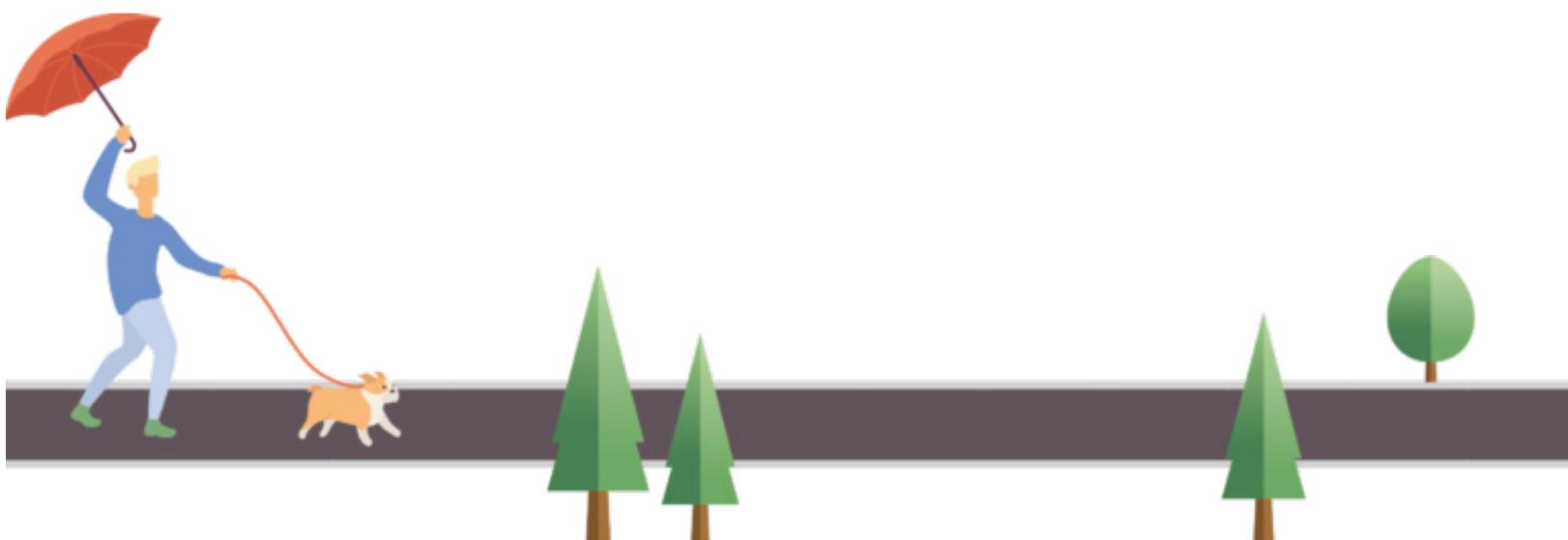


OUTDOOR TOWNS TOOLKIT

Self-Assessment Leader's Guide

www.outdoortowns.org



Purpose

The Outdoor Town Self-Assessment is designed to take an objective look at your town as a new resident or visitor would see it. The purpose is to identify what's good and what needs to be improved by looking at: how walkable is the community; how bike friendly; how easy is it to access the river; what is the status of public parks; what is the appearance of the downtown; is signage needed; and, are new types of businesses and services needed?

The assessment should bring to light the good, the bad and the ugly, and, foster a discussion about what improvements are desired.

Process

The Assessment Booklet/Worksheets and process outlined here is modeled after other trail town and river town programs including the Allegheny Trail Alliance Trail Town Manual, The Progress Fund's Trail Town Program®, the Susquehanna Greenway River Town Program, Pennsylvania Downtown Center's Nature-Based Placemaking program.

