

**New Brunswick Office of the Chief Medical
Officer of Health (Public Health)
RURAL ACTIVE LIVING
ASSESSMENT (RALA) TOOLS**

Document	Description
RALA Codebook and Scoring	<p>Read this document before using any of the RALA tools. This document is divided into three sections:</p> <p>Section 1: Introduction provides an introduction and overview of the RALA tools.</p> <p>Section 2: Using the RALA Tools provides question-by-question details for completing each of the three assessment tools.</p> <p>Section 3: Scoring the RALA Tools provides a scoring tool that can be used to obtain an overall score for the Community and Program/Policy Assessments. These scores can be used to compare to other rural communities or to compare your community to itself over time. <i>Note – you will use this scoring tool after you have completed each of the assessments.</i></p>

Appendices	Description
A. Community-wide Assessment	This tool will help you assess the ‘friendliness’ of your community for walking, biking and playing for everyone including youth, elderly and the disabled. It provides a structure for looking at the community as a whole, how it is laid out, where people live, work and go to school, and how they are likely to get from one place to another.
B. Program / Policy Assessment	This tool will help you assess your existing programs and policies that might help to overcome an ‘unfriendly’ environment or that might make an environment less activity friendly.
C. Street Segment Assessment	This detailed tool will help you assess specific street segments of your community and assess the key characteristics of those segments.
D. Scoring Tools	Scoring tools for the Community-wide assessment and the Program and Policies Assessment. <i>Note – reporting for the Street Segment Assessment is included within that tool.</i>
E. Reporting Form	Complete the reporting form to help summarize your results from the Community-wide and Program / Policy Assessments.
F. Supplementary Food Environment Codebook	Using the Supplementary Food Environment Assessment Tool provides question-by-question details for completing the Supplementary Food Environment Assessment.
F. Food Environment Assessment	This tool will help you assess the existing food environment in your community including accessibility and availability of healthy foods.

RURAL ACTIVE LIVING ASSESSMENT TOOLS: CODEBOOK & SCORING

For assessing physical features, community programs and policies that promote physical activity in rural communities

Adapted from the Rural Active Living Assessment Tools: Codebook & Scoring from:
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Rural Active Living Assessment Tools: CODEBOOK

For assessing physical features, community programs and policies that promote physical activity in rural communities

Section 1: Introduction

The Rural Active Living Assessment (RALA) Tools have been designed to help you collect data on physical environment features and amenities, community characteristics, community programs, and policies that could potentially influence levels of physical activity among residents in your community. This tool will allow you to assess the “friendliness” of your community for walking, biking, and playing for everyone including youth, elderly and disabled. It provides a structure for looking at the community as a whole, how it is laid out, where people live, work and go to school, and how they are likely to get from one place to another. It also includes a detailed tool to look at specific “segments” of your community and assess key characteristics of those segments. Finally, it also provides a structure for assessing the programs and policies that might help to overcome an “unfriendly” environment, or that might actually make that environment less activity friendly. The RALA tools were designed by researchers at the Maine Rural Health Research Center, University of Southern Maine, and were tested and refined by researchers at the University of Southern Maine, Tufts University, University of Alabama, and University of Mississippi.

The New Brunswick Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health (OCMOH) made changes to the nomenclature, codebook examples and social gathering spaces examples in the original tool. Additionally, more focus was placed on age friendly and accessibility for those with a disability to better fit the NB perspective. Additionally, OCMOH has now added a Supplementary Food Environment Assessment tool to give a more holistic view of the community for healthy living.

