

FAQ: Blue Zones Project and Site Visit Process

Q: What will happen in your community first?

The Blue Zones Project® has been invited to your community to present the Blue Zones Project to community to conduct a community readiness assessment in order to ascertain the interest, readiness and opportunities for success in undertaking a Blue Zones Project community transformation initiative. The assessment work will culminate in a report summarizing the current state of well being in your community as well as opportunities and challenges facing the community. The report will be used to inform a Blue Zones Project community implementation Blueprint and work plan. The assessment process is leveraged as an opportunity to create project awareness and excitement and has helped to identify potential sponsorship partners.

Q: What is the Blue Zones Project?

Blue Zones Project® is a community-wide well-being improvement initiative designed to make healthy choices easier. We do this by encouraging sustainable changes in our built environment, building environments and social networks, often suggesting policy changes throughout our community including such places as worksites, schools, restaurants, grocery stores, faith based communities, convenience stores and neighborhoods. By helping people live longer and better through behavior change, communities can lower healthcare costs, improve productivity, and enjoy a higher quality of life as they live, work, learn, worship and grow. The program is based on principles identified during a ten-year worldwide longevity study commissioned by National Geographic and detailed in the New York Times best-seller, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest*, by Dan Buettner.

Q: Where did the concept of the Blue Zones Project come from?

The Blue Zones Project is inspired by research about the regions of the world with the highest concentrations of centenarians (people who live to be 100 years or older). There are five Blue Zones regions: Loma Linda, California; Okinawa, Japan; Nicoya, Costa Rica; Sardinia, Italy; and Ikaria, Greece. These areas share nine common traits that contribute to people's longevity, called the Power 9®, and you can learn more about them in *National Geographic Magazine* and the *New York Times* best-selling book, *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer from the People Who've Lived the Longest and The Blue Zones Solution*.

Q: What are the goals of Blue Zones Project?

The project seeks to improve the overall well-being of your community's residents. Well-being is a measure of a person's overall physical, social and emotional health. Higher well-being leads to lower healthcare costs, higher productivity and increased economic vitality, and offers benefits for everybody.

Outcome goals include:

- Improving well-being, as measured by the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index (described in more detail below)
- Generating significant medical cost savings and productivity improvement
- Lowering the obesity rate
- Lowering smoking rates
- Increasing vegetable consumption
- Increasing daily physical activity levels
- Drive significant media attention to your community
- And leverage this inclusive and systematic approach to secure grants, gifts, and funding for your community

Q: How does the Blue Zones Project approach differ from other health initiatives?

Many traditional health initiatives offer mainly diet and exercise programs that are right-minded, but rarely sustainable over time. Additionally, they are often narrowly focused on physical health and are often put into practice without consideration for existing community engagement programs. The Blue Zones Project focuses instead on comprehensively changing a community's environments so that individuals are nudged subtly and relentlessly into making healthy choices. The Blue Zones Project is unique because it takes a systematic environmental approach to improving well-being through policy, programs, building design, social networks, and the built environment.

Q: Has this type of community-wide initiative been successful before?

Yes, successes in other communities where this program has been deployed include the following impressive statistics:

Beach Cities, CA: (2010-2013)

- 14% drop in obesity with an estimated 1,645 fewer obese adults. Lost pounds translate to \$2.35M in healthcare-related savings for Beach Cities businesses and residents from 2010 - 2012
- 30% drop in smoking or 3,484 fewer smokers. This decrease equates to \$6.97M in healthcare-related savings between 2010-2012
- Exercise rates increased by more than 10% as more people reported exercising at least 30 minutes, three times per week. Healthy eating habits improved 10% with more people reporting eating five plus servings of fruits and vegetables four or more days in the past week.
- Fourteen schools in the Cities of Hermosa Beach, Manhattan Beach, and Redondo Beach, CA started Walking School Bus (WSB) Programs. A third of all Beach Cities students now walk to school, resulting in approximately 11,000 miles walked and 15,000 car trips saved.
- 12 of the city's top 20 worksites implements campus-wide tobacco-free policies
- ***"It's a rare thing that you can come up with a real measurable success like this in the public health field. We are the envy of the public health world right now."*** - Susan Burden, CEO Beach Cities Health District