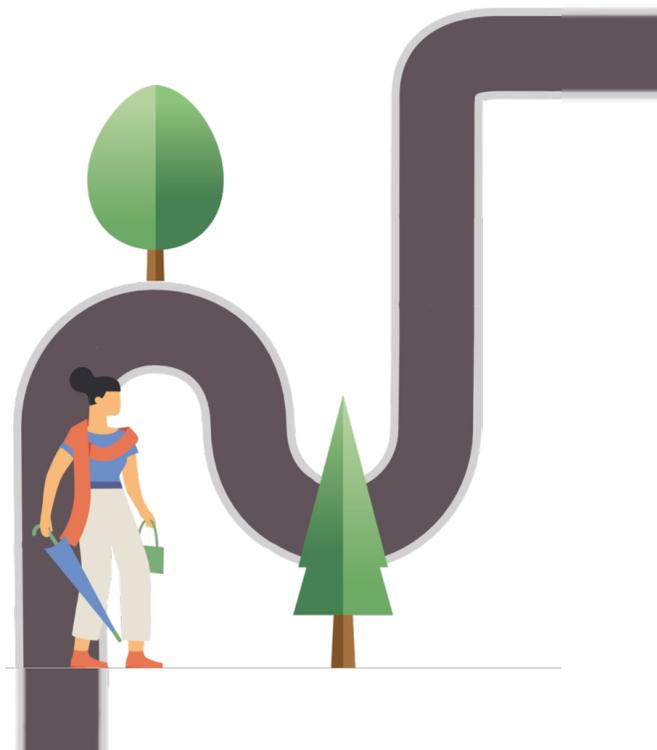
Prior to conducting an Outdoor Town Assessment, the Action Team should review the comments residents provided through the Community Input Meeting and Community Input Survey. Did any common themes emerge? Were specific areas of town identified for improvements? Were specific projects or programs identified? This input may help guide how you conduct your town's self-assessment.

We have tried to keep the process as straightforward and simple as possible. You may choose to complete the assessment in one day if you have sufficient people and expertise, or, you can break the assessment into separate days by topic area. Adapt the assessment process and questions to meet the needs and focus of your town.

Ask representatives from local, county or regional planning organizations to help plan and facilitate the assessment. Your Action Team should also line up participants from a broad cross section of your community, including representatives from the following organizations: municipal government, planning commission, public works department, parks and recreation, shade tree commission, high school students, bicycling and paddling groups, fitness centers, hospitals/healthcare, heritage/historical society, banking/investment, merchants, large employers, chamber of commerce, visitors' bureau, and realtors. Having a broad representation will bring various areas of expertise and help to build support for the recommendations that come out of the assessment.

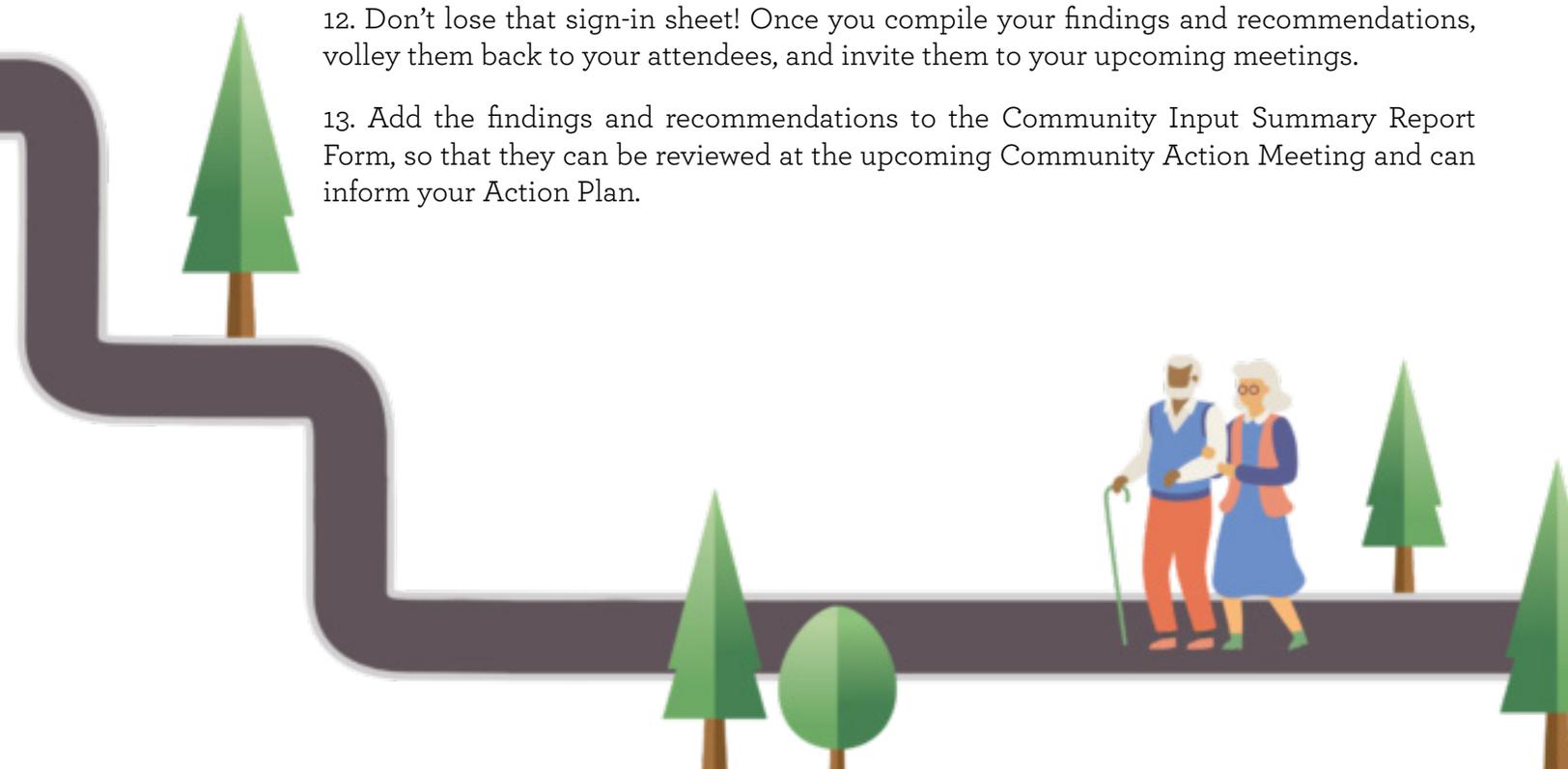
If your team is interested in improving bicycle and pedestrian facilities, invite your PennDOT Regional Bicycle and Coordinator to participate. If you are interested in making park and recreation improvements, invite your DCNR Regional Advisor.