The RALA tools consist of **three separate assessments**, including: 1. The Community-wide Assessment, 2. The Program and Policy Assessment, and 3. The Street Segment Assessment. These three assessment instruments are designed to be used together and provide a tool to conduct a comprehensive active living audit of your rural community. Please keep in mind that some rural communities have found it necessary to adapt and modify the RALA tools to better suit their needs or unique characteristics. (For example, in one western community, users wanted to extend the number of kilometres for inclusion of physical activity amenities from a 25-kilometre radius to a 60-kilometre radius, because they felt that residents regularly expect to travel as far as 60 kilometres for services – 25 kilometres would not adequately capture all amenities). Since conducting these assessments is for your community’s benefit, we encourage you to adapt as necessary.

At the end of this Codebook, you’ll find scoring tools for the Community-wide Assessment and the Program and Policy Assessment. These scoring tools are meant to further help users identify areas for improvement or change in their community, and are hoped to help create a dialogue among community members, leaders and researchers as they strive to make their communities more activity friendly. Currently there is no scoring tool for the Street Segment Assessment.

The more effort and time put into the RALA tools the better the final assessment results will be. It is

often beneficial to have more than one individual conduct the assessment to give different perspectives and opinions. Having individuals from the community help with the RALA tools can help add to the perspective and also involve the community. Scheduling an appointment with a school official can help to obtain more accurate school information. Additionally, meeting with the Age-Friendly Committee if present in your community can be very beneficial.

**Please note that in many rural communities, the Street Segment Assessment tool may not be applicable due to the community's dispersed layout and lack of a concentrated community "centre" (that is, those communities with very low intersection density). If your community does not lend itself to conducting the Street Segment Assessment, the Community-Wide Assessment and Program and Policy Assessment tools will still capture the elements in your community that determine its activity friendliness.

For more information, please contact the nearest regional Health Protection Branch office:

Bathurst

165 St- Andrew Street
(506) 549-5550

St. Stephen

41 King Street
(506) 466-7615

Perth-Andover

35 F Tribe Rd.
(506) 273-4715

Grand Falls

131 Pleasant Street
(506) 737-4400

Caraquet

295, boulevard St-Pierre Ouest
(506) 726-2025

Tracadie

3520, rue Principale
(506) 394-3888

Shippagan

239B, boulevard J.D. Gauthier
(506) 336-3061

Moncton

81 Albert Street
(506) 856-2814

Fredericton

300 St Mary's Street
(506) 453-2830

Campbellton

10 Village Avenue, Unit 15
(506) 789-2549

Sussex

30 Moffett Avenue
(506) 432-2104

Saint John

55 Union Street
(506) 658-3022

Miramichi

1780 Water Street
(506) 778-6765

Edmundston

121 Church Street
(506) 737-4400

Woodstock

200 King Street
(506) 325-4408

1.1 GETTING STARTED: UNDERSTANDING THE LOCATION & LAYOUT OF YOUR COMMUNITY

This tool is primarily intended for use in rural communities with a population less than 10,000. Larger communities may be assessed more effectively using urban typologies and audit tools. Many of these urban-based tools can be found at:

<http://activelivingresearch.org/resourcesearch/toolsandmeasures>

In the physical domain, a rural community may be described in terms of factors within its boundaries, such as road density, types and density of intersections, presence or absence of a community commons or community centre (or multiple community centres) as well as natural features such as hills and rivers. In addition, the community's geographic proximity to population centres outside its boundaries is also relevant. Thus, limiting a typology to geographic or physical factors requires us to consider at least three dimensions for rural communities:

1. Location: This will require a map showing at least a 25 kilometre radius about the community centre. A map showing location of residences, services and businesses can be found at the local municipal or local government office, or through Google Maps, Google Earth, MapQuest or GeoNB. Additionally, many communities have zoning maps on their websites that can be useful. The Community-wide assessment includes questions about specific community characteristics and about a number of recreational amenities that may not be within the community boundaries, but are nevertheless accessible to local residents. In this audit tool, such amenities are not considered readily accessible if they are beyond a distance of 25 kilometres from the community centre (as mentioned previously, this distance may be adapted if appropriate). In some parts of New Brunswick, rural communities are close to each other, and may share many such amenities. Rural community location patterns typically fall into one of the following categories, with shared amenities more common in the first two types:

- **integrated** (common in New Brunswick, where one community seems contiguous with the next)
- **intermediate** (some development between communities, typically less than 25 kilometres between community centres)
- **remote** (large undeveloped areas separate one community from the next)

Understanding your rural community's location pattern may be useful when trying to understand what resources (physical amenities, programs, and commerce) community residents have access to within and beyond their community.

