Welcome to this introduction to components of *The Neighborhood Wayfinding Assessment Pocket Guide*. We hope it will answer questions you may have about the checklist and the things you observe in your assessment. Wayfinding is a simple concept - being able to find your way in both familiar and unfamiliar places – but it is often easier said than done! The checklist includes items about many community and neighborhood features, including safety and accessibility. Safety features are included because unsafe environments make wayfinding more difficult, and poor wayfinding can create unsafe conditions. Also, less accessible environments complicate wayfinding.

*The Neighborhood Wayfinding Assessment Pocket Guide* was developed through a partnership of Easter Seals Project ACTION ([http://www.projectaction.org](http://www.projectaction.org)) and the CDC-Healthy Aging Research Network ([http://www.prc-han.org](http://www.prc-han.org)). It includes items adapted from the CDC-HAN Environmental Audit Tool, a measure of neighborhood walkability, safety, comfort and appeal, accessibility and land use. Additional information about the CDC-HAN Environmental Audit Tool is available on the CDC-HAN website listed above.

Wayfinding is very important to people of all ages and abilities. People want to be confident that they can get where they want to go. They depend on wayfinding aids and cues in the environment (for example, landmarks and signs), as well as other tools like maps and GPS devices. Wayfinding includes *orientation* (where I am) and *navigation* (how do I get where I want to go). Wayfinding is more challenging to people who are in unfamiliar territory or those who are stressed or who have some degree of memory loss.
In completing the checklist, remember that people get around by walking and wheeling, for example, using a wheelchair or scooter. Look at the areas where people walk or wheel as well as the spaces that surround those activities. Try to think from the perspective of different travelers. For example, consider what challenges someone using wheelchair might face: could that person easily reach the pedestrian walk signal or read transit information at the bus stop? Would someone with limited vision have difficulty reading faded street signs?

Let’s also keep in mind that people walk in all different kinds of places. We all have to find our way from place to place whether we live in a city, the suburbs or in the country.

To do your assessment, it’s best to do one block (or other small area) at a time. Establish a start point, then walk the block on both sides to gain a general impression, then do your ratings. Taking photos is very helpful, especially of problem areas or areas where it is unclear how best to rate. Photos also help you document your work and can be put into reports and shared with city officials. Be sure to carefully record where each photo was taken.
We've all had the experience of trying to find our way around in an unfamiliar place, looking in vain for informative signs. Street signs are clearly important in wayfinding. Signs can be on posts, over the intersection, or on buildings. Ideally, all of the intersecting streets are clearly identified by name. Sometimes one or more street names are missing – this can be a real problem. You should be able to see signs walking from both directions.

Sometimes signs are present, but are dirty or faded like the one in the upper right of the picture. They may be poorly lighted and therefore difficult to see at night. On the bottom left and center are two signs, one with a block number and one without. Having block numbers is very helpful in wayfinding. Without numbers, it is more difficult to know if you are heading toward or away from your destination.

Inconsistent or poor placement of signs is also a problem. You should expect to see a sign in roughly the same location at each intersection. This is especially key for drivers.

Other aids help us in wayfinding. You may find a directional sign or marker that is not a street sign. The photo on the left (a) is a good example. People also use landmarks a lot in wayfinding. At center left (b) is a whimsical mushroom that many people would be likely to notice as a landmark. Similarly, the red building (c) stands out and is memorable. Open or green space (d) also is likely to serve as a memory aid. On the right (e) is an example of an information kiosk that may include an area map.

"You are here" aids (for example, the large area map on the left) are very useful. They show the area and also, most importantly, mark the spot where the map is located so that people can orient themselves or "get their bearings." Text and icons are also helpful in helping people locate places, entrances and know where to walk. Examples of pairings of text and icons include restroom sign plus symbol; transit station sign plus symbol of bus; zoo sign plus picture of animal. Visual or audible aids for people with special needs are also very helpful. For example, the area map on the left might have a button to push to get audible information or have the same information in Braille.
Wayfinding aids, as described in Question 3, are of little value if they are inaccessible or otherwise problematic. Check any of these problems you observe. Is the aid close by the walkway? Is the aid accessible to someone using a wheelchair or walker? Is it legible or is text too small, dirty, faded or obstructed? Is the aid poorly lighted? These are important problems to capture, and the good news is that such problems are often easily remedied.

At night or other low light conditions, good lighting is essential to wayfinding, but also critical to safety in terms of walking, crash avoidance and crime. Note the distinction between very high overhead streetlights over the roadway and pedestrian lighting typically closer to the walkway. The photos show well-placed pedestrian lampposts.

