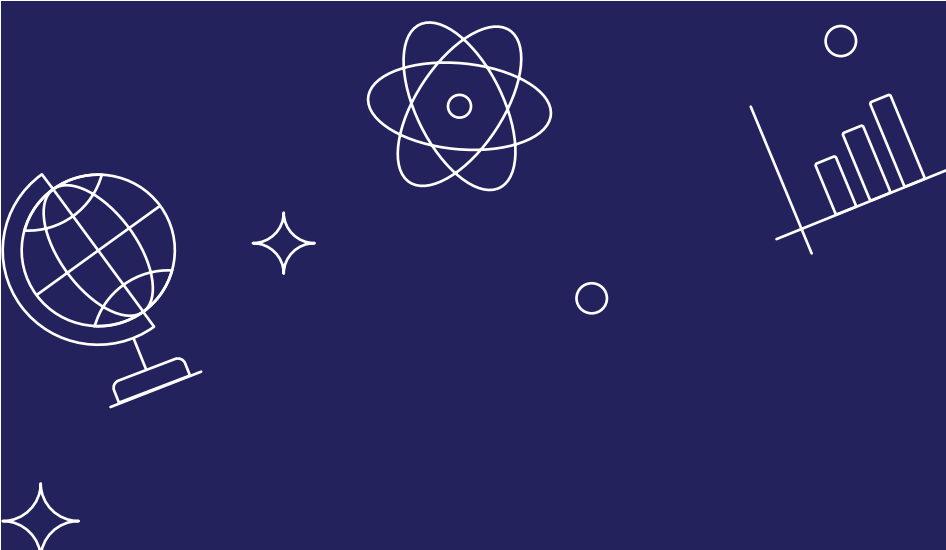




# SAFE ROUTES FOR YOUTH

Supporting and Empowering  
Teen Leaders in Vision Zero





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**AUTHOR:** Kori Johnson in collaboration with CDMA Business Model



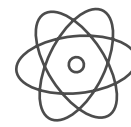
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# Introduction



Vision Zero initiatives around the country are moving to create a major cultural shift in how people relate to transportation and what they expect from their transportation systems. Young people, who have always been at the forefront of cultural and social change, will play an essential role in the success of this work. From [MTV News](#) to [March for Our Lives](#), teens shape the way we recreate, communicate, and stand up for our rights. Young people are also changing transportation culture, with fewer teens driving and more teens using public transportation and active transportation. Yet, motor vehicle collisions are still a leading cause of death for teens; this presents a critical opportunity to reduce injury and death rates in this age group.

The Safe Routes for Youth project aimed to address these trends and develop youth-centered Vision Zero strategies. The Safe Routes Partnership worked with young people in Washington, DC to drive a set of innovative transportation safety initiatives. The goals of Safe Routes for Youth project were to engage directly with young people to support youth leadership and identify barriers to safe transportation, prioritize and design strategies that increase safe transportation for young people, conduct youth-led safety education initiatives, and build District understanding around transportation issues affecting youth. This toolkit provides tips and strategies for effectively engaging young people in Vision Zero. We review the basic tenets of Vision Zero and how they can be integrated into Safe Routes to School programming, share general principles of youth engagement, feature organizations leading innovative youth traffic safety programs in Washington, DC, and provide tools to help you design and implement a successful youth safety initiative in your community.

## About Safe Routes Partnership

Founded in 2005, the mission of the Safe Routes Partnership is to advance safe walking and rolling to and from schools and in everyday life, improving the health and well-being of people of all races, income levels, and abilities, and building healthy, thriving communities for everyone.

The Safe Routes Partnership is a nonprofit organization that improves the quality of life for communities by promoting healthy living, safe infrastructure, and physical activity with a focus on walking and biking. We advance policy change; catalyze support with a network of more than 800 partner organizations, as well as schools, policy makers, and grassroots supporters; and we share our deep expertise at national, state and local levels with those helping propel our mission.

The Safe Routes Partnership seeks equitable solutions to transportation challenges. We celebrate the many assets of low-income and communities of color and believe in the power of residents as change-makers. We understand that due to systemic disinvestment, low-income and communities of color face more dangers to safe walking and biking than other communities. We commit to supporting initiatives that benefit all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for people of color.