2. Settlement pattern: "Walkability", "wheelability" and connectivity will be determined to a great extent not only by the density of population and intersections, but by the overall pattern in which streets were laid out as the community was originally settled. Most rural communities fall into one of the following patterns:

- **Dispersed** - There may be a community centre, but most of the population is spread out and

may live several kilometres from the community centre. Such communities can be identified by low population density and will usually have few roads and few intersections.

- **Elongated** – This pattern is best exemplified by very small communities with only one major road passing through and most non-residential development along that road. Intersecting roads may lead to residential areas or schools, but are often not connected to each other, except by returning to the main thoroughfare.
- **Clustered** – This pattern often results from sub-divisions. A grid pattern or cul-de-sac pattern residential neighbourhood may be quite distant from the community centre, with only one thoroughfare connecting the neighbourhood to the community centre. Occasionally, a cluster will be commercial, rather than residential, as when a large development (such as a big box store) locates on the edge of a community, and other retail businesses, restaurants, etc. develop around the box-store.
- **Compact** – In areas where sprawl has been restricted, either by natural features or by land-use restrictions, both residential and commercial development is likely to have greater density. Grid patterns are more common in such communities. Connectivity is likely to be good, due to greater intersection density. Such communities are inherently more “walkable” or “wheelable”.

These settlement types may be clarified or refined by considering the pattern of highway, thoroughfare and residential roads in a community beginning with radial vs. grid pattern, with possible combinations such as a radial pattern with neighbourhoods clustered along arteries having limited local grid patterns.

Understanding your community’s settlement pattern/type may help you determine whether you should conduct the Street Segment Assessment portion of this tool and/or to define the segments that you may choose to audit when assessing activity-friendliness of your community.

3. Physical features: There are several natural and some man-made physical features that may create unique barriers in rural communities when trying to choose segments to audit. You may find these same features to be supports or barriers to physical activity among residents in your community. Physical features can include:

- Topography (especially in combination with road pattern)
- Rivers
- Lakes
- Limited access highways or active railroad tracks

Having a general understanding of the location patterns, settlement patterns and physical features of your community before you begin your audit will aid in the selection of your segments and identification of important factors that may aid or act as a barrier to physical activity in your community.

1.2 SELECTING THE “COMMUNITY CENTRAL POINT”

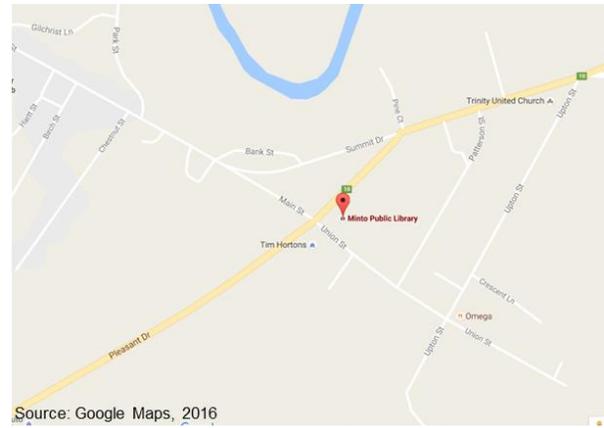
Many of the questions in the assessment tools make reference to the “Community Centre” or community “central point.” This is a reference point that should be determined by you at the onset of conducting the assessments. A good way to determine the central point for the community is by locating the community library, the community hall, or the community green – a point that you feel best represents what residents would most likely consider to be the centre of the community. You will eventually be constructing a circle (with a two kilometre radius) around that central point to help you select your segments when you reach the Street Segment Assessment (see page 20).

