-healthpsi.nyc.gov/epiquery/EpiQuery/


ix Trust for Public Land: “Healthy Parks, Healthy Communities.” Available online: tpl.org/content_documents/hphc/hphc_centralCA_casesstudy.pdf


WHERE STREETS ARE PLACES FOR PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES TO COME TOGETHER.