Albert Lea, MN: (2008-2011)

- 51% of large employers participated
- Absenteeism reported down by 20%
- Grocery stores report 46% sales gain in 36 healthy foods
- Average life expectancy gained: 3.2 years
- Average weight loss: 2.8 pounds
- 40% reduction reported in city workers' health care costs
- Smoking rates declined from 23 percent to 19 percent from 2010–2012 according to county health rankings by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Work completed in 2009; City renewed commitment in 2014
- ***“The Blue Zones Project helped our community set amazing, aggressive, and achievable strategies that moved the Public Health agenda further in 10 months than what I could have expected in 10 years.” – Lois Ahern, Director of Freeborn County Health (retired), Albert Lea, MN***

State of Iowa: (2012-Current)

- 56 communities competed to become demonstration sites; 10 selected
- Six communities certified to-date; nine cities are still in progress
- As part of Blue Zones Project, several cities have adopted Complete Streets Policies. In 2014, policies adopted by three Blue Zones Project sites in Iowa (Muscatine, Cedar Falls, and Waterloo) were ranked in the top 15 strongest policies out of over 80 Complete Streets policies adopted in the same year.
- More than 200,000 Iowans statewide have pledged their support for Blue Zones Project.
- 440+ Blue Zones designated organizations (worksite, restaurants, groceries, schools)
- More than 315 worksites are improving well-being and supporting healthy options for employees
- More than 30 schools are adding more movement into kids' days and improving food choices
- More than 35 grocery stores are encouraging citizens to stock up on healthy choices
- More than 60 restaurants are adding new menu items and making the healthy choice the default
- Many communities have received grant funding due to their built environment work and this inclusive and systematic community health initiative
- ***“The Blue Zones Project is a community by community, business by business movement that will help Iowa communities make a lasting difference in their health and well-being. By making changes to our environment and social networks, Iowans can not only live longer, we can also live better.” - Terry Branstad, Governor, State of Iowa***

Q: Is the Blue Zones Project meant to replace existing programs?

No. The Blue Zones Project® work is focused on collaboration and leveraging what is already working well within a community. When the Blue Zones Project team begins work in a community, the first several months include meetings with stakeholder groups to better understand efforts underway. It is understandable that when a new approach is introduced it can trigger concerns. Typically, existing programs that do similar work see their visibility enhanced. Leaders and organizations already doing similar work typically sit on Blue Zones Project committees and help lead these efforts.

Q: What is The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index and what is its role in the Blue Zones Project?

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index is the measurement tool of the effectiveness of the Blue Zones Project. The Well-Being Index is the first-ever daily assessment of U.S. residents' health and well-being. By interviewing at least 500 U.S. adults every day, the WBI provides real-time measurement and insights needed to improve health, increase productivity, and lower healthcare costs. Well-being is measured across populations (organizations, cities, states, congressional districts and nationally) by the WBI, which consists of the average of five sub-indexes: Purpose, Social, Financial, Community, and Physical. Public and private sector leaders use WBI data on life evaluation, physical health, emotional health, healthy behavior, work environment, and basic access to develop and prioritize strategies to help their communities thrive and grow.

Q: What does the 2 day site visit include?

The 2 day site visit is the first of three visits into the community and is part of our community development agreement, which includes preliminary research into the community's institutions, economy, and initiatives underway, as well as the major health issues facing the community. The Blue Zones Project team will review existing assessments and plans to gather this information, including but not limited to community health needs assessments, community health improvement plans, city planning documents, economic development plans, and reports from the chambers of commerce or business improvement districts. A 2-day site visit with a kick-off presentation, 1 on 1 with community leadership and focus groups follow the community research period. The kick-off presentation will give key stakeholders in the community an overview of Blue Zones Project and what it means to become a Blue Zones Community. This will be followed by a series of focus group meetings with stakeholders from various sectors including government, worksites, schools, grocery stores, restaurants, faith-based groups, media, non-profits and civic organizations. The focus groups are our opportunity to gauge the community's interest in Blue Zones Project, learn about current efforts to improve well-being in the community, identify community leaders and influencers', and capture strengths and areas for improvement. In addition to focus group meetings, we will bring in a livability expert to assess the built environment and identify areas for improvement to create a more walkable, bikeable, livable community.

