



ACTIVATE YOUR
NEIGHBOURHOOD

Activate Your Neighbourhood

KEY LESSONS LEARNED
ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION
IN NOVA SCOTIA

Activate Your Neighbourhood (AYN) is a joint initiative of the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) and the University of Waterloo designed to increase physical activity and social connections by encouraging people in neighbourhoods to re-think, re-imagine and re-purpose their neighbourhood spaces. The AYN **Tactical Guide** was produced to support neighbours in this effort.

The project, and the AYN Tactical Guide produced to support it, advances *Tactical Urbanism*, which encourages low-cost, deliberate grassroots initiatives to temporarily alter the built environment to improve local neighbourhoods and public gathering places. These temporary alterations can lead to permanent changes over time. Recognizing that our country includes a variety of population centres, we substituted urbanism with placemaking to provide a more inclusive framing that also serves rural communities. *Placemaking* is the process of shaping public space to strengthen connections between people and places. People have the power to make changes at a neighbourhood scale, including changes to their own property or using public space. The AYN Tactical Guide was informed by evidence, including academic research and input from community leaders and neighbours.

A PILOT PROJECT IN NOVA SCOTIA

In 2023, CPRA received a grant from the Government of Nova Scotia, Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage to develop a pilot project to test the AYN Tactical Guide to understand the guide's useability and fine tune ideas and the tools to better serve communities in Nova Scotia and apply those findings across Canada. We aimed to provide tools and resources to community leaders and Municipal Physical Activity Leaders (MPALs) to share the AYN Tactical Guide and encourage its implementation. The pilot project supported Nova Scotia's **Let's Get Moving strategy** by advancing key pillars of equity, active environments, and collaboration.

The Tactical Guide promotes inclusive, low-cost activities to reach equity-deserving groups, encourages temporary physical changes that make neighbourhoods more movement-friendly, and leverages the MPAL network and provincial partners to support local implementation and sustainability.

CPRA worked with five communities to test the themes and ideas in the AYN Tactical Guide and develop Nova Scotia-based content. CPRA worked with Recreation Nova Scotia as the NS-based expert organizations and select individuals from the MPAL program to ensure local connection and sustainability. All AYN resources, including the AYN Tactical Guide and Nova Scotia-specific materials, are freely accessible at ActivateYourNeighbourhood.ca, allowing MPALs and community organizations to continue using them to support placemaking and physical activity initiatives beyond the pilot period.

It should be noted that the AYN project was not intended to be an "add-on" to the work of the communities, but rather a value-added resource that could support existing community staff and systems.

People have the power to make changes at a neighbourhood scale.



PILOT PROJECT RESULTS

While the project was implemented as planned, several challenges influenced community participation including staff turnover, a number of weather-related barriers, and post-pandemic disruptions.

The following describes the steps taken to support the pilot project:

- CPRA established a leadership team to guide the project. It was made up of the provincial government representative, Recreation Nova Scotia, CPRA (Project Lead) and the University of Waterloo (ON).
- CPRA partnered with Recreation Nova Scotia to promote the initiative and support the pilot-community leaders.
- CPRA reached out to all recreation departments in NS, with a special invitation to Communities on the Move. It did so through an online meeting and email. The purpose was to secure a maximum of eight communities to participate in the pilot project. Interested communities submitted an application form. Criteria were set to assist the leadership team in selecting communities.
- Eight communities were secured; an introductory meeting was held to kick-off the project. It should be noted that due to staff turnover, we lost three communities over the course of the project and another towards the very end.
- A mini grant of \$700/community was provided for use as required to promote the AYN Tactical Guide and/or to implement activities/events. Communities were also offered a small amount for printing as required.
- A set schedule of meetings was put in place for the duration of the project. Ad hoc meetings were also introduced, particularly after the extension of the project.
- Materials were developed*. These included promotional texts and social media posts about AYN, promotional posters (that could be printed or emailed), templates to be used to collect stories.
- A **NS-specific web page** was developed and added to the activateyourneighbourhood.ca website. All materials developed to support community leaders can be found here.
- A suite of evaluation tools were developed (by Troy Glover, University of Waterloo).
- Online meetings were held to introduce and describe the evaluation tools.
- Three in-person meetings were held over the course of the project.
- Individual meetings with the pilot-community leads took place over the course of the project.
- Five online community meetings were scheduled. Pilot-community leaders were asked to invite Neighbours to attend. The CPRA lead was available for all five sessions to present the project and answer questions.
- A one-year extension was given to the project. During that time:
 - A partnership was established with the Healthy Tomorrow Foundation to help promote AYN
 - One webinar was held to promote AYN
 - One in-person event (presentation) took place in Halifax for leaders and community members.
 - Additional social media posts were created and provided to further promote the project during the grant time frame and beyond.