Examples of potential “Community Central Point”:

Community Library



Map of Community Library Location



Community Green



Map of Community Green Location



Section 2: Using the RALA Tools

You will be observing your community on both a broad-scale (macro) and a detailed (micro) level. The broad-scale, Community-Wide Assessment (CWA, Section 2.1) will look at characteristics of your community as a whole. The Program and Policy Assessment (PPA, Section 2.2) will help you take inventory of your community's programs and policies that are related to physical activity. The more detailed Street Segment Assessment (SSA, Section 2.3) will involve identifying specific physical attributes of each segment of the community that you choose to audit, in order to further assess the activity-friendliness of your community.

2.1 THE COMMUNITY-WIDE ASSESSMENT

Before conducting the Community-wide Assessment, be sure to read the introductory section above regarding location, settlement pattern and physical features, and think about where your community falls in those typologies. To complete this section, it may be helpful to refer to your community map and you also may need to contact your local community and school officials to answer some of the questions.

Questions in this section include information about:

- Community population
- Total community area and population density
- Population demographics
- General community topography (hills, mountains, flat, etc.)
- Community centre
- Community street pattern
- Public school location
- Community recreational amenities and location

If needed, you can find question-by-question details for the Community-wide Assessment here:

[Question by Question Details for Completing the Community-wide Assessment \(Appendix A\)](#)

I. COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS/CHARACTERISTICS:

Q1. Community Name:

Fill in the full name of the community that is being assessed.

Q2. Reviewer's Name:

Fill in the full name of the person(s) carrying out the assessment.

Q3. Community Population:

Enter the total number of residents residing in the community being assessed. This can be collected from the local community office or the Department of Environment and Local Government.

Q4. Total Community Area:

Enter the total area, in square kilometres, of the community that is being assessed. This can be collected from the local community office or the Department of Environment and Local Government.

Q5. Community Population Density:

Enter the community population density. This can be calculated by dividing the total community population by the total community area to get the number of persons per square kilometre. Population density can also be collected from the local community office of the Department of Environment and Local Government.

Q6. General Community Topography:

Check the option that best describes the natural topography of the community as a whole. Choose from the following options:

- Flat – the community is generally flat with very few hills and no mountains.
- Hilly – the community has rolling hills throughout.
- Valley – the community is located in a valley.
- River/creek- the community is located along a river or creek.
- Mountainous – the community is located within a mountain range or has significant mountainous peaks located within its boundaries. Other – the community has some other topography.

Q7. Presence of “Community Centre”:

Check the option that best describes whether there is one or several “community centres” located in your community. Choose from the following options:

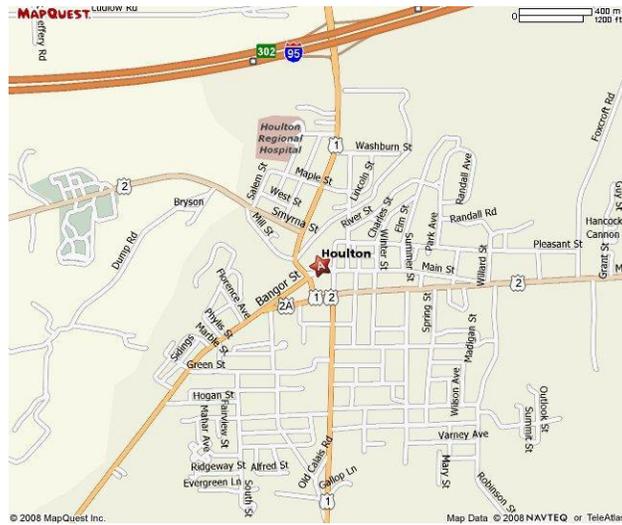
- *Yes – one distinct community centre* – The community has one established community centre where all or most of the community municipal services are located, such as the community offices, library, police/fire departments, post office, and other commercial services. Make sure to name the community centre.
- *Yes – multiple community centres* – The community has more than one area that is considered to be the community centre. Municipal and commercial services can be found in both/all of these “centres.” Make sure to name the community centres.
- *No community centre* – There is no established/distinguishable community centre where municipal/commercial services are clustered. These services are either spread out across the community or are not available.
- *Other* – the community has some other arrangement of municipal and commercial services (please specify).

