



**SAFE
ROUTES TO
PARKS**



**Safe
Routes
PARTNERSHIP**

saferoutespartnership.org

The Safe Routes Partnership's Approach to Coaching Communities for Sustainable Park Access

Parks play a role in supporting public health, from mitigating the impacts of climate change to reducing depression and anxiety. A 2022 systematic review by the Community Preventative Services Task Force – part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and supported by the Centers for Disease Control – emphasized the importance of Safe Routes to Parks for maximizing the health benefits of parks, greenways, and trails. The findings, published in what is called [the Community Guide](#), showed that rates of physical activity improved significantly only when parks were combined with at least one of four key strategies to facilitate their access and usage: community engagement, public awareness, structured programming, and access enhancements. So, why does this matter? It reinforces that Safe Routes to Parks is a research-backed strategy for improving health outcomes. [For more information on this research and related strategies, check out: Actionable Public Health Strategies to Boost Community Well-Being with Safe Routes to Parks.](#)

However, the evidence that a strategy works to improve health is usually not enough to spur action in communities. Communities often face challenges such as limited resources, lack of political support, or siloed agencies that can make it difficult to implement these strategies effectively. Communities are often more motivated to take action when they see other communities like their own successfully overcome these challenges. And still, they typically need help to figure out how to adapt what worked elsewhere to fit their unique context.

At the Safe Routes Partnership, we've honed our approach to technical assistance, working with local and state partners to coach communities to overcome these barriers. Our goal is to help them achieve short-term wins that pave the way for long-term goals of park access. Below is our practical approach to technical assistance and how we equip communities with the knowledge, skills, and partnerships they need to continue their work without us.

Applying a Systems Change Approach to Our Technical Assistance

Over the years, we have found that communities often struggle to know what to ask for from a technical assistance provider. While we encourage a broad range of requests, we have found it helpful to offer clear suggestions of how our technical assistance can help launch their work more effectively. The following tables outline our technical assistance menu to show how we can help. Since our ultimate



goal is to strengthen a community's capacity to continue this work independently, the menu of options that follows corresponds to how our help advances key knowledge and skills areas essential for communities to do equitable park access work. The broad knowledge areas include:

- ▶ How to Elevate Community Voice
- ▶ How to Connect with Formal Decision-Makers
- ▶ How to Move from Vision to Reality
- ▶ How to Sustain Safe Routes to Parks

To track the impact of our work, we use pre- and post-assessments to measure how our technical assistance has helped communities develop crucial skills in each of these knowledge areas. While we see ourselves as hands-on coaches integrated into the community's project team, we also aim to ensure our support fosters growth and development for lasting systemic change.



How to Elevate Community Voice



Skills to Build

- ▶ Understand and articulate why elevating community voice is a priority
- ▶ Build coalitions that represent the community's diversity
- ▶ Facilitate decision-making guided by a coalition
- ▶ Incorporate authentic community engagement in planning and implementation
- ▶ Identify, establish, and encourage resident leadership
- ▶ Help community members to share their stories
- ▶ Cultivate ongoing partnerships



What It Looks Like

A Walk Audit Engages Spanish-Speaking Residents on Park Access in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania. In 2023, the Safe Routes Partnership visited this rural community in northern Pennsylvania and helped Schuylkill County's VISION coordinate a Safe Routes to Parks walk audit with town staff, board members, and other community partners. While VISION was familiar with the walk audit tool, they did not anticipate how much more impactful it would be to include community participation. The audit sparked unexpected conversations, particularly with Spanish-speaking families in town. We worked with VISION to shape early actions to include these families who frequented the local parks. This included partnering up with the local school to host family-friendly events at the park and recruiting bilingual community members to promote and facilitate engagement.



How We Help

Facilitate Equity and Engagement Trainings:

These are powerful opportunities for peer learning and training on the fundamentals of equity and how-to do meaningful engagement. [Refer to this past recorded training [Incorporating Equity in Safe Routes to Parks.](#)]



Train and Assist on Engagement Activities:

We have a suite of creative approaches to bring together diverse stakeholders in interactive, solution-oriented conversations. [A sampling of our engagement resources: [Safe Routes to Parks Walk Audit](#), [Community Engagement Vision Activities](#)]



Develop Engagement Plans that Center Equity:

We coach communities to identify whose voices need to be centered in the engagement process and plot out action steps on how to do so. [See our suite of resources on [Equity in Safe Routes to Parks](#)]



Develop a Coalition:

We facilitate conversations with partners, spot opportunities for new partnerships, and identify shared resources and goals for continued work together.



How to Connect with Formal Decision-Makers



Skills to Build

- ▶ Understand the reasons and opportunities to work with elected officials and agency leaders
- ▶ Identify champions within government staff and build trust
- ▶ Foster relationships between community and decision-makers
- ▶ Identify and connect advocacy to government processes
- ▶ Advocate for community representation on government commissions, task forces, and boards



What It Looks Like

Building Capacity and Thoughtful Partnerships in Santa Fe, New Mexico

Mexico: A group of partners including a friends-of-the-park group and the local Metropolitan Planning Organization wanted to work on Safe Routes to Parks in Santa Fe. However, they did not demographically represent the area, and they wanted to focus on, a diverse, multi-lingual, immigrant, and working-class part of the city. Inspired by the Safe Routes to Parks Equity Training, they reached out to a local organizing group, EarthCare that was more deeply rooted in the focus area. With this partnership, they were able to connect to the neighborhood by meeting people where they already were engaged. They worked with that organization to lead engagement on park access and create trainings for youth to build their capacity to advocate for their own community development interests within a part of Santa Fe that is rapidly changing.



