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Supporting Safe Routes and Sparking Joy Through Community Partnerships

Increased interest in Safe Routes programs is bringing new partners into our movement. From librarians to videographers to researchers, there is a diverse range of people who can play a role in building active communities by improving traffic safety. This comes at the perfect time. Limited school capacity and burnout mean that our usual go-to partners might not have the availability they once had. Additionally, some programs are looking to shake up their regular activities to boost engagement and enthusiasm. This calls for new ideas, creative collaborations, and fresh faces.

The good news is that there is a growing pool of community partners that are supporting, or willing to support, Safe Routes projects. So how do you connect with them? This factsheet will provide strategies for developing new partnerships and examples of successful collaborations. We will also share emerging partnership ideas that are gaining momentum in the Safe Routes community.



LET'S WORK TOGETHER

Now more than ever, communities need partners to work together. People are looking for streamlined communication, “one-stop shop” engagement events, and higher levels of accountability. They want to know their time is valued and all their needs are being addressed. Kids need safe routes to walk, bike, and roll to school - but what else do they need? What other issues are kids dealing with? How can Safe Routes to School be part of the solution?

Growing your understanding of a community will help you build a holistic engagement strategy. It allows you to frame how your work fits within a bigger picture. Connecting with new partners is an important part of this process. New partners can increase your awareness about community needs and provide a pathway for tackling issues together. You can begin this question by getting to know your new partner and aligning goals and priorities.



check-ins also provide a space to troubleshoot and brainstorm new ideas. Carve out time for this every few months, it is worth the effort! For more strategies on developing and sustaining partnerships, check our resource: [Let's Get Together: A Guide for Engaging Communities and Creating Change](#).

PARTNERSHIP IS A TWO-WAY STREET

Community-based groups and institutions are ideal partners. They are usually well-connected and care about issues that support the entire community. Bicycle and pedestrian groups are natural allies who are well-versed in the transportation safety, but there are also other partners well suited to supporting Safe Routes programs:

- Parks and Recreation
- Colleges and Universities
- Hospitals
- Safe Kids Coalitions
- Local businesses
- Artists and arts organizations
- Youth-led groups
- Rotary Clubs
- YMCA/YWCA
- Environmental organizations
- Libraries

Keep in mind - community-based organizations are being asked to do a lot more with a lot less. Establishing mutually beneficial partnerships can help ease the load. As you reach out to new partners, share how Safe Routes can benefit their organization. Nothing is too small, even offering to share their materials at an outreach event is a nice gesture. Now let's explore some of these partnerships in action!

PARTNERSHIP QUESTIONS

- Who are you trying to engage? How is this partner connected to that audience?
- What problem are you trying to solve? How can this partner play a role in the solution?
- What does this partner care about? How does that area of interest align with yours?
- How can this partnership address a larger community need?
- How can this partner help you reach your equity goals?
- What support or additional information might your partner need in order for this collaboration to be successful?
- Do you need a formal partnership agreement?
- How can you help your partner? What do they need and how does your work dovetail with theirs?

Checking in regularly about capacity and priorities will help sustain a healthy partnership. Frequent

PARTNERING WITH ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS

Academic institutions might be Safe Routes to School's best-kept partnership secret. From data and evaluation to content area expertise, colleges and universities can offer a range of resources to support Safe Routes programs. Are you looking to improve program evaluation? Do you need volunteers for a bike rodeo? Do you want to develop school travel maps using GIS? A university partner can probably help with that!



WHAT COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES CAN OFFER SAFE ROUTES:

- Data and evaluation
- Research
- GIS mapping
- Event support
- Documentation
- Grants and funding
- Community engagement
- Action planning
- Materials and equipment

WHAT SAFE ROUTES CAN OFFER COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES:

- Access to students and families
- Connections to K-12 schools
- Real-world experience
- Service learning hours
- Safe Routes to School expertise
- Connections to decision-makers
- Fun extracurricular activities



The first step to establishing a university partnership is connecting with the right person. There are professionals inside of different departments who can offer their content area expertise. A public health school can assist with data collection, community engagement, and research around physical activity. Planning and engineering schools can support infrastructure projects and changes to the built environment. Education departments can help with curriculum development. Some universities also have research and data centers that focus specifically on transportation. They are a helpful resource for data analysis and evaluation. University hospitals can also provide crash and serious injury data and might house childhood injury prevention programs like [Safe Kids](#). Finally, university groups like service learning organizations, fraternities and sororities, and student-led clubs can provide volunteers and giveaways for Safe Routes events.