Q8. General Community Street Pattern:

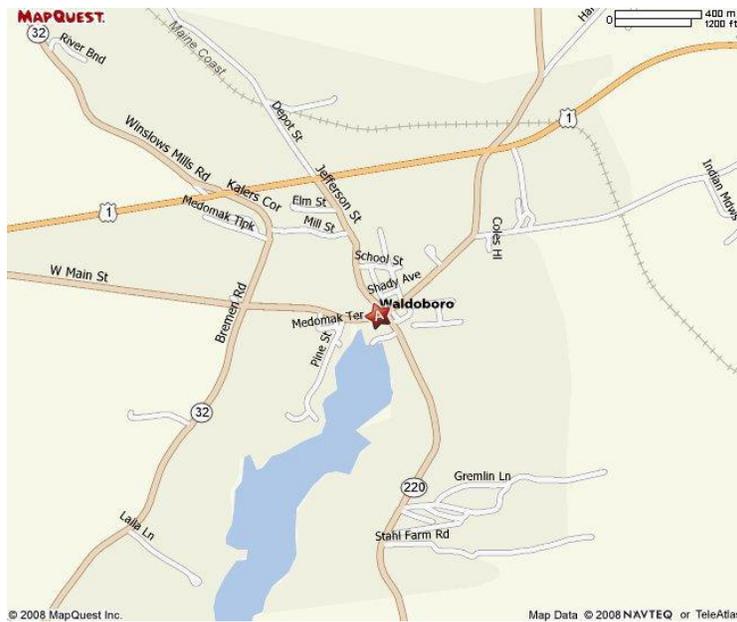
Check the option that best describes the overall street pattern when looking at the community as a whole. It may help to look at a community map to determine the street pattern. Choose from the

following options:

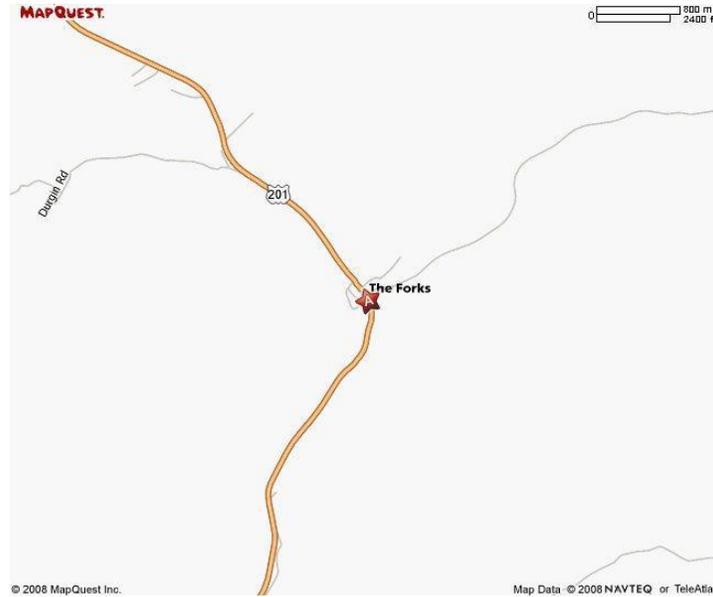
- **Grid** – The roads have an obvious and distinguishable grid pattern in one or several sections of the community. Grid patterns are similar to those found in urban areas with distinct city blocks. Example:



- **Radial** – The roads follow a pattern where the primary roads generally intersect and come together at a central point, but do not follow a distinguishable grid pattern. This pattern may resemble the spokes of a tire. Example:



- **No distinguishable pattern** – The roads do not follow a grid, radial, or other pattern.
Example:



- **Cul-de-sacs**
- **Other** – The roads follow a distinguishable pattern other than grid or radial (please specify pattern)

Q9a – Q9c. Location of Public Schools:

Q9a. Is there a school located in the community?

