

Step by Step

BECOMING A BICYCLE FRIENDLY COMMUNITY



The Bicycle Friendly Communities Campaign is a national awards program, created and managed by the League of American Bicyclists and sponsored by Bikes Belong, which recognizes municipalities that actively support bicycling. A bicycle-friendly community provides safe accommodation for cyclists and encourages its residents to bike for transportation and recreation. > > >

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Steps to Make Your Community More Bicycle-Friendly

If you want your community to be more bicycle-friendly, there are some simple steps you and your community can take.

1 Commit to becoming a BFC

It's clear from the communities that have been designated as BFCs that political commitment to change is critical. There are a number of actions a community can take that will have a dramatic impact on conditions for bicycling.

2 Learn how to become more bicycle-friendly

Having made the commitment to becoming more bicycle friendly, chances are your Mayor or their staff person is going to say, "Okay, what do we do next?"

A common next step is to organize a Bicycle Friendly Community Workshop in your community. This four-hour workshop introduces community leaders to the basic elements of a bicycle friendly community. The workshop

includes a practical walkabout or bike ride and concludes with the adoption of a short-term action plan to get things moving. League staff helped develop the workshop materials and train instructors around the country who are able to lead the workshop. The workshop makes good use of the bikeability checklist, an easy-to-use tool that you can use to develop greater awareness of the issue that affect bicyclists.

3 Implement the Action Plan

By now, your community has a localized short-term action plan. You've probably taken a look at the BFC application form and seen what we're looking for to demonstrate that a community is bicycle friendly. There's also a lot of help available. A wide array of technical resources is provided at www.bikeleague.org. To help narrow down the choices of what to do to actually implement your action plan to become a bicycle-friendly community, we suggest the following:

- Train your traffic engineers to better accommodate bicyclists. www.nhi.fhwa.dot.gov and search for course 142046

- Start using manuals such as these to build a better bicycle infrastructure (www.bicyclinginfo.org/de/bikelane-guide.htm or www.bicyclinginfo.org/de/park.htm)

- Put on a promotional or safety event during National Bike Month or organize a Bike Work Day event

- Train cycling instructors in your community to teach better bicycling

- Encourage motorists to share the road with bicyclists

- Start developing a more detailed bike plan www.bicyclinginfo.org/pp/exemplary.htm

4 Start the Application Process

An area advocacy group, club, or other bicyclists in the community can bring this program, particularly the application, to your mayor or county council to initiate positive change in your neighborhood. Here are the steps you can take to bring bicycling improvements in your town:

Download the Bicycle Friendly Community information packet.

As you review the materials, you'll see that all types and sizes of communities can be positively affected by increased bicycle accommodations. Whether decisions that affect your bicycle plan, routes, and facilities occur in a township, town, borough, city, or county level, this application can help framework a discussion with your decision makers.

Review the application to see how bicycle-friendly your community is.

Is there a written policy on maintaining bicycle safe streets? Is there a bicycle advisory committee and/or a bicycle coordinator? These basic resources can be vital to a town's ability to respond to bicyclist's needs. Highway engineers often will not change their practices unless written policy tells them to do so. A bicycle advisory committee is a good structure for getting such new policies written and formally proposed. Having someone on staff designated as bicycle coordinator can be crucial in achieving these measures. (Remember, it is a cardinal rule in every bureaucracy that any task not specified as someone's job is a task that will never get done.)

Plan your strategy for pitching bicycle-friendly improvements.

Obviously, if the mayor is a ride leader in the local bicycle club, your strategy is simple—show your mayor the application! Most communities will take a little more work. First, you must identify the decision makers responsible for the policy changes you seek. In big cities, the mayor's office would typically delegate responsibility to the city's head of transportation or public works. In a smaller

town, there may be a full-time city manager that reports to a citizen city council. In any event, you must make some calls to determine who needs to be persuaded before you can set out to persuade them. Next, find one or two bicyclists who have some influence with the decision maker. If you're lucky, there is a local government official who is an avid cyclist. Without such a person, identify the most visible bicycle dealer in town and the leader of a local bicycle club. Ask around and find support. If you find a bicyclist who is already known and trusted by government leaders, your work will be much easier.

Gather support. Ask for a letter recommending the Bicycle Friendly Community program from any organization that might be inclined to support better bicycling. The local bicycle club is a natural first choice, but local environmental groups, civic organizations and others will tend to cooperate if you make it easy enough for them. Draft the letter for them so they know exactly what you need to minimize the amount of work you ask of them. The Bicycle Friendly Communities program frames positive change for bicyclists into the form of a "yes or no" question to a political leader: "Will you support this program?" Politicians hate to say "No" to anyone. They especially do not want to say "No" to an organized group of people. And it's not likely they will want to say no to many different groups.

Call your government official and request a meeting. Attend with your best spokesperson and copies of the letters of support with you to the meeting. Talk about the benefits that the bicycle improvements you

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desire, as well as the benefits of a Bicycle Friendly Community designation.