# VISION ZERO: The Power of Young Voices

Vision Zero is an international traffic safety campaign aimed at eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Started in Sweden in 1997, Vision Zero has been adopted by dozens of US cities, including New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Seattle, and Portland. The initiatives press for dynamic changes to how we plan and use our streets. It calls for street design that is safe, accessible, and friendly for all mobility users. This may look like installing more dedicated bus lanes and protected bike lanes, creating car-free zones in certain areas of a city, and implementing educational campaigns to reduce risky behaviors. Vision Zero is ambitious and will require courage and compromise for it to be fully realized.

Young people can play a powerful role making Vision Zero a reality. Young people are already transforming the way our country views car usage. As shown by a 2016 survey from the University of Michigan Transportation Research Institute, the number of teens in the United States with driver's licenses is decreasing. In 2014, 24.5 percent of 16-year-olds had their driver's license, marking a 47 percent drop from 1983 when 46.2 percent of teens were licensed. What was once a rite of passage has increasingly been replaced by young people choosing public transportation, walking, bicycling, or catching a ride with a friend or family member. In many U.S. cities, the number of teen drivers is even lower due to the urban environment and a high number of transportation options available. Supporting this move towards safer streets for everyone requires engaging a socially conscious, physically active young generation. Their contributions will help establish a strong culture of road safety and active transportation.

Technology and social media also impact transportation trends. Students are taking to social media to spread safety messages to their peers. In Montgomery County, MD, young people worked with their local Department of Transportation and public school system to develop the [YOLO \(You Only Live Once\) Campaign](#). Their custom social media posts and hashtags encouraged pedestrians and drivers to practice safe behaviors. Other young people around the world are using new mobile technology to perform walk audits through the [Star Rating for Schools](#) app, which is currently in its pilot phase. The app allows users to input road safety information into mobile devices like cell phones and iPads. Young people are even using internet trends to impact transportation safety. The [New Urbanism Memes for Transit Oriented Teens](#) Facebook group is full of humorous, pro-active transportation/transit posts for the social media generation.





Young people living in cities are also pioneering innovative approaches to Vision Zero. [CDMA Business Model](#) is a New York City Public Schools and District of Columbia Public Schools program provider that teaches students how to make real world connections outside of the classroom. CDMA Business Model's approach to Vision Zero is grounded in [Social Advocacy](#) and includes Youth-Led Traffic Safety Events, and Youth Safety Town Halls. Students and CDMA Youth Leaders participating in CDMA Business Model [Traffic Safety Programs](#) are using their creativity and expertise to make Vision Zero more comprehensive, inclusive, and culturally-relevant.

Many youth-led initiatives are in response to the real concerns of young people. Cell phone use has led to an increase in distracted walking and driving among people of all ages. For teens, the trends are even more troubling. [Safe Kids Worldwide](#) recently conducted a study where half of surveyed teens reported crossing the street while engaging with a mobile device. Distractions included listening to music, texting, and talking on the phone. According to [National Safety Council](#), teens are at a much greater risk of being struck by a car than young children. Of the 374 pedestrians ages 5 – 19 who were killed by a motor vehicle in 2017, 64% of those deaths were youth ages 15 – 19 ([Injury Facts](#)). Young people are using this data to encourage safer behaviors amongst their peers and classmates. They are also acting out of concern for their families and community members by building safety movements that prioritize the safety of all road users. Teens are modeling the empathy and compassion needed to reach our Vision Zero goals.

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What are the traffic safety statistics for young people in your community?
- What would you like to learn about the traffic safety experiences of young people in your community?
- What youth-centered traffic safety initiatives already exist in your community? Where are the gaps to fill?

**Vision Zero is a comprehensive approach to eliminate all traffic fatalities and serious injuries. Through collaboration across government agencies and stakeholders, Vision Zero communities commit to preventing traffic deaths through a series of principles and action steps to make streets safe for everyone.**



# Integrating Safe Routes to School into Vision Zero

Safe Routes to School programs can strengthen Vision Zero initiatives. A comprehensive approach ensures that road safety and active transportation are prioritized as students travel around their community. This section reviews the Six E's of Safe Routes to School and provides ideas for school-based activities related to Vision Zero.

## SIX E'S OF SAFE ROUTES TO SCHOOL

The Safe Routes Partnership recommends an integrated approach to Vision Zero by incorporating the Six E's of Safe Routes to School:

### 1 EDUCATION

Providing students and the community with the skills to walk and bicycle safely, educating them about the benefits of walking and bicycling, and teaching them about the broad range of transportation choices.

### 2 ENCOURAGEMENT

Generating enthusiasm and increased walking and bicycling for students through events, activities, and programs.

### 3 ENGINEERING

Creating physical improvements to streets and neighborhoods that make walking and bicycling safer, more comfortable, and more convenient.

