



Local Case Study: Engagement

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When we think about engagement, a key concern is finding ways to prioritize and uplift voices from under-represented populations, and certainly feedback from those for whom intended changes are designed. There are many ways to engage the community in efforts to improve walking, bicycling, and public transportation access to parks and other destinations. From fun ways to gather community feedback like graffiti walls and community quilts to offering community members decision-making authority over developing solutions, ongoing, collaborative efforts result in safe and equitable solutions.

We're gathering local case studies that highlight successful community engagement, including insights on effective processes and evaluation. Read on for insights from the Montrose Area Bicycle Alliance!

Tell us about your project. What was the inspiration behind it?

Recognizing that the City of Montrose has great potential to be a haven for active transportation, we have been working hard to improve our safety and education efforts. Inspired by the Bicycle Friendly Community program (which puts a large emphasis on regular bicycle safety training in schools), we saw an obvious gap and developed our Safe Routes to School program to fill this need in our community.

How were community voices reflected in your project?

The Montrose Area Bicycle Alliance (MABA) led our SRTS program with an understanding of our community's demographics, strengths and weaknesses. In 2019 we brought programming to two of our most diverse elementary schools- one in a low income neighborhood and one in a high income neighborhood. This allowed us to hear many voices in our community. We were able to work with students with different skill levels (some who had been biking for many years and others who had never biked before), students with different family dynamics (students with two working parents and those with a stay at home parent), students with disabilities and both English and Spanish speaking students. By way of the Parent Survey, we collected valuable feedback on parents' perceptions of walking and biking to school, and shared this feedback in our project summary report.

We also received support from many different types of local businesses, from bike shops to manufacturers and pediatric dentists. This community partnership was a nice

reminder that SRTS is a valuable program for the entire community, not just the students.

Share a moment from this project that you were proud of. Why was this moment important?

Wow, so many!

- *On Walk to School Day 2019, a principal biked to school with his three daughters!*
- *The many students with disabilities we got on bikes at Northside!*
- *Pulling off 2 days of successful programming to 400 children with our very limited staff and resources – i.e., our hobbled together bike fleet, our tiny budget!*

What were some of the challenges you faced?

There were many.... limited resources: tiny budget, no bike fleet, no mechanic

What were the main factors that guided you in planning your engagement efforts?

With programming taking place at our two most diverse schools, we relied heavily on school staff (the Principal, Administrative staff and P.E. Teachers) to offer guidance on the best way to engage the students and their families. For example, they encouraged us to provide all of our parent communications in both English and Spanish and offered translation services. They also connected us with their Parent Advisory Committees to develop an engagement strategy.

How did/will you follow-up with participants throughout your project's process?

Upon completion, a detailed Summary Report was written for each project. The report included narrative about the content of the program, results of the travel tally and parent survey, and recommendations for encouraging students to walk or bike to school. The reports were shared with the school district, school principal, P.E. teacher, the City of Montrose, the school's Parent Advisory Council and the Montrose Police Department. These documents provide a record of the program that can be referenced in the future. They also establish a "starting point" for comparing data collected during the next round of programming.

Other outreach & engagement tactics we used-

Since our program is new and the community overall is not familiar with SRTS, our most fundamental goal was to generate community-wide awareness of the program. Toward this end, we used the avenues of marketing communication that are free or inexpensive: journalism, letters to potential donors, and newsletters to sell people on the programming, by highlighting its benefits to the whole community. Specifically, we reached out to members of our business community. All it takes is one well-connected and talkative business leader to become a champion and spread the word.

Awareness is the first step, which is hopefully followed by the development of champions and community wide buy-in and support, with the ultimate goal of institutionalizing SRTS as a new norm.

Colorado Safe Routes to School is a statewide program of the Colorado Department of Transportation. It works to create and promote safe, accessible, and fun opportunities for kids to walk and bike to and from school.