

**ACSM**  
AMERICAN  
**FITNESS INDEX**®

# COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT

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# OVERVIEW

The *Community Fitness Assessment* from the [ACSM American Fitness Index®](#) (Fitness Index) helps stakeholders in communities that were not included in the annual Fitness Index rankings apply a similar approach to assessing their community fitness, a concept analogous to individuals having strong personal fitness.

Communities come in all shapes and sizes, and when it comes to assessing your community's fitness using this guide, size and shape matter. The availability of data, the sources for data, and even the relevance of these data will vary depending on the size and location of your community. Likewise, if you wish to compare your community to others for context, it is important to choose peer communities that are similar to yours. In the instructions that follow, we provide guidance on where to look for data about your community, based on its size, how to identify appropriate peer communities, and how to assess your community's areas of excellence and improvement priority areas to guide action. While you may not be able to find data for your community for all of the Fitness Index indicators, we encourage you to use what is available to identify opportunities for action.

This guide will lead you through the steps to complete the *Community Fitness Assessment*:

**STEP 1:** DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY

**STEP 2:** IDENTIFY THE COMMUNITIES YOU WANT TO COMPARE WITH YOUR OWN

**STEP 3:** SEARCH FOR PERSONAL HEALTH INDICATOR DATA

**STEP 4:** SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY/ENVIRONMENT INDICATOR DATA

**STEP 5:** CONSIDER THE OPTION OF A *MINI COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT*

**STEP 6:** INTERPRET THE RESULTS

**STEP 7:** USE THE *COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT PROFILE TO ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVED HEALTH AND FITNESS*

Examples are provided throughout the guide and template assessment worksheets are available in the appendices.

## STEP 1

# DESCRIBE YOUR COMMUNITY



### POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

The population characteristics provide a description of your community that may be helpful when choosing priority populations and strategies for implementing relevant programs, policies, and funding. These measures are also important for identifying the communities you want to compare with your own as discussed in Step 2.

- For communities of all sizes these data are available through the U.S. Census. Enter your community's name in the search bar and look for the community profile.

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS	DATA SOURCE
<b>Population</b>	<a href="#">U.S. Census</a>
% less than 18 years old	
% 65 years and older	
% American Indian or Alaska Native	
% Asian	
% Black or African American	
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	
% White	
% Other Race or Multiple Races	
% Hispanic/Latino	
% with disability	
% high school graduate+	
% households below poverty level	
% under 18 yrs. below poverty level	

## STEP 2

# IDENTIFY THE COMMUNITIES YOU WANT TO COMPARE WITH YOUR OWN



In the Fitness Index rankings, the 100 largest U.S. cities are compared to each other and the averages are reported for these cities. Comparing your community to another community with similar characteristics can provide helpful context for the indicators being monitored, but comparing communities is not a requirement for completing the *Community Fitness Assessment*.

There are a number of possible comparisons you could make which should be guided by the goals of local stakeholders. You could compare your city/county to:

The U.S. on the whole

Your state on the whole

Neighboring or regional cities/counties of similar size and demographics

The 100 city averages reported in the Fitness Index, if your community is also a larger city

Peer cities/counties across the country

Peer cities/counties should be similar in population size, racial/ethnic composition, density, poverty levels, age structure, percent of community with rural or frontier status, among other key characteristics. Data should come from the same sources, cover the same time period and apply to a similar geographic unit (for example, county to county or city to city) in order to make fair and accurate comparisons.

## STEP 3

# SEARCH FOR PERSONAL HEALTH INDICATORS



### PERSONAL HEALTH INDICATORS

The primary data source for personal health indicators (health behaviors and outcomes) in the Fitness Index is the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). There are different ways to access these data depending on the size of your community.

- Data for many cities are available directly from the CDC's SMART: BRFSS City and County Data portal. Data for cities with 500 or more respondents to the annual survey are provided, so many communities not included in the Fitness Index rankings may be able to find their health indicators here.
- If your community is not included in the BRFSS-SMART portal, the CDC offers a second source for community data called PLACES. The PLACES data provide key chronic disease risk factors and health outcomes based on modeled estimates for all counties, census tracts, and zip code tabulation areas (ZCTAs) across the U.S.
- Rates of residents taking public transportation to work and rates of biking or walking to work are available through the U.S. Census American Community Survey.
- Pedestrian fatality rate is available through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