**Near-Miss Crash Reporter App for Youth:
Howard University Transportation Research and
Data Center (HUTRC), Washington Area Bicyclist
Association (WABA), Safe Routes Partnership**

Washington, D.C.

When Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) wanted to pilot a [near-miss crash reporter app for youth](#), they turned to Howard University Transportation Research and Data Center (HUTRC) for support. As the traffic data manager for Washington, D.C., HUTRC was able to gather bike and pedestrian safety data and assist WABA in creating a project prioritization list. They also created a community survey about near-miss incidents around school campuses. Howard University's support helped WABA make data-informed decisions to address the needs of the city's most vulnerable road users. It also allowed WABA, and other project

partner Safe Routes Partnership, to concentrate their efforts on community engagement. Beyond this project, HUTRC plays a key role in supporting traffic safety initiatives across Washington, D.C. including Vision Zero and Safe Routes programs.

**Boulder County School Travel Study:
University of Colorado - Boulder**

Boulder, Colorado

Boulder County Safe Routes to School teamed up with the University of Colorado Boulder to improve equity outcomes in their program. Boulder Valley School District and St. Vrain School District partnered with then-Ph.D. candidate Darcy Varney Kitching to research equitable community engagement strategies for Safe Routes to School. The project was part of Kitching's doctoral research. The team implemented a series of engagement activities including key stakeholder interviews, surveys, and [Place It!](#) community workshops. They aimed to capture student and caregiver travel experiences, especially from people who were not typically engaged in Safe Routes to School. Varney Kitching spearheaded data collection, community engagement, and evaluation efforts. Her expertise helped increase the capacity for Safe Routes staff to advance equity within district programs.

**Community Engagement and Service Learning:
San José State University**

San José, California

Urban planning students at San Jose State University got a first-hand look at how their work impacts school communities. As a part of service learning, students worked with five local schools on a series of Safe Routes to School initiatives. They led community-building activities, attended site visits, distributed surveys, created travel maps, and organized Safe Routes events at partner schools. The project was also supported by the City and school district. University staff clearly understood the value that Safe Routes programs can bring to new urban planners and developed a thoughtful, mutually beneficial partnership model. Check out their [full program report](#) for additional details and insights.



PARTNERING WITH PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Libraries, like schools, are important community destinations. Library visitors can vote, get vaccinated, borrow a book, check out a bike, and attend a public meeting all in one location. Increasing safety and accessibility along routes to libraries is a growing area of interest and one of the most exciting partnership developments from the last few years. Library staff are quickly becoming some of the most enthusiastic Safe Routes champions. From leading walking school buses to participating in Safe Routes to School planning committees, they are diving into opportunities to support walk, bike, and roll-friendly neighborhoods.

WHAT LIBRARIES CAN OFFER SAFE ROUTES:

- Event/outreach space
- Bike lending programs
- Bike share and bike repair
- Event volunteers
- Educational materials
- Knowledge of the local community
- Marketing and promotion
- Materials and equipment

WHAT SAFE ROUTES CAN OFFER LIBRARIES:

- Connections to schools
- Family programming
- Connections to local decision-makers
- Transportation knowledge
- School travel maps

WHERE TO REACH OUT:

- Outreach librarian
- Children's or youth librarian
- Branch manager
- Youth services coordinator
- "Friends of the Library" foundations





Perry Public Library Helps Students Rock the Walk - Perry Public Library and Perry Elementary School

Perry, Iowa

Perry Public Library is proving that walking school bus programs are a community-wide effort. The library partners with Perry Elementary School to manage a [walking school bus program](#) on Friday mornings. Students and families can register for the program through the library's website and get information about scheduling. They offer two sessions, the first one kicking off on Walking to School Day in October and the second running from early April through the end of the school year. Parents and caregivers know they can rely on their library partners for a safe, fun school travel activity. If your community is looking to increase your capacity to run a walking school bus program, see

if the library is willing to participate. Offer to create walking routes or help with volunteer recruitment – your library partners will appreciate it!

