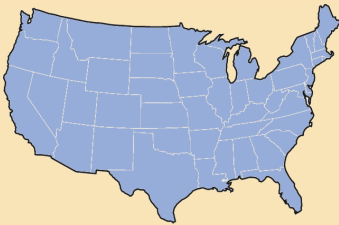


# Using Innovative Technology to Increase Physical Activity



**“The Task Force findings served as a foundation and a resource to continue developing robust, evidence-based health promotion programs for the IBM population.”**

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Machines Corporation (IBM)

## More Information

The Community Guide: Task Force Recommendations on Increasing Physical Activity  
[www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/index](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/pa/index)

The Community Guide: Task Force Recommendations for Obesity Prevention and Control  
[www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/index](http://www.thecommunityguide.org/obesity/index)

International Business Machines Corporation (IBM)  
[www.ibm.com/us/en](http://www.ibm.com/us/en)

**M**ore than 13,000 employees at the International Business Machines Corporation (IBM) averaged 8,800 steps per day while participating in the company’s Active Track Fitbit® program.

IBM used recommendations from the Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force) to help inform the design of this program. Michele Alphonse, MD, MPH, and Senior Advisor within IBM’s Integrated Health Services group, says the company always seeks to support the health goals of its employees by using the latest technology. But, she says that technology must support evidence-based approaches toward health.

“The Task Force findings served as a foundation and a resource to continue developing robust, evidence-based health promotion programs for the IBM population,” Alphonse says.

## Matching Interests with Evidence

The Active Track program, launched at the end of 2013, provides employees with a free Fitbit® to help them achieve wellness. A Fitbit® is a wireless monitor that tracks daily activities, including the number of steps taken, distance traveled, and sleep behavior. IBM employees could choose between the Fitbit® model that is worn on the wrist or the model that clips on clothing.

Alphonse says three keys to success were recognized before the program was launched. First, a strong partner was identified for program delivery and data consolidation. Second, the program was effectively and fully integrated into the overall wellness process to avoid unnecessary barriers or confusion for employees. Third, a program campaign was developed to effectively attract and engage participants.

She says the first three months of the program were used for device ordering, program recruitment, and initial device experimentation with participants. Now employees who participate in the Active Track program can compete with their peers in activity challenges and earn reward points for their achievements. Employees earn points by reaching either 5,000 or 10,000 steps daily.

Technology-supported multicomponent coaching or counseling interventions is a Task Force recommended strategy that IBM used to design the program. These interventions use technology to facilitate or mediate interactions between a coach or counselor and an individual or group, with a goal of influencing weight-related behaviors or weight-related outcomes. The Fitbit® allows users to connect with Facebook friends and community discussion forums to receive support and advice for their wellness goals.

## Personal Investment at No Additional Cost

The Active Track program was included as one of several options in IBM’s Healthy Living Incentives program and replaced their traditional physical activity cash rebate. Alphonse says it represents a “personal investment in wellness” and no additional cost is incurred by the company or the employee.



[www.thecommunityguide.org](http://www.thecommunityguide.org)

## What is The Community Guide?

The Guide to Community Preventive Services (The Community Guide) is an essential resource for people who want to know what works in public health. It provides evidence-based recommendations about public health interventions and policies to improve health and promote safety.

The Community Preventive Services Task Force (Task Force)—an independent, nonfederal, unpaid panel of public health and prevention experts—bases its recommendations on systematic reviews of the scientific literature. With oversight from the Task Force, scientists and subject-matter experts from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention conduct these reviews in collaboration with a wide range of government, academic, policy, and practice-based partners.



“The Community Guide and Task Force findings are often an unknown, untapped, and under-utilized health resource to help leaders in U.S. organizations develop and justify the cost of health promotion programs with proven effectiveness and a definite ROI,” says Stewart Sill, Manager of Global Health and Vitality at IBM.

With the Active Track program, employees choose among having incentives deposited into a health savings account, using their reward points to buy Amazon.com gift cards or other purchases, and making charitable donations.

Individually-adapted health behavior change programs are also recommended by the Task Force to increase physical activity and improve fitness among adults and children. The Active Track program incorporates this recommendation by teaching employees how to use the Fitbit® to set individual goals and monitor their progress. It also builds social support for new behaviors when employees take activity challenges with their peers.

## Encouraging Results

IBM’s initial findings show 96 percent of employees who chose the Fitbit® have used it and 63 percent have linked it to the rewards platform. During the program’s first year, participants averaged 8,800 steps per day with individual averages of at least 5,000 steps for 120 days.

Employees admitted to choosing the Active Track Fitbit® program because it was a new, refreshing alternative, and they liked wearing an activity tracker. Also, 86 percent of employees said the device was easy to set up. And 77 percent believed it would help them reach their individual health goals. Alphonse says the program was so well received and adopted in the U.S. that IBM leaders in other countries have invested in similar programs.

In 2014, IBM members took a total of 11,719,172,899 steps and walked approximately 5,859,586 miles. That was enough to take them to the Moon and back a total of 24.5 times.

Currently, IBM is comparing the physical activity of participants in the Active Track Fitbit® program to nonparticipants and participants of other programs. In the future, the company plans to evaluate the quality of sleep measured by the Fitbit®.

## Lessons Learned

- **Integrate.** Including options in an overall wellness process can help avoid confusion and unnecessary barriers for employees.
- **Market.** Creating an awareness campaign for new programs helps attract and engage employees.
- **Match.** Knowing your audience’s interests and motivations allows for better matching with evidence-based approaches toward health.
- **Evaluate.** Looking at a program’s process and outcomes not only allows for success to be measured, but also for future opportunities to be identified