Trees are very valuable in providing shade, but also add aesthetic value. There are also other sources of shade that you might count, such as porticos or awnings. Places to rest are important, especially to people with health conditions or families with young children. Bicycle racks are useful and handrails on stairs and ramps are critical to safety, accessibility, and wayfinding. Indicate if there are restrooms that are open to the public, for example, in public building or fast food restaurants, and accessible (and no, we are not suggesting that the Porta-Potty is a good choice!). Working drinking fountains and phones or call boxes are a plus.
Walkways are of the utmost importance from pedestrian safety, accessibility and wayfinding perspectives. Walkways should continue into from one block to the next as in the top photo. They should be wide enough for a wheelchair and free of obstructions that can make a walkway impassible for someone using a mobility aid like a walker. Obstructions can be permanent, like telephone poles, or temporary, like the recycling bins in the photo. Walkways can also be in poor condition with heaves, misalignment, cracks, or weeds that might constitute a tripping hazard.

When thinking about the width of the walkway, it is helpful to consider that 5 feet is the recommended width of the area where people walk or wheel. Many older sidewalks will only be 3-4 feet wide. This illustration shows zones of use and the actual pedestrian zone.

Some driveways, streets or alleyways slope through the pedestrian walkway as in the top photo. Cross slopes are especially problematic for people with gait or balance problems.

Pedestrian pathway markings tell people where to walk (and drivers where to expect pedestrians). As illustrated in the photos, such markings can consist of high visibility white lines or different pavement treatments or colors.
Railings or fences should be present at drop-offs or where people are at risk of a fall (see top right photo).

Curb ramps (often called curb cuts) are areas that are sloped from the walkway into the intersection to make the transition as easy as possible for all users. In the photo on the right, you see a situation where a sidewalk has ended, but there is no curb ramp. That presents a real challenge for the man with the walker, putting him at risk for a fall. On the bottom left is a curb ramp in poor condition.

Based on what you have seen, decide if there are barriers or hazards for people with specific characteristics: users of assistive devices; people with visual impairments or who are hard of hearing or deaf or who have problems with memory or judgment; and those who tire easily or need to rest. For example, very narrow walkways or poor curb ramps might be a problem for people who use assistive devices, while missing street signs might be challenging for people with memory or judgment problems.

Intersections demand that you take into account many factors: vehicles, signals, other pedestrians, the step down into the crossing, the walking surface. They also require judgment, for example, calculating whether you have sufficient time to cross or deciding whether the motorist can see you. Intersection controls (signs and signals) reduce free flowing vehicle movements and increase safety for pedestrians. Check the type in place at each intersection.
Note whether there are whether there are signals especially for pedestrians, checking all that apply. The first option – pedestrian “Walk” signals - simply refers to the presence of a “walk” signal for pedestrians. The photo on the right is a pedestrian push button (option 2) allowing the pedestrian to “request” a walk signal. For option 3 referring to push button accessibility, determine if someone could easily reach the push button in a wheelchair or using a walker. Determine if there is also an audible walk signal (option 4) for those with visual challenges. Finally (option 5) indicate if there is a countdown signal as in the photo on the left, showing seconds to cross.

Next check the crossing time at the intersection, walking slowly at a pace similar to what might be used by a person in a manual wheelchair or walker.

Determine if the crossing time is adequate for a slow walker (If a countdown signal is present, the time includes the white “walk” time plus flashing “don’t walk” time).

List any intersections where the crossing time seems inadequate.

Now rate the overall crossing risk for walkers with functional limitations, be it vision, memory, or mobility problems. The options are as follows: 
Low = Barriers or hazards exist, but can be easily avoided.
Example: pothole in crossing path with room to walk around
Moderate = Barriers or hazards that can be avoided but with difficulty. Example: potholes in crossing that would force wheelchair outside the crosswalk
High = Barriers or hazards make crossing inaccessible or extremely dangerous. Example: very short crossing time with vehicles turning into crosswalk during walk signal
Transit stops are often destinations in wayfinding and should be clearly marked and accessible to all. The photo on the lower right is a bus stop that would be inaccessible to someone using a wheelchair or other mobility device.

Transit stops can also be valuable sources of information for wayfinding. Ideally route information is posted or available in brochures at the transit stop.

Once you have completed the checklist, there is great potential to use findings to guide environmental change in areas like those suggested here and in the *Neighborhood Wayfinding Assessment Pocket Guide*. Other options include creating maps of safe walking routes, educating the public and residents about wayfinding and how they can contribute, engaging law enforcement in problem areas, and in general, improving the walking environment. See the *Neighborhood Wayfinding Assessment Pocket Guide* for steps you can take.


Information about the CDC-Healthy Aging Research Network is available at [http://www.prc-han.org](http://www.prc-han.org)

For technical assistance, contact Rebecca Hunter at Rebecca_Hunter@unc.edu
Some key background resources are listed here.

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