Student Artwork Encourages Biking Along Shared Use Path – City of Mesa and Mesa Public Library

Mesa, Arizona

Mesa Public Library is spreading joy through a creative collaboration with City of Mesa's Bicycle and Pedestrian Program. They launched their first [Bike to Books Design Contest](#) in 2023 to encourage more biking and reading. Over 90 students submitted their designs to the contest. Three talented winners were chosen to have their designs installed along a shared-use path. Runners-up received bike safety gear and official recognition from City officials. For a fun twist, each of the winning designs is paired with a book recommendation, bringing the love of biking and reading to the entire community.

E-bike Lending Program Introduces a New Way to Ride – Local Motion and South Burlington Public Library

Burlington, Vermont

E-bikes are popping up across the country, and people have a lot of questions. How do they work? Are they safe to ride? Can you run errands with them? [Local Motion](#), Vermont's active transportation advocacy organization, teamed up with South Burlington Public Library to let community members test out e-bikes. They brought their [traveling e-bike lending library](#) to town to encourage people to use e-bikes for short trips around town. The program offered two electric assist bikes including one with cargo and kid-carrying capacity. Lenders could check out an e-bike for running errands, school pick up, or just to have an easier ride.

For more tips on sparking up library partnerships, read this [blog post](#) from librarian and Safe Routes champion Noah Lenstra ([Let's Move in Libraries](#), UNC Greensboro).

EMERGING PARTNERSHIPS

As Safe Routes expands into high school and communities bolster equity and inclusion efforts, new partnership opportunities are emerging. The following partnerships might not be the norm yet, but they are piquing interest among Safe Routes practitioners.

Teen Driver Programs

Youth engagement is all about meeting young people where they are. For many teens, this means drivers education classes. While a lot of young people support active transportation, they might also want or need to drive. Partnering with drivers ed programs can reinforce bike and pedestrian safety with young drivers. It is also a space to hear from youth about their concerns and how Safe Routes programs can continue to support them. Reach out to driving instructors to see if you can do a brief presentation or share materials with students. This might include distributing school travel maps, sharing youth-created traffic safety campaigns, or simply raising awareness about different transportation options. These partnerships can also lead to larger policy changes, like incorporating more information on walking and bicycling in drivers ed curricula and driving tests. Laying the groundwork with novice drivers will have positive long-term impacts and lessen the lift from Safe Routes practitioners.

Malls and Shopping Centers

Mall outreach can help you to connect with people who experience barriers to participating in Safe Routes programs. This can include essential workers, immigrants, older adults, and youth. Malls are also great locations to encourage physical activity since most people walk or roll between stores. Consider prime times to reach families – Back to School season, holiday season, weekends, and mornings.

Equity Tip: The shift to online shopping is not applicable to everyone. Many people still shop in person, either due to personal preference or out of necessity. Malls, farmers markets, grocery stores, and flea markets are important commercial and cultural centers. If you are looking to engage a new audience, try conducting outreach at these locations.



Celebrate Local Heroes

The success of Ruby Bridges Walk to School Day is an exciting development in Safe Routes to School. But why stop there? Along with honoring national icons, communities can also celebrate local heroes. Ask students who they would like to celebrate in a special Safe Routes to School event. It could be a historical figure, a notable person in the community, or just a friendly neighbor. Partner with news reporters, community organizations, or local businesses to promote your celebration.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV)/Motor Vehicle Association (MVA) Branches

A trip to the DMV is not something most people look forward to, but Safe Routes practitioners can change that. This is a prime spot for community outreach. Not only will you encounter a diverse group of people, you can also provide a bit of fun to an otherwise dull location. Ask a DMV branch manager if you can distribute Safe Routes to School materials to people to peruse while they wait. Or even better, set up a table with giveaways, school travel maps, and bike and pedestrian safety tips. What better way to remind drivers to look out for kids walking, biking, and rolling than going to a driving hub!

Conclusion

Partnerships keep communities strong and thriving. They also ensure that Safe Routes programs have the necessary resources to make a positive impact. As the Safe Routes movement rolls on, let's bring others along for the ride. With the power and possibility of partnerships, the future of Safe Routes is bright!