

## **ABSTRACT**

*Improving community walkability requires an understanding of existing infrastructure and user perception and behavior, as well as expertise in physical design. Because local leaders often lack access to this type of information, a University Extension Outreach program for small communities was developed that reframes expert assessment as a community-learning experience using digital technology, user perceptions, facilitated evaluation, and infrastructure data collection.*

*The methods implemented identified user perceptions of assets, barriers, and opportunities for improving walkability (and bikeability) and documented how walkers and cyclists interact with the environment. Using local experience as a foundation for participatory planning, these methods allowed residents to make meaningful discovery about community infrastructure, while the hard evidence generated in the facilitated infrastructure assessments reinforced decisions about the investment of scarce funds.*

*This crowdsourcing method is beneficial beyond the raw data. For instance, inviting citizens and civic leaders to experience infrastructure conditions firsthand through assessing the community's transportation network and discussing issues they discovered strengthens the local walkability coalition.*

*This paper presents the methodology employed in more than 50 Iowa communities to collect user perceptions, evaluate the current infrastructure, and present that information in a format appropriate for both local leaders and the general public. Through this participatory research process, local leaders were able to make informed decisions regarding changes necessary to improve walkability (and bikeability) in their community.*