



MOVE MORE NORTH CAROLINA:

A Guide to Wayfinding



Everyone, every day engages in wayfinding as they move from place to place, whether walking, riding a bike, driving or using public transportation. The term wayfinding is used to define both the process by which people navigate from place to place and the cues, aids and signs in an area that help guide them to their destination. Wayfinding includes recognizing where you are, knowing where you want to go, deciding what path or route to take and realizing when you have arrived.

Move More North Carolina: *A Guide to Wayfinding*

This guide is for community members who want to use wayfinding to improve walkability and increase physical activity in their community.

Wayfinding provides information and directs people to specific places. People prefer to find the path to their destination quickly and easily. If people believe they can navigate a new area successfully, they are more likely to explore, stay longer and return frequently. Wayfinding is commonly used to help community residents and visitors find local attractions and businesses. Good wayfinding also supports the health and safety of all walkers, bike riders, drivers and transit users. Increasingly, wayfinding is being used to encourage people to leave their cars and walk or bike to their destination.

Walking and wayfinding are interconnected activities. Wayfinding is an important part of creating walkable communities and is a powerful way to impact the health of the people in a community because:

- Walking is an easy way to start and maintain an active lifestyle.
- Walking is a great way to connect with friends and family.
- Walking serves many purposes. It can be a way to exercise, have fun, or get to school, work or other nearby places.

Improving wayfinding in a community is important because:

- Wayfinding makes it easier to walk, bike and use public transportation.
- Wayfinding reduces the risk of getting lost or injured.
- Wayfinding creates identifiable communities that people recognize, feel connected to, and are comfortable being in.
- Wayfinding improves air quality through reduced vehicle use and improved traffic flow.

Wayfinding is more than just signs—it includes cues and aids such as landmarks, pathways and markers that help to guide us to our destination, identify our location during the trip and return us to our starting point. Successful wayfinding systems provide information for users to:

- Confirm they are at the correct start or finish point of their journey.
- Identify their location within a space (show where they are or how far they have travelled).
- Reinforce that they are traveling in the right direction.
- Help understand what else is in the area and warn of any potential hazards.



Good wayfinding routes are easy to navigate, simple to remember, usable both day and night, appropriate for persons of all abilities and open in all types of weather.

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COVER IMAGES
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Good accessibility and ease of wayfinding go hand in hand. Essential are uninterrupted, well-maintained, obstacle-free walkways; curb ramps and safe crossings that can accommodate slower walkers and people with low vision; handrails and barriers when needed for safety; and easy access to/from transit.¹

Good wayfinding design provides visitors with the confidence that they can successfully navigate unfamiliar places and reduces stress and anxiety. The best wayfinding systems take into consideration all modes of transportation. Effective wayfinding planning is rarely as simple as putting up a few signs. The following key stakeholders could be engaged in the planning process: design professionals, urban planners, engineers, public health personnel, elected officials, consultants, transportation planners, developers, public works officials, aging and disability organizations, private sector organizations (e.g., chambers of commerce), recreational facilities and citizens. Before starting the project, it is important to determine the wayfinding goals (e.g., increase walking, reduce traffic congestion, highlight area attractions, increase use of public transportation, direct people to specific destinations). For ten steps to developing a wayfinding system, turn to the back.

Good wayfinding enhances the quality of life of individuals and communities. Communities of all sizes are using wayfinding to promote walking and walkability. Use this guide as the first step in making your community a walkable, healthier community.

The five elements of wayfinding include:

- 1. Routes** (paths, walkways, roadways and public transit routes) show us where to go. Routes should be continuous and allow people to get to their destinations without detours or dead ends.
- 2. Edges** form boundaries, mark where the route begins or ends, and keep travelers from straying off course. Edges can be natural barriers such as rivers or man-made barriers such as fences.
- 3. Zones/Districts** are recognizable neighborhoods that help us understand where we are and when we may be crossing a boundary into another area.
- 4. Nodes** are intersections or recognizable meeting places that serve as points on the route where people decide where to go next.
- 5. Landmarks** are objects that stand out, for example, distinctive buildings, monuments, fountains or distant mountains, which help us orient ourselves and serve as markers for finding our way.

The journey to better health begins with a single step.

—Vivek H. Murthy, M.D., former U.S. Surgeon General





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Ten Steps to Developing a Wayfinding System²

- 1** Assess the current wayfinding system in the community by conducting a thorough wayfinding audit.
- 2** Determine all the entrance and exit points of the wayfinding system.
- 3** Divide the route into smaller segments. (Make sure you don't break up an already designated or cohesive space. Preserve the connectivity between the spaces.) Create an identity at each location to distinguish it from the others. The goal is to create recognizable points of reference in the larger space.
- 4** Designate landmarks to be used to provide orientation cues.
- 5** Develop wayfinding signs that communicate a clear message. All signage along a route should have a consistent color scheme and general layout, consistent logos, maps and artwork. There are four basic types of wayfinding signs³:
 - Identification signs identify a destination or space.
 - Directional signs direct people to various destinations.
 - Warning signs alert people of danger or safety procedures within an environment.
 - Informational signs provide information on a location's history, geography, inhabitants, artifacts and more.
- 6** Determine where all information (e.g., signs, kiosks, maps) will be located. Make sure to place information near or at decision points.
- 7** Create well-structured paths. Use color and texture changes on walkways to signal transitions (e.g., from sidewalks to street crossings).
- 8** Limit the number of choices in navigation.
- 9** Add walking time information on signs and maps. Identify areas within a 5- to 15-minute walking distance to encourage walking.
- 10** Ensure, whenever possible, that there are clear, unobstructed sight lines so everyone can see what's ahead.

References

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