

SAFE ROUTES NEBRASKA

Community Partnership Handbook



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TEAMS, TASKS & TIPS: BUILDING YOUR LOCAL SAFE ROUTES PROGRAM

Building a successful Safe Routes program in your community is more than a matter of luck. It takes planning. This handbook will walk you through some of the first steps to creating an effective program that makes a real difference in the lives of your community's children.

STEP 1: BUILDING YOUR TEAM

While a local Safe Routes Nebraska program usually has one or two main champions, it's imperative that your team involve representatives of all important stakeholder groups. Because each community is unique, each community will have different stakeholder groups to work with. Making sure that all of these groups are represented is a solid first step to creating a Safe Routes program that is tailored to the specific needs of your community.

Your Safe Routes program is likely to involve the local school . . . but team members will come from beyond there. Will your program involve city and/or county walking and biking routes, law enforcement, or health education components? If so, you'll want to directly engage the city, county, school, and local health care officials.

Here's a list of stakeholder groups and potential partners you may want to involve in your Safe Routes program:

Schools, students, and parents

- Principals and teachers
- Parent-teacher associations
- School board members
- Student council members

City, state government officials, organizations

- Mayor and council members
- City engineers
- City and/or county planners (transportation, public works departments, etc.)
- State and/or county department of roads
- Parks and recreation departments

Businesses, community organizations

- Business and community leaders
- Health and fitness businesses (shoe, bike, sports retailers, etc.)
- Children's book retailers
- Chambers of commerce
- Service clubs (Rotary, Elks, etc.)

Health and safety organizations

- Police officers/law enforcement
- Neighborhood and community policing organizations
- Health officials (public health, pediatricians, nutritionists, etc.)

Sports and youth clubs

- Youth organizations (YMCA, 4-H, Boy/Girl Scouts, FCCLA, etc.)
- Children’s sports organizations
- Sports clubs (e.g., running, walking, cycling clubs)

Public figures

- Local media
- Local sports celebrities

STEP 2: STARTING YOUR PROGRAM

Now that your team is assembled, it’s time to begin planning your program. Schedule a series of team meetings where the group can come together to develop a comprehensive strategy for encouraging kids to walk to school. Remember, the goal is to get more kids active on a daily basis, so be sure to explore all possible avenues . . . let all ideas come to the table!

SCHEDULING YOUR MEETINGS

While higher-level state officials usually have allowances for night meetings, night and weekend meetings can be difficult for most city and county government staff to attend. If you start meetings at about 4 p.m. on weekdays, you’re likely to get higher attendance. For those who can’t attend, be sure to get their ideas about the program beforehand, so these can be presented to the group.

If team members are not attending meetings, don’t give up. Keep calling the groups you want to work with and find people within that group who can get excited about your Safe Routes program. Having the local media present at your meeting can be a highly effective way to motivate elected officials and staff on the team to attend meetings.

MEETING AGENDAS

While every Safe Routes program team will need to tailor its discussion to the community’s specific needs, there are some items that should be covered in every plan:

- *Physical barriers* – Discuss issues with roads, traffic, and sidewalk availability that may make it difficult for children to walk or bike to school safely.
- *Parental motivation* – What is the motivation for parents to drive their children to school or the bus stop? If your community is in a rural area, it may be the long distances. If your community is in an urban area, it may be safety. When you determine what is motivating parents to drive their children to school, you’ll be in a better position to present solutions that will work in your community. Some districts have developed park and walk stops to save parents time, remote drop-offs for school busses, chaperoned walking programs that address safety, and more.