### 4 ENFORCEMENT

Deterring unsafe traffic behaviors and encouraging safe habits by people walking, bicycling and driving in school neighborhoods and along school routes.

### 5 EVALUATION

Assessing which approaches are more or less successful, ensuring that programs and initiatives are supporting equitable outcomes, and identifying unintended consequences or opportunities to improve the effectiveness of each approach.

### 6 EQUITY

Ensuring that Safe Routes to School initiatives are benefiting all demographic groups, with particular attention to ensuring safe, healthy, and fair outcomes for underserved students, students of color, students of all genders, students with disabilities, and others.





## School-Based Approaches to Vision Zero

You can use the Six E's of Safe Routes to School to create safety programs and activities to improve road safety. Here are a few integration opportunities to explore:

- **Create targeted campaign messages:**

Consider working with young people to build traffic safety campaigns specific to older students. Campaigns around distracted walking and driving are particularly important for this demographic.

- **Focus on streets where young people are traveling:**

Vision Zero often draws attention on busy arterials where a lot of crashes occur. Older students can bring attention to other areas of concern including side streets, alleyways, parks, and residential paths.

- **Measure what matters:**

After implementing a youth safety initiative, assess if there was a traffic safety shift for students. Did more students choose to walk or bike instead of drive? Was there a decrease in students crossing the street while distracted? Bring attention to major cultural shifts and encourage students to continue practicing safe behaviors.

For more information on this integrated safety approach, check out Safe Routes Partnership's report [Vision Zero and Safe Routes to School: Partners in Safety](#).



# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT 101: Grounded in Change and Growth

Working with young people, especially teens, can be intimidating. Some of this intimidation derives from **negative stereotypes** of teens as being rebellious, irresponsible, and difficult to manage. We also know that American teens are dealing with many issues that affect their well-being. A 2019 study by **Pew Research Center** noted a substantial number of teens who are experiencing mental stresses related to anxiety, depression, bullying, and living in poverty. These challenges can make it harder to engage young people and build positive relationships between youth and adults.

Still, we must recognize young peoples' valuable contributions to society and find meaningful ways to support them. Their innovation and creativity push us to consider new perspectives and plan thoughtfully for the future. This section explores the strategies of youth engagement that will help you develop a successful safety program. We call these strategies Youth Engagement 101.

## IDENTIFY INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

It is important to keep things fresh when working with young people. Forming innovative partnerships can be a great way to experiment with a new idea or breathe life into an old program. Think about reaching out to groups who you would usually consider unlikely partners. Does your school have a game design class? A robotics team? An anime club? A school store? Find out what groups exist in your school and see if they would be open to traffic safety collaborations. Some of the best ideas can come from unexpected places!

## SPEND TIME GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Young people can tell when the adults around them are putting on a show. They do not expect you to "play it cool" or be up to date on the latest trends. They expect you to be yourself. If you are working on an activity or event with young people, spend some time learning their names, asking about their interests, and listening to their stories. In turn, decide on a few things you are comfortable sharing with young people so you can bring your authentic self to the conversation. These informal interactions are a great way to build trust and develop a deeper understanding about the lives of young people. Think about having these conversations during group meetings, event prep, or activities like walk audits.

## DIVERSIFY YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

Technology and social media are a huge part of young peoples' lives. The way they communicate is always changing so we must stay up to date on the latest trends and platforms. This does not mean becoming social media experts but it does mean looking to young people to drive communications plans. Work with young people to create digital content and marketing materials including flyers, graphics, videos, and photos. If you are still developing social media skills, ask a young person for guidance. Adults do not always have to be the ones with all the answers. Use this opportunity to switch roles and become a learner. Young people will appreciate you valuing their expertise.

## ALLOW FOR CHOICE IN PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Young people like structure but they also want room to make their own choices. When creating a youth initiative, be clear about what is non-negotiable and where there is space for flexibility. Ask young people to determine walk audit routes, design surveys, volunteer at events, and present their ideas to the public. It can be hard to give up control, but young people are capable, confident leaders if they have the right support.



## CONNECT WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Communicating with parents and families can be a challenge as students get older. Studies show that family engagement drastically decreases by the time students enter middle school. Talk with young people about the best ways to connect with their parents and guardians for things like permission slips, media release forms, and general information about your program. You can also ask young people if there are traffic safety concerns that affect the adults in their family to help build those bridges. It is also important to keep in mind that many young people play caretaker roles in their families and are responsible for siblings, including school pick-up and drop-off. Ask people if they would be interested in developing traffic safety resources for young people taking care of siblings.