HEALTH BEHAVIORS	DATA SOURCE
% exercising in the previous month	<a href="#">CDC's SMART: BRFSS City and County Data</a>
% meeting aerobic activity guidelines	<a href="#">CDC's PLACES</a>
% meeting both aerobic and strength activity guidelines	
% bicycling or walking to work	<a href="#">U.S. Census American Community Survey</a>
% using public transportation to work	
% consuming 2+ fruits per day	<a href="#">CDC's SMART: BRFSS City and County Data</a>
% consuming 3+ vegetables per day	<a href="#">CDC's PLACES</a>
% sleeping 7+ hours per day	
% currently smoking	

### STEP 3 CONTINUED

HEALTH OUTCOMES	DATA SOURCES
% in excellent or very good health	<a href="#">CDC's SMART: BRFSS City and County Data</a>
% with poor physical health in the previous month	<a href="#">CDC's PLACES</a>
% with poor mental health in the previous month	
% with obesity	
% with asthma	
% with high blood pressure	
% with angina or coronary heart disease	
% with stroke	
% with diabetes	
Pedestrian fatalities/ 100,000 residents	<a href="#">National Highway Traffic Safety Administration</a>



## STEP 5

# SEARCH FOR COMMUNITY/ ENVIRONMENT INDICATORS



### COMMUNITY/ENVIRONMENT INDICATORS

Fitness Index data for parks, park proximity, recreational amenities, and facilities come from a report prepared annually by The Trust for Public Land; however, many smaller communities are not listed in this report. Similar measures may be obtained from city or county websites or directly from the local parks and recreation office. In addition, some of these indicators may lack relevance in smaller and/or rural communities. Community stakeholders should apply their own knowledge of the community and include those indicators that are most relevant.

- Air quality data are available from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Air Now.
- Bike Score (bikeability) and Walk Score (walkability) data can be found at [www.walkscore.com](http://www.walkscore.com). An alternative source for walkability data can be found in the EPA’s National Walkability Index.
- Data on food insecurity can be accessed using Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap interactive map.
- Data regarding parks and recreational facilities in your community may be available through your city or county website or through direct contact with your local city/county parks department or government. While this will be useful information to you, it may not be directly comparable to data collected by The Trust for Public Land or by other communities’ parks departments, so be cautious in making comparisons.

BUILT ENVIRONMENT	DATA SOURCES
Air Quality Index	<a href="#">U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s Air Now</a>
Bike Score (bikeability)	<a href="http://www.walkscore.com">www.walkscore.com</a> <a href="#">EPA’s National Walkability Index</a>
% with food insecurity	<a href="#">Feeding America’s Map the Meal Gap</a>
Parks/ 10,000 residents	<a href="#">Trust for Public Land</a>
% within a 10-minute walk to a park	Local parks department
Walk Score (walkability)	<a href="http://www.walkscore.com">www.walkscore.com</a> <a href="#">EPA’s National Walkability Index</a>

## STEP 4 CONTINUED

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES	DATA SOURCES
Ball diamonds/ 10,000 residents	<a href="#">Trust for Public Land</a>
Basketball hoops/ 10,000 residents	Local parks department
Playgrounds/ 10,000 residents	
Recreation centers/ 20,000	
Swimming pools/ 100,000	
Tennis courts/ 10,000	

### POLICY & FUNDING

Policy indicators in the Fitness Index are assigned a numerical score based on the strength of the policy. Implementation of the policy is not scored in the Fitness Index. Additional information on policies and funding is available from your local government agencies.

- Local government annual budget reports should include park expenditures/funding.
- Local Complete Streets policies are scored by type of policy at the city or county level. Scores favor ordinances, laws, and tax levies as they have more enforcement mechanisms than other policy types. Data on Complete Streets policies are available from Smart Growth America's policy inventory.

Policy Type	Score
Ordinance/ Law, Tax Levy	2
Policy, Design Manual/ Guide, Plan, Internal Policy/ Executive Order, Resolution	1
No Policy Type	0

POLICY & FUNDING	DATA SOURCES
Local Complete Streets policy	<a href="#">Smart Growth America's policy inventory</a>
Park expenditures/ resident	<a href="#">Trust for Public Land</a> Local parks department Local government agencies' annual budgets



## STEP 5

# CONSIDER THE OPTION OF A MINI COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT



If completing the entire *Community Fitness Assessment* is not possible, another option is to complete an abbreviated version using fewer indicators. To use the *Mini Community Fitness Assessment*, select the Fitness Index indicators most important to your community as shown in the list below, then collect the data needed and complete the assessment as described above.

