

How Communities Make SRTS Happen

When starting a Safe Routes to School program, every community has different issues, so the way a program develops will reflect a unique set of challenges, opportunities, and resources. The following seven steps offer a general framework of how communities can begin to build SRTS programs.

1. Bring together the right people

Because SRTS programs involve a wide range of issues and strategies, successful programs consider several stakeholders. Sharing concerns, interests, and knowledge among a variety of community members with diverse expertise can enable groups to tackle many issues. Those interested in serving a more active role can form a core group, or taskforce, to guide program planning and implementation.

2. Gather information and identify issues

Collecting information can help to create a picture of local conditions and provide a way to measure the impact of the program later. Information that can inform both program planning and evaluation includes: current school travel methods and routes, assessment of existing walking and bicycling issues, parent attitudes on walking and bicycling to school, student and parent behaviors during school travel, traffic counts and speeds, and injury data.

3. Find solutions

Once the taskforce identifies barriers to walking and bicycling, they can begin to brainstorm solutions or strategies to address those barriers. The group should consider both long-term and short-term solutions.

4. Make a plan

A SRTS plan does not need to be lengthy or complicated, but should summarize baseline information on the school and community (see #2 above), identify challenges and opportunities to increase walking and bicycling to school, pinpoint and prioritize solutions for all 6 “E’s” and guide SRTS projects and programs, possibly through a time schedule.

5. Find funding as needed

In broad terms, there are two types of funds usually necessary for a comprehensive Safe Routes to School effort: 1.) Infrastructure (or capital) funds pay for new facilities like sidewalks, crosswalks, and other changes to the built environment. 2.) Non-infrastructure funds provide resources for education, encouragement or enforcement efforts. NCTCOG provides resources for non-infrastructure activities. For more information, visit <https://www.nctcog.org/SafeRoutesToSchool> or <https://www.lookouttexans.org/school-resources>.

6. Act on the plan

Even if the plan identifies priority projects that may take time to implement, remember there are things that can be done right away without major funding such as a media-friendly kick-off event or the launch a safety education program for students. Short-term activities can provide visibility, build support for long-term strategies and boost program momentum.

7. Evaluate and make changes if needed

Tracking progress will help determine whether things are going as planned or adjustments are necessary.

SRTS Program Sustainability

For a SRTS program to achieve any long-term goals identified through SRTS planning, the program has to be around for awhile. Program sustainability – the ability of a SRTS program to be maintained into the future – is vital to the ultimate success of the program. A few strategies that can help make the program sustainable include:

- Once the taskforce has drafted a SRTS action plan, share this plan with stakeholders.
- After the plan is final, request its adoption or endorsement by key partners, including the school, school district, school board, PTA/PTO, or local government.
- Identify, support and build a team of program champions. Typically, SRTS programs are driven by the energy and passion of a few people. Parent turnover can place great strains on a program. Having a team can help.
- Move the taskforce into a SRTS committee. This could be a separate committee or a subcommittee of the PTA/PTO or another group.
- Keep the program visible. Publicize events and projects through school and neighborhood newsletters and local media outlets. Invite elected officials and key stakeholders to events or ribbon cuttings for completed projects (and let them know media has been invited).

SRTS Program Evaluation

Evaluation efforts are important for long-term sustainability as they can provide important information to guide program decisions and to secure community, partner and stakeholder support and resources.

When to gather information

- Information collected *before* the program yields baseline information and provides information for program planning.
- Information collected *during* the program identifies progress and areas needing improvements.
- Information collected *after* the program identifies changes in behaviors, attitudes and/or the physical environment and informs decisions about the future of the program.

Tools to use

Sometimes communities develop their own surveys and other tools. However, the National Center for Safe Routes to School has developed two standardized SRTS data collection forms that prevent having to “reinvent the wheel” and also allow for collection of consistent information across the country. These tools are the Student In-Class Travel Tally and the Parent Survey. When it’s time to compare “before” and “after” data an online system can summarize local data and create reports for use by the taskforce. See <http://www.saferoutesdata.org/> to download the forms and to find more information on creating reports.