## BE OPEN TO CHANGE AND GROWTH

Young people are growing up in a rapidly changing world. They pick up new technology quickly, adapt to new trends with ease, and have a keen ability to predict the next “big thing” before the rest of the public catches on. Developing dynamic programs shows young people that we understand the fast-pace of their lives. This means we must be open to change and growth in our approaches to traffic safety. If you have been using the same materials for the past few years, see if you can switch it up to include information relevant to today’s world. Ask young people to review your materials and suggest updates – or invite them to create materials of their own. Create opportunities for young people to share stories about their lives as they participate in safety activities. Also, keep on top of trends but don’t over rely on them – what is “in” one day can be “out” the next!

## DC Vision Zero Goal

In 2016, the District of Columbia adopted a Vision Zero goal to end traffic fatalities by 2024. With full support of Mayor Muriel Bowser and under the direction of the District of Columbia Department of Transportation (DDOT), Vision Zero is now in its fourth year of implementation. The District’s Vision Zero plan commits to:

- Creating Safe Streets
- Protecting Vulnerable Users
- Preventing Dangerous Driving
- Being Transparent and Responsive

## Safe Routes for Youth: Youth Engagement 101 in Practice and Application

In 2019, the Safe Routes Partnership received a DDOT grant to implement youth-centered traffic safety initiatives in support of the District’s Vision Zero plan. This project, titled Safe Routes for Youth, centered on young people living in the city’s Wards 7 and 8 neighborhoods, also known as East of the River. Communities East of the River have experienced decades of systemic disinvestment, leading to a lack of adequate safety infrastructure. Students travel to school contending with poor lighting, busy intersections, unmarked crosswalks, and inadequate sidewalks. For older students, the commute complicates when they have to travel to schools outside of their neighborhoods and deal with physical safety concerns like gun violence and street harassment. This section outlines how our DC Community Engagement Manager used youth engagement strategies to address these concerns and support Vision Zero initiatives led by young people.



# IDENTIFY INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

When Safe Routes Partnership embarked on a youth-centered traffic safety project in the District of Columbia, we knew we wanted to find ways to work with creative thinkers and innovative minds. Our DC Community Engagement Manager identified this innovation in CDMA Business Model's mission to empower young people by making real world connections in schools. Their focus on urban education and youth entrepreneurship also presented a unique opportunity to advance transportation equity within the District. CDMA Business Model has been running innovative traffic safety programs for teens in New York City and Washington, DC They aim to uplift the voices of young people living in urban environments and communities that have experienced systemic disinvestment. Their traffic safety initiatives started with Glow-in-the-Dark parties in New York City and transitioned into youth-led programs in DC Public and Charter Schools.

Safe Routes Partnership Community Engagement Manager connected with CDMA Business Model while running an after school program focused on traffic safety for middle school students. One of the Safe Routes Partnership Community Engagement Manager program activities was creating reflective scarves to raise awareness about poor lighting in the neighborhood and to keep students safe and stylish during the winter months. When Safe Routes Partnership Community Engagement Manager learned that CDMA Business Model was already creating reflective shirts and glow in the dark wristbands. With this in mind, Safe Routes Partnership Community Engagement Manager reached out to learn more. CDMA Business Model was working with students to create [reflective technology-powered school uniforms](#) to increase visibility as students traveled home from afterschool programs. Students identified the need for better visibility but found most reflective clothing was not aesthetically appealing. They created fashionable reflective uniforms that students loved to wear and that kept them safe while traveling around their community. As a result of supporting the [CDMA Business Model: Entrepreneurship Program](#) overall, it afforded us with the opportunity to broaden our perspective on transportation safety. We remained open-minded in considering which approach Safe Routes Partnership would develop for its Safe Routes for Youth Project and took the opportunity to learn from the young people participating in CDMA Business Model Entrepreneurship and Traffic Safety Programs. We also engaged other partners including DC-based arts organization [Project Create](#) and our local Safe Kids coalition, [Safe Kids District of Columbia](#). These collaborations led to a dynamic traffic safety agenda that was engaging and educational for young people.

## Project Create

Project Create is an arts education organization serving youth and families in Washington, DC. Their teaching artist staff have supported a number of local Safe Routes to School initiatives including traffic safety awareness demonstrations, Bike to School Day observances, and a CDMA Business Model Youth Traffic Safety Town Hall event. This creative infusion has elevated traffic safety to a new level, proving that art-based youth engagement can be successful and powerful.