- *Education* – It’s vital to inform parents, children, and teachers about the importance of daily activity for children. Obesity is a national epidemic that threatens the health of the next generation. It’s something that the public needs to be educated about so they can understand the need for your Safe Routes program. Consider working directly with schools to make appropriate health and safety curriculum available to students. See the Safe Routes in the Classroom section of www.SafeRoutesNE.com for in-class activities that teachers can use.
- *Child safety* – Kidnapping is a common fear among parents. In order to be successful, your team must find a way to put parents at ease. The team should also discuss child safety when it comes to traffic.
- *Publicity* – Discuss how your team plans to promote the program in schools, to parents, and to the community in general. Specifically, discuss how team members can spread the word to the other committees, agencies, and community groups they’re part of. See more about this in STEP 3: PROMOTING YOUR PROGRAM.
- *Economic issues* – Finally, once your team has developed a plan, it’s time to attach a dollar amount to it. How much will it cost to implement everything? Can donations be secured? Discuss applying for funding from the Nebraska Department of Roads/Safe Routes Nebraska to help cover the costs. Visit www.SafeRoutesNE.com to find out more.
- *Community partners* – What other community members can help your efforts with monetary, service, or materials donations? See *Partnerships That Pay* in Section 2 of this document.

PARENTAL BUY-IN

Economic status is the single biggest predictor of whether parents will participate. It’s typically more difficult to get parent volunteers in low-income communities, even though more low-income children are walking. Reach out to these parents through the schools. A backpack flyer promoting the program may be an effective method. Download a Safe Routes Nebraska backpack flyer from the Marketing Toolkit section of www.SafeRoutesNE.com.

Another good way to reach out to parents is through the local parent-teacher association. If you want to find PTA contacts in your area, visit the National PTA website at www.pta.org.

Create a program advocate that parents will trust. For example, a police officer who is also a parent can make a powerful connection with other parents and help you reach out to the PTA and elected officials. If there is a wellness council at the school, work through this program to institutionalize Safe Routes Nebraska.

Remember, parents aren’t the only caregivers who can encourage children to walk and bike. Coaches, police officers, grandparents, and more can be powerful allies when it comes to getting kids fired up about physical activity.

STEP 3: PROMOTING YOUR PROGRAM

Once your team has developed a plan of action for the Safe Routes program, it's time to begin promoting the program. There are several techniques for effective promotion that should be used together for maximum impact.

Kicking it off

Plan a kickoff event to promote the program and get people excited. A fun, kid-focused event will bring in kids and parents. Invite the local media to the event with a press kit and follow-up phone call. Try to get local celebrities (a TV personality, business leader, city official, or hometown sports celebrity, for example) to attend the event and generate even greater attendance by community members.

In-school education

Work with schools to make teachers the program's biggest advocates. By using in-class encouragement programs and specialized in-class activities that focus on the importance of physical activity, teachers can give kids plenty of incentives to walk and bike to school. See the Educators section of www.SafeRoutesNE.com for more information. You'll even find Safe Routes book covers in the Marketing Toolkit section of the site!

Community education

The Marketing Toolkit at the Safe Routes Web site is a treasure trove of community education materials. You'll find brochures, flyers, posters, media fact sheets, press release templates, Web banner ads, and more. Make use of these materials when promoting your program. Safe Routes Nebraska has even developed radio public service announcements you can use in your community free of charge. Most local radio stations will give PSAs free airtime . . . be sure to contact them to find out.

Word of mouth

Get your team members involved in other groups that deal with community issues. PTA, city council, neighborhood associations, and community fitness meetings can be tremendous venues for letting vocal community members know about the program. Most of these groups are looking for speakers and would be glad to give you 10 minutes to share the program with members. Write letters to the editor to inform the community about the importance of daily activity for children and what your Safe Routes program is doing to keep kids healthy. You can even use the Letter to the Editor tool at www.SafeRoutesNE.com.

PARTNERSHIPS THAT PAY: IDENTIFYING COMMUNITY PARTNERS TO HELP YOUR SAFE ROUTES PROGRAM SUCCEED

Your Safe Routes program is eligible for funding from the Nebraska Department of Roads/Safe Routes Nebraska, the state-level implementation of the federal Safe Routes to School program. But even with funding, your program will have needs to be filled. The best place to look for donations is within your own community.

This section will discuss how you can go about soliciting donations of money, time, services, or materials from community businesses and organizations to help your Safe Routes program achieve success.

WHAT DOES YOUR PROGRAM NEED?

