



Massachusetts
Councils On Aging

Date: April 6, 2018
To: Members of the Massachusetts Councils on Aging
From: Lynn Wolf, Communications Manager
Re: Grants for New Walking Clubs

We are offering grants to Councils on Aging who want to launch new Walking Clubs. The grant will provide \$600 to COAs to pay a monthly \$50 stipend to a volunteer walking group leader who will start and lead a new walking group. The grant period is May 1, 2018 through April 30, 2019. We seek to sponsor up to 30 new walking club sites.

MCOA will award grants through an open competitive process. Grant opportunities are available to COAs who are both members of MCOA and up to date on MCOA dues through the current state fiscal year.

MCOA is able to offer programs due to the financial support it receives from Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Massachusetts.

Why is Walking So Important?

Walking is a wonder drug! Everyone can do it – all you need is a good pair of shoes and a safe walking area. In fact, walking just two days a week can greatly improve a person's overall health. Walking with a group of people is also a great social activity that can help combat social isolation experienced by so many older adults.

Additionally, the walkability of your community is a core factor for becoming an Age-Friendly community. Walkability improvements are slowly taking place across the Commonwealth. Perhaps the members of your new walking club could play a role in that discussion. In many ways, active walkers are the best advocates for improving the walkability of your town, the environment of your parks, slowing down traffic speeds in certain areas. Some of your walking club members could become important allies in your local Age Friendly community improvement efforts.

Because of all these things, we encourage you to start up a new walking club, if you have not yet done so. And, we encourage every COA to join in hosting large group community walks this September 2018. (More detail on the Family Fun Walks is provided below).

1. Building Walking Routines

The goal for the grant is to help individuals develop and maintain their ability to walk for 60 minutes at a time. Also, to offer a safe and social walking experience. Effective walking clubs do the following:

- Hold at least 2 group walks per week, for 60 minutes or more, rain or shine, on indoor and outdoor routes.
 - As the group leader, consider varying the routes to sustain the group's interest;
- Make an effort to build club membership to at least 25 people/walk.
- Encourage its members to track their distances walked throughout each week, on their own time or with the group.
 - As the group leader, consider combining everyone's miles onto a map (e.g. walking from Boston to Chicago – 991 miles) and celebrate your arrival.
- From time to time, include social activities such as simple picnics, lunch, or a cup of coffee after the walk to build the group's social cohesion

To measure program effectiveness, you will be asked to do the following:

- At the end of each 3 month period, send in on the number of people who walked 2 times per week during that period and any lessons learned as host, including what motivated people to keep coming.
- At the start of the club, and then at mid-year and year end, a simple survey of walking club members about their starting goals and subsequent experience as a member of the club. The survey forms will be provided to you by MCOA.

2. Community Celebration -- 2018 Go4Life® Family Fun Walk

We encourage all COAs, especially COAs with walking clubs, to host a community walking event/celebration during September 2018. This year's events will have the theme of Go4Life Family Fun Walks.

- These walks will be a **great motivator** for many people who join the club in May and June to slowly increase their walking distances so that they can walk a full hour by September, accompanied by family and friends!!
- This is a **great event for your walkers, their family members and friends, and people of all ages in your community**. Imagine a club walker bringing their daughter, grandson and great granddaughter with them to the Family Fun Walk!!
- **We're looking for this year's event to be an intergenerational activity** and encourage sites to work with their Parks and Recreation and School departments for site location and engaging young people in the walk.
- This is also a great opportunity to engage local businesses to sponsor water, balloons, table tops, raffle prizes, and other event fare.

Support from MCOA for the Go4Life Family Fun Walks

We encourage all COAs – those with or without a walking club -- to join in hosting a fun outdoor walking event this September. MCOA will provide:

1. Gift card prizes for walkers selected via a random drawing of all walkers.
2. A full set of **tools for organizing this event are available on www.mcoaonline.com.**
3. MCOA will provide a colorful poster template that can be localized with your walk information.

We hope at least 60 towns host this event and decide to make walking a much bigger theme for the residents of your town – of all ages! Also, you could showcase the walkability of your town by holding the walks on downtown sidewalks or around the perimeter of a cherished park.

3. Go4Life Materials Are Great for Supporting New Personal Fitness Routines

We are pleased to be partnering with the National Institute on Aging's Go4Life. Go4Life promotes healthy aging through four types of exercise – Endurance, Strength, Flexibility and Balance. Endurance exercises, like walking, improve the health of your heart, lungs, and circulatory system and help keep us healthy, improve our fitness, and help us do the tasks we need to do every day. They can also delay or prevent many diseases that are common in older adults such as diabetes, heart disease, and osteoporosis.

Go4Life also offers myriad **FREE, vibrant and encouraging marketing and health promotions materials on their website** (<https://go4life.nia.nih.gov/>). You can order posters, and exercise booklets, workout tracking tools, and more, all for free, online. They also have exercise videos on their YouTube channel that can be used at home to augment any exercise classes you offer at the center.

Please take advantage of these great fitness resources as you lead your walking clubs and any other type of fitness/wellness programs. And, please refer older adults in your community to the Go4Life website and exercise videos which they can use to learn how to get fit, make a personal plan, and work out (both at home and in a group at your center). Please take time to visit: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rkDlpZ3Musw> to view a 1 hour sample workout with Go4Life video designed for older adults at home.

4. Walkability -- Training on How to Improve Your Community's Walkability Score

All COAs with an active walking club will have reserved seating for training in the fall of 2018 with walkability experts of WalkBoston. Walkability is defined as the measure of how friendly an area is to walking – from sidewalk width to curb bump outs, crossing signals, seating areas, and much more. You will learn about how your town can improve its walkability and have time to reflect on how you might encourage some of your walking club members in local discussions about pedestrian safety and walkability improvements that are needed.

WalkBoston works with communities all across the state; they conduct walk audits, provide technical assistance to town and city planners, meet with public officials to discuss what's possible and initiate change, propose legislation to improve pedestrian access to safe routes, and provide consumer educational materials. MCOA is sponsoring WalkBoston's work within the City of Boston's Age Friendly

Project and has worked with WalkBoston in several Mass in Motion communities during 2016 – 17 that focused local efforts on making key roadways and crossings more friendly to all pedestrians, especially areas frequently used by older adults.

5. Application Instructions and Contract Terms

- To apply, complete the application online at: <https://mcoaonline.com/grants/bid-opportunities/walking-clubs-rfp-application/>
- Applications must be completed by April 20, 2018; contracts will be issued May 1, 2018.
- A conference call will be held with all Walking Club Leaders (“Champions”) on May 9, 2018 at 2:00 PM. Call-in details to be provided at a later date.
- General questions about the grant process itself or your COA’s eligibility may be directed to my attention, via lynn@mcoaonline.com, or to Shari Cox at shari@mcoaonline.com .
- These grants will be paid out on a “Cost Reimbursement” basis, meaning COAs incurs costs and submits invoices for reimbursement to MCOA, attention Grants Manager, during the project period and up to 60 days after the end date for the project period.
 - The address to submit an invoice is: MCOA, Attn: Grants Manager, 116 Pleasant Street, Suite 306, Easthampton, MA 01027.
- Simple reports from project grantees will be collected by MCOA once per quarter to ensure clubs are active and things are going well.
 - Note: MCOA may withhold final reimbursement to a COA until receipt of summary project report.
- Information to be included in your application:
 - How will you find a walk champion?
 - What indoor routes do you have or can you secure?
 - What days of the week will your walks be held on?
 - Can you commit to two walks per week?
 - How will you promote your walking group and get people to join?
 - Will you commit to the Go4Life Family Fun Walk event in September?