## Safe Kids District of Columbia

Safe Kids District of Columbia, a local coalition of [Safe Kids Worldwide](#), works with families and communities to prevent childhood injuries in the District of Columbia. Bicycle and pedestrian safety is one of Safe Kids' main focus areas. Along with educating families on safety best practices, Safe Kids also organizes Walk to School Day and Bike to School Day events. Recently, Safe Kids Worldwide has partnered with Star Ratings for Schools to pilot a new pedestrian safety app called iRAP. This app has been used to evaluate and improve school safety infrastructure in communities around the world.



## SPEND TIME GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

One of the first steps of the Safe Routes for Youth Project was learning about the safety concerns of young people. CDMA Business Model invited our DC Community Engagement Manager, a group of CDMA Youth Leaders to participate in their programs. Our Community Engagement Manager used these initial sessions to hear directly from young people about what they were experiencing while traveling around their community. Many young people expressed their excitement about learning to drive even though they were only in middle school. Other CDMA Youth Leaders could pinpoint exact streets and intersections in their community where safety was a concern. CDMA Youth Leaders also spoke candidly about ways their peers could change their behaviors as pedestrians, most notably by not using their phones while crossing the street.

Oftentimes we are so quick to get into program activities that we skip the crucial step of getting to know each other. We've learned that young people value this time because it shows them how adults are concerned about positively impacting their lives. Making the effort to learn a student's name and learn about their experiences helps to establish communication. Periodic listening sessions also ensure that your programs remain relevant to the lives of young people. Remember, their lives change quickly and what worked one day might need updating sooner than expected. Be sure to check in and take the role of being a listener and a learner seriously.

## DIVERSIFY YOUR COMMUNICATION STYLE

We knew that incorporating social media and technology into this project would be important. Young people use technology to learn, to connect with friends, to express themselves, and to advocate for change. We wanted to support the natural habits of teens and encourage them to use social media in their traffic safety work. CDMA Business Model showed us how young people used a variety of digital media skills to create safety content. CDMA Youth Leaders created custom hashtags for safety campaigns, documented their work via photos and videos, and shared their work on various social media platforms. This allowed their safety messages to reach young people in other communities and influence a wider culture of youth safety.

## ALLOW FOR CHOICE IN PROGRAM STRUCTURE

Our Safe Routes for Youth Project activities had to be centered on DC's Vision Zero plan. Beyond this framework, youth could decide how they wanted to address traffic safety in their community. Building on CDMA Business Model's traffic safety work, youth identified their own ways of integrating Vision Zero information into their traffic safety programs. This included a CDMA Business Model Entrepreneurship Program **Training Workshop: Concepts for Making Connections** that focuses on EdCorps Classrooms designed to produce **fashionable safety products** developed and sold by student run businesses that direct support and benefit schools exclusively. Safe Routes Partnership DC Community Engagement Manager attended production sessions to support students and learn from their process.

## ARTS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Young people are some of today's most powerful content creators. From designing clothes to producing music, they are using their creativity to drive social change. The arts can make traffic safety more accessible and engaging for young people. They also demonstrate how transportation advocacy can be multidimensional. Petitions, rallies, and letters are effective ways of showing support for traffic safety improvements. Painting a mural, writing a song, or making a t-shirt are equally valid forms of advocacy. When organizing your next safety event, consider infusing arts into your plan. Reach out to youth artists for help with creating marketing materials, documenting events, and curating cool social media content.



## CONNECT WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Traffic safety work does not stop in schools. There are many ways to engage students during afterschool hours and involve their parents and family members in safety programs. [CDMA Business Model's Youth Safety Town Hall](#) is a free event that brings together local organizations to celebrate [Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.](#) Legacy and honor other black leaders including [Garrett Morgan](#), inventor of the traffic light. This year's event, held on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue in Southeast DC, brought students and family members together for a weekend afternoon of safety-themed arts activities including a traffic safety photo booth, mural making, and recording studio sessions. Activities were youth-led and supported by venue host, Project Create. Safe Routes Partnership served as a key collaborator in providing materials for arts and crafts to support youth-led workshops and participants. Project Create teaching artists also led mural-making, music production, and photography sessions.

