Great Tailored Tactics to Win your Safe Routes to School Campaign

As your campaign takes shape, you will want to employ a range of tactics to build momentum and support for Safe Routes to School funding. Tactics are events and actions you will implement to fulfill your Safe Routes to School campaign strategy; your strategy is your overall plan and tactics are how you will harness collective power to persuade the targets to act in order to meet your plan goals.

Rather than choosing just one way to communicate your message, hosting a variety of campaign events and actions will help you reach a wider audience. Safe Routes to School, walking, and bicycling appeal to people for different reasons. As such, your campaign strategy should involve tactics that are tailored to different audiences, focusing on what will convince them that they should care about making it easy and safe for kids to walk and bike to school and beyond.

One challenge to bear in mind when running a Safe Routes to School funding campaign is the simultaneous need to influence decisionmakers and keep advocates enthusiastic about the effort. Since legislators are the decisionmakers, it’s essential to educate them about the value of Safe Routes to School programs, but your coalition will be much more effective at doing so if grassroots advocates are amplifying that message and contacting their legislators in support of the bill. Campaign events and actions are a fun and effective way to keep momentum alive throughout long legislative campaigns. Actions are an effective way to recruit new grassroots advocates and keep existing ones enthusiastic and motivated to continue working on behalf of the campaign. Some especially helpful tactics for successful Safe Routes to School campaigns utilize youth and elected official engagement and organizing, special events, and various social media approaches.

When planning tactics for Safe Routes to School campaigns these are some questions you may want to address:

- Who is our target audience for this campaign action or event?
- How will this tactic convince them that they should care about making it easier and safer for kids to walk and bike to school by creating walkable and bikeable communities?
- Are the people involved in carrying out this tactic the most effective messengers for the people we are trying to influence? Where can we hold this campaign event or action where it will have the greatest impact? Consider hosting events in districts of legislators you want to target, or in areas with high rates of crashes.
- What goal will this tactic help the campaign to achieve?
Walk Audits

**Purpose:** A staple in Safe Routes to School programs, walking and bicycling audits are field visits to the street. Walk audits identify barriers or challenges that students or community members face as they walk or bicycle the route between home and school, often involving the visual mapping of areas of concern. Walk audits generally include a tour of the school area where participants identify issues related to walking and biking, followed by a debriefing and brainstorming session to rank high priority concerns and identify potential solutions. Participants systematically document information about the social, built, and natural environments that affect students walking or bicycling to and from school.

**How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign:** Walk audits can be used as part of a state Safe Routes to School campaign in a few different ways. First, walk audits can be used to rally support and recruit volunteers within a specific local community. Local walk audits can be a great way to educate reporters about the problems that state Safe Routes to School funds can address and connect them with parent and student voices. Walk audits can be a way to educate or target state decision makers. Include supportive or undecided legislators in walk audits near the state capitol or in their home districts. Or, use a walk audit to call out a lawmaker who should be supporting the campaign but is not.

**Participants:** Core Safe Routes to School coordination team, youth, parents, teachers, school officials, walk/bike advocates, transportation planners/engineers, elected officials, community representatives.

**Resources Needed:** Large-scale aerial map of the school area, smaller maps for each audit team, list of previously identified issues, sign-in sheet for follow-up, checklists of information to gather, clipboards and pens, cameras, reflective vests, interpreters, and water or other refreshments.

**Logistics:** The coordination team will need to decide the routes to audit based on where children are living and the route they may take to get to school, usually within a ½ - 1 mile buffer from the school. Gathering materials and inviting guests also take time and you want to give enough notice to elected officials and community representatives so they can participate.

**Level of Effort:** 🚶‍♂️ 🚴‍♂️

Reviewing Legislative District Maps of Underinvestment with Legislators

**Purpose:** Maps are a wonderful tool to use in Safe Routes to School advocacy. Of course, as discussed in the previous tactic, walk audit mapping can pinpoint safety concerns along routes at the school level. However, what if you want a bigger picture of what is happening in your community to really make needs salient to decision makers? Another type of map, helpful to a Safe Routes to School campaign, is Geographic Information System (GIS) mapping. GIS mapping is visually representing data points related to Earth's geography. GIS can be used to show many different layers of data on one map: disease prevalence, neighborhood characteristics (ex: locations of school buildings and bus stops), crash data, and more.

