

OVERCOMING CHALLENGES — FUNDING

School administrators are key to a successful Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program, so it is critical to understand their perspective on children actively getting to and from school.

The California Safe Routes to School Technical Assistance Resource Center (TARC) surveyed and interviewed principals and vice principals across the state to explore strategies for overcoming their most common concerns, one of them being a lack of funding to implement SRTS programs.

Every school is unique, but the following ideas can serve as a good starting point to start building a SRTS program with little to no outside funding.

Build Parent Support

If school officials know parents are on board and willing to help, it can go a long way towards overcoming funding concerns. Start talking with parents who may be supportive of SRTS to identify the best in-roads to school or Parent Teacher Association/Organization (PTA/O). Talk with PTA/O leaders at the district and school levels to learn about past discussions around SRTS and potential school or school district champions.

Often, a PTA/O will end up championing a SRTS program at a school; applying for mini-grants or using existing funds to support education and encouragement programs. For sustainability, encourage the PTA/O to establish SRTS as a standing committee, which can go a long way to garnering principal support for a program.

With school budgets strapped and school administrators juggling a laundry list of priorities, SRTS programs are often seen as costing a lot of money.

While major roadway infrastructure improvements may necessitate seeking outside funding, many positive education, encouragement, enforcement and roadway infrastructure changes can be achieved through low-cost strategies, partnering with key organizations to leverage resources, and by securing smaller-scale grants. In addition, making walking and bicycling to school safer and easier can help reduce the negative impact of budget cuts that reduce school bus service.

Work with the School District to Make SRTS a Priority

Formal school district policies can help draw awareness to the potential of SRTS programs and help alleviate principal concerns about school district support. As a first step, review the school district's wellness and transportation plans to ensure that walking and bicycling to school are encouraged. Start building relationships with school district officials to learn more about their particular needs and the local climate around SRTS. Consider making a presentation about the benefits of SRTS programs at a school district board meeting. Then set up a meeting with

school district officials to discuss making SRTS a priority and ask for their support. As part of school district support, see if the school district's grant writer can assist with a SRTS funding application.

Bring Reinforcements

When presenting your ideas to school administrators, bring along interested parents, caregivers, students, city/county staff, and community groups/members who could work collaboratively on the program.

Be prepared to present evidence of volunteers and/or resources that can help implement the program. And have options drawn up for levels of programming (see *Start Small* below) that can be done with little or no cost to the school either in real dollars or staff time. This helps show administrators that the program would not be dependent on school staff.

Start Small

At the start of any program, it is common to launch a whole host of activities, but this may be seen as requiring resources that schools do not have. Instead, work together with school officials to create a long-term plan with incremental steps made up of small, meaningful successes that build on each other.

This approach is less overwhelming for everyone involved and has the added benefit of attracting positive attention along the way. For example, rather than starting a weekly walking school bus, start with annual Walk and Bicycle to School Days to build interest around walking and bicycling to school. Then sit down as a team to gauge parent and school interest and determine which baby steps then make sense. Being seen as successful is a great way to engage more volunteers and staff in a program and to be competitive in grant funding.

Work with Partners

Developing strategic partnerships is key to long-term program success and viability. SRTS programs often combine efforts with other organizations that have similar goals. Consider partnering with the PTA/O, law enforcement, local health departments, youth-serving groups such as YMCA and Boys and Girls Clubs, community health and physical activity groups, and existing coalitions with similar goals.

Talk with these partners about program goals and how programs can collaborate to leverage funding. Partners may also be able to provide (or help seek) funding, refreshments for meetings, incentive donations, or professional services such as grant writing or help with media.

Seek Private Funding

Consider non-governmental resources in the community whose interests align with the benefits SRTS programs offer the community. Organizations with similar goals may be looking for partnerships of their own.

Look to businesses, community foundations, local pedestrian or bicycle advocacy groups, neighborhood associations, PTA/O, and school districts for support. Organizations like these may be able to bring much needed funding to the table, and be more than happy to do so to help meet goals of their own.

Apply for Mini-Grants

Local community-based organizations, local foundations, or public agencies may offer mini-grants to support SRTS education and encouragement. Often a small, \$1,000 to \$5,000 grant award can go a long way towards building momentum for

a long-lasting SRTS program. Consider using this funding for Walk and Bicycle to School Day events or to purchase reusable supplies for bicycle safety rodeos to help kick-off a longer-term program.

State and Federal Infrastructure Funding

Most school administrators want to improve the safety of the roadways or drop-off zones around their school. Connect the school with the city or county public works department to begin the process of identifying potential infrastructure improvements that will mutually benefit the school and the city/county. Many small improvements, such as crosswalk or curb striping, can be done at minimal cost and may be able to be done as part of the city/county maintenance budget.

Funding for larger infrastructure improvement projects can be secured through school districts' operating budgets, local transportation agencies' capitol improvement projects or operating budgets, and the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) which offers funding through a variety of local assistance programs.

Find funding at www.CAsaferoutestoschool.org/safe-routes-to-school-basics/find-funding/.

Read the full *Crosswalk* issue brief and supplemental tip sheets online at www.CAsaferoutestoschool.org.



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