## BE OPEN TO CHANGE AND GROWTH

Our DC Community Engagement Manager regularly partnered with Safe Kids DC to perform school walk audits East of the River. For a Safe Routes for Youth Project to support Safe Routes for Youth: Youth Engagement 101 Approach, we partnered with them again to train youth on how to conduct walk audits using iRap technology. For the iRap Technology Assessment, Safe Routes for Youth also decided to partner with a small group of CDMA Business Model Youth Entrepreneurship Program Youth Leaders again for listening sessions to understand safety concerns around their middle school since they were already engaged in gathering data around traffic safety on Saturdays. CDMA Youth Leaders worked in pairs to administer and collect more data about the safety habits and concerns of their peers during school lunch periods, collecting more than 100 responses from students in grades 6-8. After gathering their responses, CDMA Youth Leaders met to reflect on the result and participate in a walk audit training. This training reflected current changes to data collection. CDMA Youth Leaders learned how to use mobile technology to assess safety of various intersections around their school. This technology could become more commonplace as it evolves and expands to more communities. We also had to adjust to logistical changes during this training, including changes to student availability and technical difficulties. CDMA Youth Leaders were not able to attend the final walk audit sessions due to academic priorities.

Our DC Community Engagement Manager and Safe Kids DC finished the walk audit using student-identified intersections as a guide. The iRAP website, which collects the data and gives a safety rating to each assessed intersection, underwent routine updates which caused a delay in our results. These changes forced us to grow our youth safety engagement practices to be more mindful of working with new technology and being mindful of student schedules. While we were glad we tried something new, we walked away with several ideas for improving youth-led walk audits in the future.





## Safe Routes for Youth Project Reflections

Our partnership with CDMA Business Model highlighted the importance of connecting traffic safety to the real lives of young people. It also helped us consider other identities young people have besides just being students. They are artists, entrepreneurs, siblings, and powerful community leaders. These dynamic identities can make our traffic safety work more relevant and more responsive to the needs of young people. Consider this when designing and implementing your own traffic safety initiatives. Here are a few more project takeaways that can help when planning your youth-led safety program:

- **While teens value independence**, they still need the support of adults. When asked what would make them feel safer traveling to school, many students mentioned feeling more comfortable when a crossing guard or supervising adult was present. This was not necessarily a surprise but it was a good reminder that teens want to feel safe and are still looking for adults to prioritize their safety. We must continue developing strategies that keep kids safe as they transition into middle and high school.
- **Collaboration is key.** Safe Routes for Youth would not have worked without our amazing collaborators. We worked together to develop an effective youth engagement strategy grounded in change, growth, and innovation. Our collaborations during this project educated us, challenged us, and ultimately made our youth engagement efforts better. We learned the importance of having clearly defined roles and responsibilities to ensure that partners kept their own identities through quality programming, while maintaining equity among all stakeholders to work effectively and cohesively. We encourage you to find your “people” and embrace the wonders of teamwork.
- **Be open to experimentation and flexibility.** We went into Safe Routes for Youth ready and willing to think outside the box. This mentality helped grow our own knowledge about youth engagement in traffic safety and share new resources with our community. In turn, we are keeping more young people safe because we better understand their needs and concerns.





# Engaging School and Community Partners

Many of us work in small teams or individually. This means that we rely on the support of school and community partners. Working with schools and organizations serving teens requires knowledge about how these spaces operate. With a more independent youth population comes considerations about program scheduling, physical safety concerns, and the many responsibilities teens take on. This section explores how to leverage school and community partnerships to improve youth safety.

## PARTNERING WITH MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOLS

School partnerships are one approach to engaging young people in Vision Zero. Many middle and high school students face safety concerns while traveling to school. Unlike elementary school students, many older students commute to school alone or with friends. Teen drivers are navigating busy, sometimes unsafe roads along with myriad distractions from phones to in-car entertainment. Students in cities might be relying on public transit instead of driving to school. This can often mean long travel times, multimodal transit, and a race to get home before the streets darken. Young people taking care of younger siblings face the extra responsibility of ensuring safe pick-ups and drop-offs. These challenges exist on top of rigorous academic and extracurricular schedules.

Middle and high school students play a critical role in this integrated approach. Young people are greatly influenced by their peers. Developing peer-to-peer education and encouragement campaigns is an effective way to create change on a school-wide level. School-wide assemblies and parties can add a fun twist to safety campaigns. Student groups can lead walk audits with their peers and school staff. Some communities work with high school students to run walking school bus programs with a nearby elementary school. Work with your local school district to determine the best way to involve young people in safety programs.