As your campaign determines its goals, mapping can be a useful tool to determine need and priorities. With so much information to handle, visual representations, like maps, can be helpful for digesting and interpreting large amounts of data. Resources such as the PolicyLink National Equity Atlas and data from Community Commons offer insight into many equity related indicators. Using data can help you recruit the right advocates from affected areas, determine persuasive messages, and decide which legislators to target with advocacy efforts.
Crashes involving people walking and biking are often underreported and information about the location and severity of these crashes may be less readily available than information on motor vehicle crashes. While it may involve more effort to obtain, mapping locations of crashes involving people walking and biking may illustrate high-injury corridors or intersections that are in need of traffic safety improvements. By compiling data on rates of crashes involving people walking, bicycling, school-aged youth, and crashes that happen around schools, maps can provide the big picture on how a state is doing with safety for walking and biking.

Such maps can be supplemented by community-led mapping efforts, such as walk audits, vision boards, and other collaborative methods. Community-led mapping efforts are a strategy for both gathering information that may not be readily available through other sources, as well as garnering support for your effort. They offer the opportunity for individuals to relay their personal concerns about walking and bicycling in their communities. What is generated is a tool that demonstrates the obstacles to safely walking and bicycling in a neighborhood or community. In turn, these maps can be uniquely effective at communicating the need for investments in Safe Routes to School.

**How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign:** Using data can help Safe Routes to School campaigns fine tune their messages to pressure and educate legislators to invest in the safety of the children in their districts. In addition to legislators, maps can educate potential advocacy allies and reporters. Armed with the mapped proof, specific data points and hot spots, pockets of need and underinvestment in your state will be communicated much more effectively and will boost the persuasiveness of your campaign. Mapping unfunded Safe Routes to School applications within a legislative district and meeting to discuss these with your legislator can be a very effective way to motivate an elected official to act on the need for more funding for walking and biking for kids.

**Participants:** Partners to brainstorm the types of maps and data needed to persuade decision makers and a contact knowledgeable in the use of the GIS program and the types of data that are available for mapping.

**Resources Needed:** Time and a partner or professional (most likely a transportation professional or public health professional) that has access to the GIS program and knowledge to use it will be the most important for this tactic.

**Logistics:** Start as early as possible, as GIS mapping is often a big feat, and be ready to discuss the types of data you would like mapped with the partner who is assisting. A person versed in GIS mapping will be able to tell you the types of data that can be accessed, overlaid, and mapped.

**Level of Effort:** 🚶‍♂️ 🚴‍♂️ 🚵‍♀️

**Walk/Bike to School Day with Elected officials**

**Purpose:** Walk/Bike to School Day celebrates and creates a buzz and visibility for walking and biking to school. Over time, it has become a key tool of the Safe Routes to School movement to get children, school staff, parents, and community members excited about how youth travel to and from school. It is often used as a Safe Routes to School Program kickoff event at the beginning of the school year. While you can hold a Walk/Bike to School day any day of the year, National Walk to School Day is held on the first Wednesday of October. National Bike to School Day is held during National Bike Month in May. The dates for National Bike to School Day change annually.

**How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign:** Walk/Bike to School Day is a great attention grabber. The day is a rallying cry for the support to walk or bike to school and is a prime opportunity to be highlighted by newspapers and news stations. The day can educate and alert parents, school staff, and local elected officials about the need
for safety and the benefits of children walking and biking to school. Finally, much like the walk audit, Walk/Bike to School Day can be used to rally support and recruit volunteers within the local community.

**Participants:** Students, parents, teachers, school officials, elected officials, local walk/bike champions – anyone that is interested in making safe routes to school. Businesses and non-profits might also be great allies as they may market the event and even donate money, swag, or other items.

**Resources Needed:** Mapped routes, volunteer chaperones, refreshments, swag, signs/banners or other items to direct children along their routes, talking points for media interviews or for the politician in your community to give some remarks at the beginning or end of the walk.