Are you planning an event that could use a sponsor? Want to give away bikes or walking shoes as incentives to kids? Maybe you'd just like to have some Safe Routes Nebraska materials professionally printed to promote your program? Whatever you need, there are likely to be partners in the community who can help. Common needs include:

- Ad space/airtime with local media outlets
- Volunteer support for events and programs
- Program and event sponsorship
- Materials printing
- Incentive donations for kids
- Monetary donations for supplies, staffing, and training
- Law enforcement support for events and programs

WHO SHOULD YOU ASK FOR HELP?

Once you identify your needs, identifying community resources is simple. Many businesses—large and small—seek out community causes to support. Make a list of all the stores, businesses, organizations, or individuals that can provide what your program needs. Then determine which of these are most likely to be open to partnership with your Safe Routes program.

HOW DO YOU ASK FOR DONATIONS?

When asking for donations of time, money, services, or materials, asking in person is usually the most effective route. Once you establish a personal connection with decision makers, it's harder for them to turn down your requests. When visiting with potential donors, be sure to dress professionally and conservatively. Before heading out to call on local businesses and organizations, find out who the appropriate contact is and approach that person ahead of time via mail, e-mail, or phone. The contact chain should move like this:

1. Letter or e-mail making request, promising follow-up
2. Phone follow-up focused on setting face-to-face meeting
3. Face-to-face meeting to review request and close the deal

Remember, even though you're starting with a letter or e-mail, your ultimate goal is a face-to-face meeting. The verbiage of your initial letter should explain your Safe Routes program, its goals, and what donation can help your program meet those goals. At your face-to-face meeting, bring at least two copies of the request letter: one for you and one for the potential donor. This way you can refer to the letter during the conversation. For ideas on verbiage for your letter or e-mail, please see the sample request letter on the following page.

SAMPLE REQUEST LETTER

<DATE>

<BUSINESS OWNER>

<BUSINESS NAME>

<ADDRESS>

<CITY, ST ZIP>

Dear <NAME>,

We've all heard about the obesity epidemic that's gripping our nation's kids. Even in our community, childhood obesity is becoming a major health problem . . . causing diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and even death. We can do better. And you can help make it happen.

<ORGANIZATION'S NAME> is committed to making childhood obesity and its deadly effects a thing of the past in our community. We're writing to ask for your help!

We've started a Safe Routes to School program in <CITY> to encourage kids to get daily exercise and stay healthy. With your help, the program can impact the futures of many children!

The program

The purpose of a Safe Routes to School program is to provide kids a clear, safe path so they can walk or bike to school regularly. In <CITY>, our program <INSERT BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM GOALS>.

How YOU can help

In order to make our program a success, we need community leaders like you to pitch in. We need <SPECIFIC NEEDS: bikes, walking shoes, money, printing, etc.>. This donation is vital in helping us <SPECIFIC GOAL: offer kids incentives to be active, educate kids and parents, spread the word about the importance of the program, etc.>.

What's in it for you?

In return for your generous donation, we'll make sure your concern for our children is publicly acknowledged. The goodwill generated by your act of kindness will benefit your business for years to come.

You CAN help stop childhood obesity!

Please consider the impact your donation could have on the lives of our community's kids. Someone from our organization will call you soon to follow up. If you can't wait to get started, contact <NAME> at <NUMBER AND E-MAIL>.

The difference you make for our children could be enormous. Thank you so much for taking the time to consider a donation.

Sincerely,

<YOUR NAME>

<YOUR TITLE, ORGANIZATION>

P.S. For more information about Safe Routes to School programs, visit www.SafeRoutesNE.com.

THANK YOUR DONOR

Nearly all donors like to be recognized and appreciated for their contribution. That's why it's so important to thank them for their donations. It's easy to do and will help ensure future contributions.

Send a personalized thank you note a few days after donors make their contribution. Emphasize the importance of what they're doing. After all, they are helping to curtail the deadly obesity epidemic that's facing your community's children. Let them know that you'll be contacting them for future support if a need arises.

One very important way to thank donors is to see that their contribution is publicized. Do this by preparing a news release on behalf of the donor and sending it to local media organizations. Check with your donors to see if they'd like this service. Most of them will be grateful for the goodwill such publicity could generate for their business or organization.