Ask for something specific and try to get a specific commitment.

A good starting point is to ask if the person will submit the appli-

cation for Bicycle Friendly Community status. Another good ask is how long it will take to designate a bicycle coordinator. You could propose working with the new coordinator on implementing the other bicycle-friendly criteria items (such as convening the bicycle ad-

visory committee, proclaiming Bike to Work Day, developing bicycle safe engineering policies, etc.). Be specific in your requests and, if the official raises concerns, ask him or her to be specific. Following the meeting, write a thank you memo

What are the Five Es?

Applicant communities are judged in five categories often referred to as the Five Es. These are Engineering, Education, Encouragement, Enforcement, and Evaluation & Planning. A community must demonstrate achievements in each of the five categories in order to be considered for an award. Communities with more significant achievements in these areas receive superior awards. Filling out the BFC application is an education in itself, as communities see where they are lacking in each of these categories.

ENGINEERING Communities are asked about what is on the ground; what has been built to promote cycling in the community. For example, questions in this category inquire about the existence and content of a bicycle master plan, the accommodation of cyclists on public roads, and the existence of both well-designed bike lanes and multi-use paths in the community. Reviewers also look at the availability of secure bike parking and the condition and connectivity of both the off-road and on-road network.

EDUCATION The questions in this category are designed to determine the amount of education there is available for both cyclists and motorists. Education includes teaching cyclists of all ages how to ride safely in any area for multi-use paths to congested city streets as well as teaching motorists how to share the road safely with cyclists. Some things that reviewers look at are the availability of cycling education for adults and children, the number of

League Cycling Instructors in the community, and other ways that safety information is distributed to both cyclists and motorists in the community including bike maps, tip sheets, and as a part of driver's education manuals and courses.

ENCOURAGEMENT This category concentrates on how the community promotes and encourages bicycling. This can be done through Bike Month and Bike to Work Week events as well as producing community bike maps, route finding signage, community bike rides, commuter incentive programs, and having a Safe Routes to School program. In addition, some questions focus on other things that have been built to promote cycling or a cycling culture such as off-road facilities, BMX parks, velodromes, and the existence of both road and mountain bicycling clubs.

ENFORCEMENT The enforcement category contains questions that measure the connections between the cycling and

law enforcement communities. Questions address whether or not the law enforcement community has a liaison with the cycling community, if there are bicycle divisions of the law enforcement or public safety communities, if the community uses targeted enforcement to encourage cyclists and motorists to share the road safely, and the existence of bicycling related laws such as those requiring helmet or the use of sidepaths.

EVALUATION & PLANNING Here the community is judged on the systems that they have in place to evaluate current programs and plan for the future. Questions are focused on measuring the amount of cycling taking place in the community, the crash and fatality rates, and ways that the community works to improve these numbers. Communities are asked about whether or not they have a bike plan, how much of it has been implemented and what the next steps for improvement are.

that spells out your understanding of what was agreed to.

Follow up and follow up (and follow up). Lack of persistence is the downfall of many a bicycle advocate. Motivated people motivate politicians and their employees. If you raise an idea and then don't pursue it, they grow suspicious about just how important that idea is to you. So many people are clamoring for their time and attention, they will forget if you make yourself forgettable. Keep calling back and keep going back. Commit to the result and make it happen!

How to Apply

Once you are finally ready, go to www.bikeleague.org, and start filling out the application! There are two parts—Part I is a general community profile. Once you have completed this and sent it in (it can be done online or by hand), the League will evaluate it and inform you if you have met some of the basic criteria required.

Once you have been approved, then Part II of the application must be completed. This is a detailed audit of the engineering, education, encouragement, enforcement and evaluation efforts in your municipality. This comprehensive inquiry is designed to yield a holistic picture of your community's work to promote bicycling. Technical assistance for completing Part II is available.

Award Determination

Twice a year (spring and fall), a committee reviews and scores the application and consults with local cyclists in your community. An award of platinum, gold, silver or bronze status is designated for two years. The League and technical as-

sistance staff will continue to work with awardees and those communities that do not yet meet the criteria to encourage continual improvements. If your community is selected as platinum-, gold-, silver- or bronze-level Bicycle Friendly Community, the League notifies you immediately. A community-specific press release is sent out, and a national one with all newly designated communities is created as well. A League representative usually presents the award to the community at the time and place of your choosing.

Renewing the Designation

To renew the award, complete a simple renewal form to compliment your original application. The League of American Bicyclists will evaluate it and continue to recognize your progress. Renewals are due two years after a community is designated or receives their renewal notice. Award levels may change based on the renewal feedback.

Getting Started

This book is filled with 58 fantastic communities who are making great strides for bicycling. Turn the page, be inspired, and get started on a road to better bicycling for everyone. For more information on applying, contact the League at 202-822-1333. ●



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