How We Help

Develop a Leadership Relations Strategy

We help teams strategize on how to get leadership on board and supportive. This may be framing talking points, crafting proposals, joining calls with staff, or identify who else needs to be part of the conversation to move leaders.



Give Formal Presentations or Public Comments

We give presentations to elected officials, department heads, and other decision-makers to reinforce key messages on the importance of Safe Routes to Parks.



Conduct Policy Scans

We review existing policies and plans to identify opportunities to improve access and equity. Advocates can use these reviews to show decision-makers how their projects can advance existing government commitments.



Gather Case Studies of Peer Communities

With seven years of experience in Safe Routes to Parks and over two decades in active transportation and Safe Routes to School, we can pull examples of work from a variety of communities across the country to inspire people.



How to Move from Vision to Reality



Skills to Build

- ▶ Facilitate goal and priority setting with community members
- ▶ Support community-led data collection
- ▶ Influence public plans and agency budgets
- ▶ Understand funding mechanisms and how to engage in them
- ▶ Identify grants, and other funding resources for future work
- ▶ Navigate timelines for public planning processes and understand how to include community priorities



What It Looks Like

An Action Plan Workshop Sets in Motion Cross-Agency Buy-In to Advance Park Access in Boulder, Colorado. When Boulder's parks staff began planning a new park in North Boulder they were unsure how to address concerns expressed by residents regarding the safety and accessibility of routes leading to and from the park. Park staff were committed to leading deep engagement in this neighborhood of predominantly Latino and Nepalese families and needed a pathway to loop in Transportation and Mobility. We helped them jumpstart that collaboration through an in-person site visit, where we helped them organize a roll and stroll audit with community partners, transportation staff, and local residents to identify key safety concerns. Building on the audit's findings, we co-hosted a Safe Routes to Parks Action Workshop to work collaboratively with Transportation and Mobility staff to explore viable solutions. This partnership resulted in tangible short and long-term improvements and \$7.5 million earmarked by the city to improve access to this park. This process also established a precedent for future cross-agency collaboration and a model to advance a more holistic and equitable approach to community planning.



How We Help

Facilitate Action Plan Workshops

These sessions foster collaboration among partners and facilitate planning that helps everyone align on clear next steps to advance their efforts.



Conduct In-person Site Visits

In-person site visits can be valuable in the early months of an action plan process to bring together partners and kickstart action.



Support Evaluation

We walk people through how to measure the impact of their work from beginning to end so that they can uplift impact and include tangible data in their stories.



Pair Short-term Actions and Long-Term Planning

We help identify and implement short-term actions that build momentum towards long-term changes to policies, practices, and funding. This helps ensure that residents, nonprofit organizations, elected officials, and government staff feel bought into this work for the long term and can see ongoing progress.



How to Sustain Safe Routes to Parks



Skills to Build

- ▶ Break down long-term goals into short-term actions
- ▶ Measure the impact of early actions
- ▶ Keep community members interested and engaged
- ▶ Identify system-wide plans to incorporate community priorities
- ▶ Have a clear plan on how to influence agency functions



What It Looks Like

Piloting an Inclusive Process for Community Engagement in Bozeman, Montana.

In 2022, Bozeman had an upcoming transportation and parks plan update and were interested in incorporating Safe Routes to Parks. Early on, we encouraged them to try out different community engagement tactics, and they were excited to implement a community liaison program with people who represented different communities like the Black community, Spanish-speaking community, people with disabilities. We helped them use their Safe Routes to Parks work to demonstrate how this new community engagement approach could be applied to the bigger city-wide planning effort.



Conclusion

Over the last seven years, we have continually refined our technical assistance to support communities to advance their Safe Routes to Parks work. Our approach ensures that communities are better positioned with the knowledge and skills to continue their initiative in the long-term.



How We Help

Write Impactful Plans

We draft and design action plans that accurately reflect a community's Safe Routes to Parks process. These are polished documents so communities can proudly publish them and share them with their partners. [See these examples of action plans we created for [Bellefonte, PA](#) and [Boulder, CO](#)]

Connect to Upcoming Planning Efforts

Not only do we identify upcoming opportunities to nest Safe Routes to Parks priorities into existing transportation, parks, and public health planning efforts, we also provide communities with a roadmap as to how they might do that. We ensure they know who to connect with, how to connect with them, and help them craft their ask.

Lead Collaborative Assessments

We tailor assessment activities specifically to the participants and their needs, selecting from a wide range of tools such as modified SWOT analysis, community power mapping, and process evaluation. These activities help partners build on what works well, strategize on how to move key actors, and reflect on lessons learned to inform future work. [Here is a glimpse of relevant resources: [Power Mapping 101](#) and [What Gets Measured Gets Managed: A Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluating Safe Routes Projects from Beginning to End](#)]



Communication and Storytelling Support

We draft press releases, talking points, and case studies to help communities share their story to boost attention and make the case for further investment.