### MINI ASSESSMENT INDICATORS

#### POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS

- Population
- Poverty indicator

#### HEALTH BEHAVIORS

- Physical activity indicator
- Healthy eating indicator
- Other health behavior indicator

#### HEALTH OUTCOMES

- Physical health indicator
- Mental health indicator
- Other health outcomes indicator

#### BUILT ENVIRONMENT

- Air quality indicator
- Food access indicator
- Local parks indicator

#### RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

- Recreational facility indicator #1
- Recreational facility indicator #2

#### POLICY & FUNDING

- Policy or funding indicator

## STEP 6

# INTERPRET THE RESULTS<sup>1</sup>



Now that you have all available data for your community and any comparison communities, it is time to take a close look at the data to determine areas of excellence and improvement priority areas. The purpose of this comparison is to gain a *relative* sense of the fitness of your community compared to others or compared to previously collected baseline data for your community to help stakeholders determine priorities for action. This comparison is not designed to determine statistically significant differences or to calculate scores for ranking as in the Fitness Index. Conclusions drawn from the comparisons should be interpreted with caution since not all underlying differences may be considered.

After collecting the indicator data, calculate the difference between your community and the comparison community and/or state or national data. Subtract the comparison community's data from your community's value and enter the result in the corresponding box. Next, assess if the difference is relatively better, worse, or similar when compared to your community. Keep in mind that we want some indicators to go down, like heart disease, and other indicators to increase, like fruit and vegetable consumption.

Examples are provided under each category to demonstrate this approach. Data in the examples below are for illustrative purposes only and should not be used in the assessment of your community.

### AREAS OF EXCELLENCE

These are areas where your community's value is **better** than most or all of your comparison communities. Highlight these areas of excellence and celebrate the efforts of those who helped your community develop these good attributes.

Indicator	My Community Riverside	Comparison Community Santa Ana	State California
<b>% with angina or coronary heart disease</b>	1.7%	4.4%	8.4%
Difference:		-2.7%	-6.7%
My community is:		better	better
This is a(n):	<b>ADVANTAGE</b>		

<sup>1</sup>Use of the Community Fitness Assessment is not meant to create a score comparable to a score or ranking found in the annual ACSM American Fitness Index rankings. Please refer to the [ACSM American Fitness Index Terms of Use](#) when replicating and using data found in the rankings and reports.

## STEP 6 CONTINUED

### IMPROVEMENT PRIORITY AREAS

Improvement priority areas exist where your community's value is **worse** than most or all of your comparison communities. The degree of the difference matters too, so take this into consideration when setting priorities for action. These are potential targets for implementing local initiatives to improve these measures.

Indicator	My Community Riverside	Comparison Community Santa Ana	State California
<b>% with obesity</b>	29.2%	19.6%	26.2%
Difference:		9.6%	3.0%
My community is:		worse	worse
This is a(n):	<b>CHALLENGE</b>		

### SIMILAR

Having results similar to others shows that your community has fitness levels that are about the **same** as others in this area. Depending on your community's history, this may be a sign of progress. However, it may still be at a level that indicates it needs attention. For example, a rate of 3.2% of residents walking or biking to work, even if it is in line with other communities, is still a public health concern that warrants action.

Indicator	My Community Riverside	Comparison Community Santa Ana	State California
<b>% bicycling or walking to work</b>	3.2%	2.6%	2.6%
Difference:		0.6%	0.6%
My community is:		similar	similar
This is a(n):	<b>SIMILAR</b>		

### MIXED OR MISSING MEASURES

Sometimes, results will be **mixed** or the comparison data may not be available. In comparison to other communities, your community is doing better than some and worse than others or there is not a clear pattern. Put these on a watch list and see how things change next year, or invite discussion among stakeholders to learn more about the community context.

Indicator	My Community Riverside	Comparison Community Santa Ana	State California
<b>% meeting aerobic activity guidelines</b>	56.9%	59.9%	55.0%
Difference:		-3.0%	1.9%
My community is:		worse	better
This is a(n):	<b>MIXED RESULT</b>		

## STEP 7

# USE THE COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT PROFILE TO ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVED FITNESS

The purpose of completing the *Community Fitness Assessment* is to help local stakeholders better understand residents' physical activity levels, health status, and community assets to help guide strategic planning activities. Now that you have collected and assessed your community's information, remember to celebrate your community's successes and work with stakeholders to develop an action plan to improve those measures that need attention. Keep in mind that any work on a local challenge moves your community toward improved health and quality of life. Consult the [Fitness Index website](#) for tools and resources to focus local policy, funding, and programmatic efforts.