***Materials developed:**

For Community Leads/MPALs information materials

- Step-by-step guide as to how to get neighbours involved
- Social media posts to promote the AYN Tactical Guide

For Community Leads/MPALs to use for recruitment

- Bulletin board flyers/posters (with QR codes)
- Blurbs and little graphics to be used in community newsletters, etc.
- Step-by-step guide for neighbours as to how to get involved and use the AYN Tactical Guide
- Pre-made graphics



INDICATORS AND RESULTS

Qualitative Data

1. Increased awareness of the neighbourhood as a space/place for PA
2. Increased knowledge of the neighbourhood as a space/place for PA
3. Increased awareness of the resources and processes within their neighbourhood and communities to implement activities

Quantitative Data

Use and Implementation

- MPALs who engaged with [ActivateYourNeighbourhood.ca](https://activateyourneighbourhood.ca) found it to be a useful framework for community discussions but noted that many residents were unaware of it.
- Some MPALs used the tactics to guide community conversations, but adoption was inconsistent and varied by region.
- The guide was more successfully used as an internal tool by MPALs rather than a widely disseminated community resource.

Barriers to Adoption

- Limited Public Awareness: Many residents were unfamiliar with the guide and did not recognize its relevance to their community activities.
- Perceived Complexity: Some MPALs found the language in the guide too specialized, requiring adaptation to local terminology.
- Lack of Hands-On Support: Community members often felt unsure about implementing activities independently and sought municipal support.
- Staff Turnover: Frequent transitions among MPALs led to gaps in knowledge and implementation continuity.

Festival of Everyone

Halifax



KEY LESSONS LEARNED

ABOUT IMPLEMENTATION IN RURAL NOVA SCOTIA

Competing Priorities and Staff Capacity: Recreation staff in rural communities often juggle multiple roles, and unexpected events (e.g., weather disruptions, lingering post-pandemic recovery) can significantly affect their ability to take on new initiatives — even when those initiatives align with their existing mandates.

Staff Turnover and Continuity Challenges: Transitions within MPAL positions impacted consistency and follow-through. Without a stable point of contact, uptake of the AYN Tactical Guide was diminished in several communities.

Need for Clearer, Simpler Language: Some rural leaders were uncertain as to how to translate the content into their community contexts, especially for neighbours unfamiliar with placemaking concepts.

Adaptations for Future Delivery to Increase Engagement

Localized Coaching and Peer Support: A mentorship or community-of-practice model, where experienced MPALs coach others in applying the AYN Tactical Guide, could help increase uptake and confidence in implementation.

On-the-Ground Animators: Embedding local “activation leads” or part-time placemaking facilitators within rural communities could ensure more consistent follow-through, especially where recreation departments are stretched thin.

Simplified, Modular Tools: Repackaging the AYN Tactical Guide into smaller, step-by-step modules — with examples tailored to rural Nova Scotia — may make the content feel more accessible and actionable.

Insights for Other Provincial Departments

Infrastructure Isn't Enough — Engagement Needs Investment: Even with strong resources and funding, uptake may be limited without dedicated staff time and interpersonal connection to guide implementation. Embedding engagement supports (e.g., training sessions, office hours, roadshows) is key.

Cross-Departmental Collaboration Could Multiply Impact: Departments beyond recreation (e.g., Health, Municipal Affairs, Environment) could benefit from integrating AYN concepts into their work on active transportation, community well-being, and climate-resilient public spaces. The AYN Tactical Guide has the flexibility to support multiple mandates.

Block Party

Getting set up for a block party event in New Glasgow



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CONCLUSION

The ACF grant supported efforts to embed less-structured movement in neighbourhood life by promoting walking, reducing sitting time, and active play through community-led placemaking. While uptake was lower than anticipated, resources and visual cues created through the initiative encourage micro-movements and social interaction — particularly in walkable nodes such as community halls, sidewalks, and parks.

While community engagement was limited due to external factors, the Activate Your Neighbourhood initiative laid essential groundwork for future placemaking and physical activity promotion in Nova Scotia. The insights gained from this pilot have refined the the AYN Tactical Guide, enhanced our understanding of local leader needs, and seeded a network of champions committed to community-led change. With continued collaboration and support, AYN has strong potential to scale its reach and deepen its impact across the province.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Activate Your Neighbourhood:

<https://activateyourneighbourhood.ca/>

Healthy Tomorrow Foundation:

<https://www.healthytomorrow.ca/make-your-move-in-your-community>

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Public Health
Agency of Canada



Bill Fenton Community Garden

Halifax

Before

After



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