**Logistics:** Walk/Bike to School Days can be simple or complex. One with invited elected officials will take more time to plan, because you will want there to be more pomp and circumstance. Give yourself and your planning teams enough time to meet before the big day. Planning teams will need to get approval from principals; plan safe routes and drop off points for children who live too far from school; secure volunteer chaperones and decide if there will be a rally once children get to school; plan refreshments; and invite and highlight the event to local media and elected officials.

**Level of Effort:** 🍀🍀🍀

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**Lobby Days**

**Purpose:** Lobby days, also referred to as advocacy days, are days when advocates meet with elected officials to discuss specific causes and legislation. Safe Routes to School coalitions and school based teams can organize youth to become advocates to meet with legislators about the importance and benefits of walking and biking to school. Lobby days can be combined with special events such as infrastructure demonstration events or protests.

**How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign:** Lobby days are especially important to show constituent support and put faces to the issues the community prioritizes. It gives face to face time with legislators and/or their staff and shows that Safe Routes to School is important enough to show up for in person. The advantage of lobby days is that you can give your elevator speech about the importance of dedicated Safe Routes to School and active transportation funding. You can communicate your campaigns specific ‘ask’ and clarify questions legislators may have about active transportation needs. Lobby days are a great time to whip out your GIS map to show legislators specific needs in their districts.

**Participants:** Youth, parents, teachers, school officials, walk/bike advocates, transportation planners/engineers and/or community representatives – basically anyone that wants to take part in advocating for safer routes for children and funding for the Safe Routes to School program.

**Resources Needed:** Transportation to get to the state capital, youth and adult volunteers, materials to assure uniform communication/messaging and to leave with legislative offices, cameras for photo opportunities.

**Logistics:** Appointments to meet with legislators will need to be made well ahead of time. Materials should be created to summarize the Safe Routes to School program, the benefits of walking and biking, and a specific ‘ask.’ Before meeting with legislators, research should be done to analyze those who may be allies and those who may be opposition, their interests, and their voting record to support other active or general transportation legislation.

**Level of Effort:** 🍀🍀🍀
Pop Up Projects: Infrastructure Demonstration Events

Purpose: Infrastructure demonstration events – pop up projects – can be used anywhere to raise visibility and spark conversation about the importance of safe walking and biking infrastructure. At the state capitol, they can act as an advocacy tool and educational event for the public and legislators. Infrastructure demonstrations implement low-cost, short-term, and scalable changes to the environment to benefit people who walk and bike. These events can be used to draw attention to policies and physical design that is not working and broaden engagement around the issue. Demonstration events showcase solutions that could be implemented to create safe sidewalk space, and creating crosswalks with paint.

How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign: Pop up infrastructure events are an eye-catching way to demonstrate the value of various types of infrastructure changes for pedestrians and bikers. They are so attention grabbing because literally, one day they appear and then they are gone. This is another tactic that can help to recruit partners and volunteers to your campaign, catch the attention of news outlets, and educate elected officials. Pop up events are useful because they simulate changes that make safe walk and bike infrastructure concrete rather than something a person read or heard about.

Participants: Youth, parents, walk/bike advocates, transportation planners/engineers, community representatives, community development professionals, health professionals, businesses, and non-profits.

Resources needed: Resources vary for the type of changes you will implement. You could need as little as a few gallons of paint or as much as several different materials to create barriers that will keep walkers and bikers safe. Depending on the size of the event and attention you want to draw, you might want to secure donations and vendors for the day.

Logistics: Start planning for a demonstration event months in advance. Plans need to be drawn up and proposed to the municipality to secure a permit. Securing partner organizations and donors early on can also be helpful, especially if you want swag, raffles, and refreshments to draw in more people to share in the fun. Demonstration events can be small, mid, or large sized events. Depending on the size of the event, coordinators will need to secure volunteers and educators who will assist event day coordination and be able to answer questions that may arise about the purpose of the event.

