



To your office health

Cities and towns aim for a healthy workforce

EVERY CITY WANTS a healthy workforce. It reduces health care costs, increases productivity, and improves morale. Recognizing that healthy people work in healthy places, municipalities are examining their workplace policies and practices and making changes that will promote healthy environments for their employees.

Many cities and towns are adopting workplace wellness policies and practices to create environments where making healthy choices is easy for their staff members.

Two early steps toward building a healthy workplace are to:

1. Appoint wellness leaders

You'll need some champions of the cause in the form of a wellness committee or wellness leader. These are employees who are passionate about wellness and can serve as role models to others.

If you form a committee, ensure that the committee is representative of the workforce by including people from a variety of departments and work schedules. Consider including an executive; representatives from HR, Parks & Rec, Benefits, and Marketing; and someone with a health/wellness background.

2. Adopt Nutrition and Physical Activity Policies

These may include:

Health Meeting Policy – Policies typically encourage breaks at meetings to stand, stretch and move and serving healthy food options such as water, fruit and other healthy snacks. For meetings that include one or two people, a “walking meeting” can be productive and provide an opportunity to be active during the work day.

Active Stairwell Policy – Municipalities can set standards for stairwell safety and encouraging stair use. Efforts to encourage use of the stairs include: sprucing up the stairwell with colorful paint, good lighting and artwork and creating promotional materials, including point-of-decision posters at elevators.

Healthy Vending Policy – The goal of a healthy vending policy is to provide healthier food options to municipal

employees and residents by making snacks that meet nutrition standards available in vending machines in municipally owned and operated locations. The healthy vending policy provides the food nutrition criteria for the healthy snacks and beverages and typically requires that a certain percentage of the snacks in the vending machine meet the criteria.

What Are Walking Meetings?

They are real meetings that take place while walking. They are an opportunity for employees to be physically active while completing work. Walking meetings are a good way for leaders to model physical activity in the work day and to show their commitment to active living.

Why Have Walking Meetings?

Walking meetings have many benefits. Among them, walking meetings have been shown to:

- stimulate creativity by breaking the normal work routine.
- promote more honest exchanges with employees.
- increase productivity. In sedentary meetings, employees may be physically present, but not mentally present. Getting up for a walking meeting can help increase the time employees are present and productive.
- improve morale.
- recharge people's energy in the afternoon
- stimulate problem solving (thinking on your feet) and minimize distractions (no phones, no email).

Good guidelines for walking meetings

- Size of group: four people or less; two is ideal.
- Length: 30 minutes or less.
- You can have a destination or just walk around the block.
- Permit wearing sneakers or comfortable shoes.
- Types of topics that are conducive to walking meetings: brainstorming, conflict resolution.
- Start with a few people who you think can be champions of walking meetings.

Remember to include employees/citizens who are in wheelchairs or using canes and walkers; accommodate their pace and make sure that the walking route includes enough space for everyone walking. 

About the author: *Susan DeFrancesco is the HEAL Cities & Towns Campaign Manager.*

The Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Cities & Towns Campaign, a partner of the Virginia Municipal League, provides free technical assistance and coaching to help municipal officials adopt policies that improve their communities' physical activity and food environments.

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