Generally, it will take about four hours to conduct the community assessment, provided you have lined up enough people. Try to schedule the assessment for a time of year when the weather is warm.



How to conduct the assessment:

1. Ask representatives from local, county or regional planning organizations to help your Action Team to plan and facilitate the assessment.
2. Secure a meeting room that is centrally located, because you will be walking around town to conduct the assessment.
3. Invite participants at least one month in advance to ensure you will have adequate participation.
4. On the day of the assessment, set up a table with a sign-in sheet where you can welcome everyone and hand out pens and the themed assessment worksheets in this booklet.
5. Have water and light snacks for participants.
6. Have a facilitator review the agenda and give an overview of what you'll be doing.
7. Break everyone into small groups, each with a leader from your Action Team, and walk (or bike) different routes through town. Each participant should have an assessment booklet/worksheets to answer questions along the way and make notes of suggested improvements. Allow about 2 hours for the walk about.
8. Regroup at the meeting room and give everyone a few minutes to finish answering questions and noting suggestions in their assessment booklets.
9. A facilitator should lead a discussion that gives time to discuss each of the focus areas of the assessment booklet/worksheet, to bring out comments and suggestions from the participants. If possible, capture the suggestions on a flip chart and have a member of your team take detailed notes.
10. Finally, thank everyone for the participation and let them know you will email them the summary report from the day. Collect the booklets from participants so that you can capture and analyze the participants' suggestions.
11. Write a summary of the findings and recommendations.
12. Don't lose that sign-in sheet! Once you compile your findings and recommendations, volley them back to your attendees, and invite them to your upcoming meetings.
13. Add the findings and recommendations to the Community Input Summary Report Form, so that they can be reviewed at the upcoming Community Action Meeting and can inform your Action Plan.



Leader's Guide Outline



1.) Preparation

- a. Review the [Essential Ingredients of a Great Outdoor Town](#)
- b. Review input gathered through community meetings, surveys and previous plans. Are there focus areas that should be emphasized during the assessment?
- c. Review the process for conducting a community assessment
- d. Line up facilitators to assist with conducting the assessment. Look at your [Community Leader List](#) to see who has the expertise to help. Ask for planning, mapping, and facilitation help from local, county and regional planners. Assign facilitators to lead each group.
- e. Set a date and develop an agenda for the day of the assessment and determine what areas of town will be assessed.
- f. Secure a central meeting location
- g. Develop and send invitations and meeting reminders
- h. Line up refreshments, meeting supplies/equipment, and print out sign-in sheets, community maps and assessment worksheets.

2.) Conducting the Assessment

- a. Participants sign-in
- b. Explanation of the purpose and process for the assessment
- c. Break into groups and distribute assessment booklets/worksheets
- d. Conduct walk-about/bike-about assessment
- e. Regroup at meeting room. Allow a few minutes for people to finish making notes.
- f. Lead a debriefing discussion to capture comments and build consensus on what's important.
- g. Thank participants and promise to provide them with a summary report. Collect worksheets from everyone before they leave.

3.) Follow-up

- a. Tabulate responses from assessment booklets/worksheets. Write a brief summary document of the assessment findings and recommendations.
- b. Email the summary document to assessment participants and ask if they have any further comments.
- c. Add the findings and recommendations to the [Community Input Summary Report Form](#), so that they can be reviewed the Action Team, shared at the upcoming Community Action Meeting, and can inform your Action Plan.