Level of effort: 

Activate Mayors and City Councilmembers to Advocate for State Funding

Purpose: This tactic is one that persuades secondary targets to act in your interest in order to move primary targets to action. Many times, you might have more clout or power over secondary targets than you might primary targets. Examples of this tactic may be to mobilize city mayors to show support and advocate for Safe Routes to School campaigns by contacting state legislators or to ask a legislator who is already an ally of Safe Routes to School programs to pressure other legislators to take up the cause.

How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign: Mayors and city council members have their fingers on the pulse of what is happening in their communities and what is important to their constituents. They are elected officials that when banded together can show wide support for active transportation, including Safe Routes to School funding, across the state. Local elected officials can help to educate and pressure state legislators in their appropriate district.
Participants: Elected officials, coalitions, and constituents.

Resources needed: Materials about the benefits of safe infrastructure, time and expertise to field questions and concerns that may arise.

Logistics: Your coalition can reach out to elected officials directly or with assistance from organizations such as your state’s mayors association. You can ask constituents to reach out to their legislator to express their support for Safe Routes to School funding and programs.

Level of effort: 🚴‍♂️ 🚲

Promoting your Safe Routes to School Campaign at Related Events

Purpose: Capitalizing on opportunities to support your cause within other events is a great way to spread your efforts wide without doing all of the work yourselves. Do not recreate the wheel; instead use the wheel to your advantage. If any of your partners are having days to highlight health, safety, or safe infrastructure, it would behoove you to take advantage of an already planned event to spread the word about Safe Routes to School and your campaign. Examples of the types of events that you could promote safe routes to school are community bike rides, open street days (also called ciclovias), infrastructure demonstration events, and health fairs.

How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign: Do not miss a great opportunity to educate likeminded individuals and organizations about your campaign. Safe Routes to School has many benefits so education and advocacy messages can easily be tailored to fit the event. In addition, piggybacking on related events is a great way to access organizations and people that have a vested interest in your cause, but may not be in your membership. You can get people to sign postcards or petitions, donate money, or sign up to become a volunteer for the campaign.

Participants: Youth, parents, health professionals, walk/bike advocates, other community members and representatives.

Resources needed: Volunteers to get the word out about Safe Routes to School programs, educational materials, an education booth/table, and swag.

Logistics: Logistics for these events vary, but contacting the event planners will be the first thing you want to do. Discuss the event and Safe Routes to School and how you might be able to partner or participate in the event. After you get approval and direction from event planners, co-market the event within all your partner agencies and social networks.

Level of effort: 🚴‍♂️ 🚲

Social Media Contests

Purpose: Social media platforms are a terrific way for Safe Routes to School campaigns to get the word out about the benefits and need for state policy. The emergence of social media tools, such as Facebook, Twitter and blogs, has helped advocates quickly disseminate information, share resources and ideas, release calls to action, and receive input from the public. Social media can also have a profound effect on policymakers, since it can reach a large number of people without the extra effort of garnering earned media from traditional sources such as newspapers or radio or television stations. Popular approaches for Safe Routes to School social media
contests focus on submissions of best and worst infrastructure photos or photos of the state’s walking and biking kids.

**How this Tactic Can Support Your Campaign:** Social media platforms quickly spread your news far and wide. Social media contests that elicit submissions, publicity, and participation by the public can be a very effective means for Safe Routes to School campaigns to use social media to influence decisionmakers, inform the public about your issue, and recruit volunteers.

**Participants:** Campaign communication managers or partners/volunteers who are savvy with social media, are trusted messengers, and have social media followers (note that if you have nonprofits/health groups/etc. as partners, their accounts may be where you find your followers).

**Resources needed:** Time and a communication partner to manage social media communications are the biggest resources you will need to have a successful social media presence. The partner should be deeply familiar with the pros/cons of each platform, the best times to reach audiences, and the best ways to frame Safe Routes to School with each audience.

**Logistics:** Campaigns will need a communication plan that includes social media. A schedule of when and which messages should go out on specific social media platforms should also be created. Various messages can be sent out by various partners who are respected in the populations you will target with your message.

**Level of Effort:** 🍀 🛍