Q: How can I get involved in the Assessment?

Individuals and organizations can get more involved by attending the stakeholder kick-off presentation and participating in the focus groups that follow. Your participation is critical so we can learn more about your community and hear your thoughts about its strengths and opportunities for improving well-being for all of its citizens. Be on the look-out for email invitations and media inviting you to attend the kick-off presentation once an assessment is ordered and participate in the focus groups. Everyone is encouraged to take part!

Q: What happens after the Site Visit?

30 days after the Site Visit the Blue Zones Project team will return with a customized proposal for a Blue Zones Project in your community, and a report that summarizes the state of well-being, and opportunities and challenges that the community faces in the various sectors. After this second proposal visit, our team will work with community leaders and potential funders over the next few months and a decision will be made to either move forward with a project or not.

Q: What does community transformation look like?

Blue Zones Project utilizes many strategies for improving well-being although not all will be necessary or applicable in your community. Strategies will be chosen based on the Blue Zones Project team's community assessment and the Blueprint planning done by a core leadership team, made up of citizens and leaders from your community.

Employers (public, private, and not-for-profit) will be offered no-cost tools to improve employee productivity and well-being. Individuals will have access to free tools that will help them create healthier surroundings for themselves, their families and the community. These include checklists for setting up a home to improve well-being, an online quiz to project longevity and a coaching tool to improve your outcome, and workshops to deepen a sense of purpose, make new friends, and explore healthier eating. Civic leaders will play a key role by adopting and implementing best practices in policies and programs to improve the built environment, food environment, and smoke-free environment. Restaurants, schools, grocery stores, faith-based communities and other organizations will participate by pledging to make changes that will create healthier environments for customers, students, members and residents. Local media outlets will spread the word about Blue Zones Project and encourage participation. We see upwards of 80% of residences in communities we work in aware of the project and 45% plus participating.

Some of the typical changes you can expect:

- Walking school buses that provide students with at least a mile of walking each day
- Partnerships with local grocery stores to promote healthy foods
- Planning for walking and biking paths that promote human-powered transportation
- Establishment of walking, healthy eating and purpose groups that encourage social engagement
- Helping local restaurants change menus to include more appealing, healthier choices that can also help them

grow their customer base and revenue

- Creation of healthier worksites making healthier choices easier
- Reducing snacking and increasing physical activity in schools

Q: Who are Healthways and Blue Zones?

Healthways. For more than three decades, Healthways has been dedicated to making the world a healthier place, one person at a time. Millions of people around the world count on Healthways solutions to make a positive difference in their well-being, and a wide variety of organizations rely on Healthways to drive healthcare savings. Healthways solutions keep healthy people healthy, reduce risks by changing health-related behaviors and optimize care for those with serious health concerns. Healthways solutions influence individual well-being, including physical health and social and emotional factors, by reaching out in ways that are most effective for each person. For more information, visit www.healthways.com.

Blue Zones. Blue Zones employs evidence-based ways to help people live longer, better. The company's work is rooted in *The New York Times* best-selling books *The Blue Zones*, *Thrive*, and *The Blue Zones Solution*—all published by National Geographic books. In 2009, Blue Zones applied the tenets of the books to Albert Lea, MN, and successfully raised life expectancy and lowered healthcare costs for city workers by 40%. Blue Zones takes a systematic, environmental approach to well-being that focuses on optimizing policy, building design, social networks, and the built environment. The Blue Zones Project is based on this innovative approach. For more information, visit www.bluezones.com.

Q: Where can I find more information about the Blue Zones Project?

Visit us online at www.bluezonesproject.com.

Ted Med Video: How to Live to be 100 - Dan Buettner: Share this TedMed video with people who are interested in learning more about the origins of Blue Zones Project and the original Blue Zones areas.

Video: Blue Zones Project: Share this short, informational video via email with your networks or on your social media channels. It quickly sums up what we do and how we do it.