While schools provide a direct connection to young people, these partnerships are not without their challenges. Teachers are often pressed for time and do not have the ability to deliver traffic safety instruction. School administrators can also be unwilling to release students for special programs during instructional time. Afterschool programs are one alternative, but attendance and retention pose barriers to effectiveness. On top of academics, many middle and high school students balance a busy schedule that includes sports, work, taking care of siblings, and extracurricular activities. These challenges can be solved by connecting with in-school champions who can help coordinate logistics. Collaborating with an already existing group, like a Student Government Association, can relieve the stress of recruitment and retention. Partnering with a local government agency to solve a specific safety problem helps get buy-in from school administrators. School-based partnerships, with all their challenges, are still worthwhile opportunities to engage young people in transportation safety.



## SCHOOL-BASED ACTIVITY TIP: Create a Butcher Paper Graffiti Wall

Creating a [butcher paper graffiti wall](#) is a fun, simple way to get to know the young people you are working with. Ask school administrators if you can set up a table during lunch periods where students can come and share their ideas about traffic safety. Place a large piece of brown butcher paper or bulletin board paper on the table and write a question you would like students to answer (example: What would make you feel safer as you travel to school?). Invite students to come up and write their responses to the question. Make sure you have colorful markers available and be open to students responding in creative ways, including drawing and symbols. Use student responses to assess student safety concerns and inform future programming.

### Supporting Young People who Care for Siblings

Older students may be responsible for dropping off and picking up younger siblings from school. Make sure that students, no matter their age, know the basics of safe walking and biking. Encourage older students to model safe behaviors for younger students. Consider organizing walk audits around feeder schools to ensure that students stay safe as they transition between buildings. Invite older students and their younger siblings to join the walk audit and share their experiences of traveling to school together.



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What student groups already exist within middle and high schools in your community?
- How can students participate in traffic safety activities outside of instructional time (before/after school, lunch periods, homeroom periods)?
- Are there opportunities to offer student incentives for participating in traffic safety programs?

### Partnering with Community Organizations

Young people have interests and responsibilities that extend beyond the school day. They are running errands, participating in extracurricular activities, working, and spending time with friends. This means that traffic safety initiatives need to address the many ways young people are moving around their communities. Partnering with local groups – sports teams, recreation centers, arts organizations, and advocacy organizations – ensures that Vision Zero is responsive to the needs of young people. Community partners can also supplement resources that you might not be able to provide, such as meeting space or volunteers.





## Partnering with Law Enforcement

Law enforcement can be critical partners in traffic safety. However, it is important to understand how young people in your community relate to law enforcement. Some young people, especially young people of color, have had negative experiences interacting with police. These negative interactions can lead to fear, anxiety, anger, and distrust. Before inviting law enforcement to be a part of your safety initiative, speak with students and community members about their comfort levels for interacting with police.

Did you know that many police departments have officers trained in community outreach? Connect with your local precinct to see if they have officers who specialize in working with teens and building positive relationships within the community. Invite officers to participate in student-centered outreach activities like poster-making sessions and driver's education classes. Having officers engage as participants instead of enforcers allows more opportunities for students to develop trust and comfortability. Officers can also speak at student assemblies and parent/caregiver meetings. Ask them to keep it positive and share what they are doing to keep young people safe. Make sure students, families, and school staff know the officers names and how to contact them should they need their assistance.

Remember, if some young people do not want to engage with law enforcement, don't push it. Consider other ways to enforce safe behaviors like a student safety patrol team. Ask students how the adults in their community can work to keep them safe without engaging with police. Take the time to figure out how to create positive safety initiatives for older students, whether police are involved or not.



### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What are the organizations in your community that work with young people (sports teams, arts programs, youth leadership organizations)?
- Where are the opportunities to collaborate with other groups/organizations on youth traffic safety initiatives?
- What young voices are underrepresented in your community (ex. Young people of color, young people who work, young people who take care of siblings)?

## Supporting Student Leadership

Whatever your comfort level in working with teens, it is important to support student leadership efforts. Young people want to know that adults in their community have their backs and are responsive to their concerns. Take time to learn about different student groups in your middle and high schools. Think about ways student groups can engage in safety initiatives. Can [National Art Honors Society](#) students make traffic safety campaign posters? Can the photography club take photos at an upcoming event? Can student athletes advocate for better street lighting since they travel home late for practice? Where are the hidden student leaders - students who don't participate in extracurricular activities but still influence their peers? When planning your next safety initiative, brainstorm some ways to connect with student leaders. They will appreciate your support.

# HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT WORKING WITH TEENS?

This table can help you decide which engagement activities might be best for you based on your experience working with teens:

<p><b>EMERGING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I have little to no experience working with middle/high school students</li> <li>■ I have little to no information of traffic safety issues affecting young people (tweens and teens) in my community</li> <li>■ I'm not sure how to effectively engage older students</li> <li>■ I never/rarely lead traffic safety activities for middle and/or high students</li> <li>■ Possible Activities: <b>Butcher paper graffiti wall</b>, traffic safety poster contest, <b>safety photo booth</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>EXPLORING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I have some experience working with middle/high school students on safety initiatives</li> <li>■ I have a general understanding of traffic safety issues affecting young people (tweens and teens) in my community</li> <li>■ I have some understanding of how to effectively engage older students</li> <li>■ I sometimes lead safety activities for middle and/or high school students</li> <li>■ Possible Activities: Youth-led walk audit, youth-led safety surveys, youth volunteers at outreach events</li> </ul>
<p><b>EXPANDING</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ I have a lot of experience working with middle/high school students on safety initiatives</li> <li>■ I have a deep understanding of traffic safety issues affecting young people (tweens and teens) in my community</li> <li>■ I have a deep understanding of how to effectively engage older students</li> <li>■ I regularly lead safety activities for middle and/or high school students</li> <li>■ Possible Activities: Youth-led school-wide/district-wide safety campaign, youth-led bike rodeo, youth-led walking school bus program, youth-led walking/biking club, safety mural or art piece</li> </ul>

Like developing any new skill, learning how to work with young people requires patience and practice. Some of your efforts might be great, others might not go as expected. It is important to continue experimenting and learning what works best for young people in your community.



# A WORLD OF OPPORTUNITY: Creating a Youth-Centered Traffic Safety Initiative

We have reviewed ways to integrate Safe Routes to School and Vision Zero, outlined youth engagement best practices, featured innovative traffic safety initiatives in the District of Columbia, and provided strategies for partnering with schools and community organizations. Now it is time to use this knowledge to plan a youth-centered traffic safety activity in your community. This section shows you how to design, implement, and share a successful safety initiative with teens.

## PLANNING YOUR ACTIVITY

Think about a traffic safety activity that can engage young people in your community. Your activity can be small or a fully developed safety program depending on what is realistic for your situation. Consider where young people can contribute to the activity, both as participants and leaders. If you are looking for ideas, check out Safe Routes Partnership's [Community Engagement Cards](#).

Once, you have your idea, use these questions to get started:

- **What's your activity/project idea? What's the mission/vision/goal?**



## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- What traffic safety problem is this project/activity addressing?
  - Who is the target audience?
  - When will this activity/project take place?
  - Where will this activity/project take place?
  - Why is this activity/project important?
  - How will this activity/project impact young people in your community?
- **What resources do you need?**
  - **What community partners do you need to engage?**
  - **How can Safe Routes Partnership support your idea?**
  - **How will you share your work with your community, Safe Routes Partnership, and other Safe Routes to School practitioners?**



# Implementing Your Activity

When it's time to implement your activity, clearly define your role as an adult facilitator and find opportunities to let young people take the lead. If your core audience is other young people, student leaders will play a critical role in affecting the behavior of their peers. Let them be speakers, let them lead activities, identify students who can be resources if their peers need support. If your core audience involves adults, be sure to emphasize why it is important to address the needs to older students. Prepare young people to speak about their experiences and advocate for specific changes in their community.

## Sharing Work on Social Media

Creating a custom hashtag can be a great way to spread safety messages. Ask the young people you are working with to develop a hashtag and share safety information on social media. Feel free to let Safe Routes Partnership know what you are up to by tagging [@SafeRoutesNow](#) and [#SafeRoutesforYouth](#)

## Sharing Your Activity

Use your activity as a chance to amplify young voices in traffic safety. Their ideas and experiences can inspire young people in other communities and inform safety programming on a school, district, or state level. Along with sharing work on social media, look for opportunities for young people to present at conferences and webinars. Remember that sharing work is a celebration – so let your students shine!

**We hope you are feeling confident about engaging teens in traffic safety. Remember, it is okay to start small and grow your youth engagement practice over time. Most importantly, have fun! Working with young people can be joyful and inspiring. Learn from their experiences, enjoy their creative ideas, and value them as real partners in safety.**

### For more information, check out the following resources:

- [Safe Routes Partnership Webinar: Building Our Future – Engaging and Empowering Youth in Vision Zero](#)
- [Safe Routes Partnership Toolkit: Moving DC to Zero – Championing Community and Change East of the River](#)
- [CDMA Business Model: Traffic Safety Programs](#)







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