Check the option that best describes the community.

Q9b. If yes, what type of school(s) is/are in the community?

Fill out the table with information on the school(s) present in the community.

Q9c. If no, what is the proximity of the closest school?

Fill in information for the next closest public high school, middle school and elementary school.

NOTE: Complete questions 9b and 9c if schools are located both in and outside of the community. Additionally, make note if the community has one school for all grades, i.e., schools goes from Kindergarten to grade 12 instead of having separate elementary, middle and high schools.

II. COMMUNITY RECREATIONAL Facilities:

This section is designed to collect information about recreational amenities available in your community. For each amenity, please check off its distance from your central community point

(community centre), the condition of the amenity, and whether it has the specific access features listed. If there are any comments related to a specific amenity, please write it in the space provided. In the comments section also record if the amenity has a different use in the winter (e.g. basketball court flooded to become an outdoor skating rink).

Each amenity is listed in the **first column**. In the **second column**, check off the *distance* of that amenity from the designated community central-point. If the amenity is located outside of the community's boundaries, but is still considered to be accessible to community residents, please note it in the "Comments" box for that particular amenity. Choose from the following options:

- *Yes – within 2 kilometres of community centre* – The amenity is located within two kilometres of the community's designated central point.
- *Yes – 2 to 8 kilometres from community centre* – The amenity is located between two and eight kilometres from the community's designated central point.
- *Yes – 8 to 25 kilometres away from community centre* – The amenity is located between eight and twenty-five kilometres away from the community's central point.
- *No – community does not have this amenity* or is beyond 25 km from the community's central point.

In the **third column**, check off the most appropriate choice regarding the *condition* of each amenity. Choose from the following options:

- **Fair/Poor** – The amenity is not well maintained and is in fair or poor condition. There is apparent neglect and/or deterioration.
- **Good/Excellent** - The amenity is well maintained and is in good or excellent condition. There is little or no apparent neglect and/or deterioration.

In the **fourth column**, check off the most appropriate choice regarding *access* to each amenity. Check whether the amenity includes any of the following elements:

- **Clearly marked signs for amenity** – There is clear and legible signage posted specifically to direct visitors to the amenity (on building or alongside the road).
- **Clearly marked signs for accessibility** – There is clear and legible signage with the universal symbol of access to direct visitors to the accessible entrance.
- **Sidewalks, trails, etc. leading to amenity** – There are sidewalks, trails, etc that lead to the amenity and connect visitors to safe walking routes to and from the amenity. Safe walking routes are those that are in good repair throughout and include appropriate lighting.
- **Public transit leading to amenity**- The amenity is located along a public transit or shuttle route. The public transit is accessible to those with disability or parallel transit is offered.
- **Designated parking for amenity** – There are parking spaces (paved, dirt, gravel or other)

designated for the amenity, including accessible spaces that meet the NB Barrier Free Design Building Code.

- **Accessibility** – The amenity is easily accessed by the young, elderly and disabled.

Complete the above steps for each amenity listed. Please note that there are additional spaces at the end of this section for “Other Amenities” in your community that have not been listed on this assessment tool. “Other Amenities” could include amenities that encourage people to be active in the winter such as outdoor skating rinks, sliding hills and/or cross country skiing or snowshoeing trails.

**This completes the instructions for the Community-Wide Assessment portion of the RALA Tools.