GETTING STARTED

Below is a list of some common potential partners you can approach for a variety of program needs. This list should help generate some ideas on where to start seeking out community partnerships.

Law enforcement agencies

- Monitor approved Safe Routes Nebraska walking and biking paths
- Implement special enforcement in and around school walking and biking paths near roads
- Educate children and parents about walking and biking safety
- Escort children on a walk to school event

Health and fitness businesses, organizations

- Provide education about walking and biking safety
- Hold a free children's health check event
- Offer tips for healthy living to children
- Sponsor a Safe Routes event

Safety agencies

- Conduct free bicycle safety checks
- Sponsor a Safe Routes event
- Educate children about walking and biking safety

Bike/shoe/fitness retail outlets

- Sponsor a Safe Routes event
- Donate bicycles or walking shoes as prizes or incentives
- Provide free bicycle safety checks and discounted repairs
- Donate a percentage of new bike or shoe sales to Safe Routes
- Offer free in-store advertising for Safe Routes events

Major retail chains

- Donate money for Safe Routes educational materials
- Donate bicycles or walking shoes as prizes or incentives
- Sponsor a Safe Routes event

Chambers of commerce

- Sponsor a Safe Routes event
- Promote Safe Routes sponsorship to local businesses

Parents groups

- Promote the program at local city council and PTA meetings
- Write letters to the editor to promote your program

Community media

- Donate airtime to raise awareness
- Cover Safe Routes events
- Speak to kids about health and fitness
- Establish and cover a walking/biking competition between schools

Community philanthropists

- Donate money to buy bikes or shoes for children in need
- Sponsor a Safe Routes event

Community sports figures

- Sponsor a Safe Routes event
- Donate money for bikes or shoes
- Speak to kids at school assemblies about health and fitness

Landscapers, architects, builders

- Identify recommendations and designs to improve walking and biking paths for kids
- Donate time and money to design, build, or improve paths

Neighborhood housing associations

- Identify safe walking or biking routes to schools in the area
- Provide volunteers to monitor routes
- Donate funds to erect signs identifying safe routes
- Sponsor Safe Routes events

Youth centers/YMCA, etc.

- Develop programs that incorporate Safe Routes Nebraska activities
- Provide volunteers to escort students who walk/bike to school
- Sponsor fitness/health-related activities or events

Printing companies

- Donate printing of brochures and other promotional materials
- Offer discounts on printing

Bookstores

- Hold a sale and promote kids' books about fitness
- Donate books about fitness/health to schools

SAFE ROUTES RESOURCES

- 1. Safe Routes Nebraska Web site:** This is your first and best resource for everything you need to build community partnerships, execute your program, and promote it to your community. Visit www.SafeRoutesNE.com.
- 2. Safe Routes to School toolkit:** A great resource for getting started locally is the Safe Routes to School toolkit published by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. We encourage you to review this how-to guidebook, which includes surveys, checklists, sample press releases, resolutions of support, fact sheets, curriculum, success stories, statistics, and more. Get it at www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/pedbimot/bike/Safe-Routes-2002.
- 3. National Center for Safe Routes to School:** Visit www.SafeRoutesInfo.org for a variety of resources, such as the SRTS Guide, adult school crossing guard guidelines, and a walking school bus guide. The Web site resource center contains materials on walk to school day events, promotional materials, and more. Also, the Web site online library is a searchable database of more than 150 additional resources where you can upload new material.
- 4. SRTS Topica list-serve:** Receive Safe Routes Web updates from the national center. To sign up, simply send an e-mail message to saferoutestoschool-subscribe@topica.com, leaving the subject heading and the body of the message blank. After you send the message, you will receive a verification e-mail. From there, reply to the verification e-mail to receive a welcome message saying that you have successfully subscribed to the list. Now, you can elect to receive every e-mail update message, a daily digest of messages, or to review messages via the Web.
- 5. Nebraska Department of Roads/Safe Routes Nebraska Program Coordinator:** Angela Barry is available to provide you advice and assistance in developing your program and identifying potential partners. Contact her at abarry@sinclairhille.com or (402) 476-7331.