**APPENDIX**

# COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT WORKSHEETS

POPULATION CHARACTERISTICS	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>Population</b>			
& less than 18 years old			
% 65 years and older			
% American Indian or Alaska Native			
% Asian			
% Black or African American			
% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander			
% White			
% Other Race or Multiple Races			
% Hispanic/Latino			
% with disability			
% high school graduate+			
% households below poverty level			
% under 18 yrs. below poverty level			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

HEALTH BEHAVIORS	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
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**% exercising in the previous month**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**% meeting aerobic activity guidelines**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**% meeting both aerobic and strength activity guidelines**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**% bicycling or walking to work**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**% using public transportation to work**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

HEALTH BEHAVIORS	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>% consuming 2+ fruits per day</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% consuming 3+ vegetables per day</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% sleeping 7+ hours per day</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% currently smoking</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

HEALTH OUTCOMES	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>% in excellent or very good health</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with poor physical health in the previous month</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with poor mental health in the previous month</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with obesity</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			



APPENDIX CONTINUED

HEALTH OUTCOMES	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>% with asthma</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with high blood pressure</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with angina or coronary heart disease</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% with stroke</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

HEALTH OUTCOMES	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
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**% with diabetes**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**Pedestrian fatalities/ 100,000 residents**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

BUILT ENVIRONMENT	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
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**Air Quality Index**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**Bike Score (bikeability)**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

BUILT ENVIRONMENT	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>% with food insecurity</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>Parks/ 10,000 residents</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>% within a 10-minute walk to a park</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>Walk Score (walkability)</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
<b>Ball diamonds/ 10,000 residents</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>Basketball hoops/ 10,000 residents</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>Playgrounds/ 10,000 residents</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			
<b>Recreation centers/ 20,000</b>			
Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

APPENDIX CONTINUED

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
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**Swimming pools/ 100,000**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**Tennis courts/ 10,000**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

POLICY	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	U.S. OR STATE COMPARISON
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**Local Complete Streets policy**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

**Park expenditures/ resident**

Difference:			
My community is (similar, better, worse):			
This is a(n) (advantage, challenge, similar, mixed result):			

## APPENDIX

# MINI COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT

MINI ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	INDICATOR SELECTED	MY COMMUNITY	COMPARISON COMMUNITY	THIS IS A(N) (ADVANTAGE, CHALLENGE, SIMILAR):
<b>Population Characteristics</b>				
Population				
Poverty indicator				
<b>Health Behaviors</b>				
Physical activity indicator				
Healthy eating indicator				
Other health behavior indicator				
<b>Health Outcomes</b>				
Physical health indicator				
Mental health indicator				
Other health outcomes indicator behavior indicator				
<b>Built Environment</b>				
Air quality indicator				
Food access indicator				
Local parks indicator				
<b>Recreational Facilities</b>				
Recreational facility indicator				
Recreational facility indicator				
<b>Policy &amp; Funding</b>				
Policy or funding indicator				

## EXAMPLE MINI COMMUNITY FITNESS ASSESSMENT

MINI ASSESSMENT INDICATORS	INDICATOR SELECTED	MY COMMUNITY RIVERSIDE	COMPARISON COMMUNITY SANTA ANA	THIS IS A(N) (ADVANTAGE, CHALLENGE, SIMILAR):
<b>Population Characteristics</b>				
Population	City Population	331,360	332,318	
Poverty indicator	% under 18 yrs. below poverty level	12.5%	18.6%	
<b>Health Behaviors</b>				
Physical activity indicator	% meeting aerobic & strength activity guidelines	25.4%	25.4%	Similar
Healthy eating indicator	% consuming 2+ fruits per day	33.9%	35.7%	Challenge
Other health behavior indicator	% smoking	10.3%	7.8%	Challenge
<b>Health Outcomes</b>				
Physical health indicator	% with diabetes	12.1%	8.2%	Challenge
Mental health indicator	% with poor mental health in the previous month	34.8%	35.0%	Similar
Other health outcomes indicator	% with angina or heart disease	1.7%	4.4%	Advantage
<b>Built Environment</b>				
Air quality indicator	Air Quality Index	14.0%	54.2%	Challenge
Food access indicator	% with food insecurity	10.0%	8.5%	Challenge
Local parks indicator	Parks/ 10,000 residents	2.1	1.4	Similar
<b>Recreational Facilities</b>				
Recreational facility indicator	Playgrounds/ 10,000 residents	1.5	1.0	Similar
Recreational facility indicator	Recreation centers/ 20,000	1.1	0.9	Similar
<b>Policy &amp; Funding</b>				
Policy or funding indicator	Park expenditures/ resident	\$70	\$43	Advantage

Visit [acsm.org/fitnessindex](https://acsm.org/fitnessindex)  
to compare city rankings and download  
resources for your city.

