

Learn it. Do it. Live it!

GETTING STARTED GUIDE FOR EVENT ORGANIZERS



The following 8 steps will get you from ideas to reality. This guide is intended for event organizers who like having a to-do list so that they know everything is covered. The following 8 steps will get you from ideas to reality. Seasoned event organizers or those who feel comfortable with a more relaxed approach may want to simply skim this information. All the references below are located here: www.walkbiketoschool.org/get-set-plan-the-event/getting-started-guide

1. ENVISION THE EVENT
2. GET BUY-IN FROM THE SCHOOL
3. REGISTER YOUR EVENT
4. APPROACH PARTNERS AND RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS
5. FINALIZE EVENT PLANS
6. PROMOTE THE EVENT
7. CELEBRATE
8. FOLLOW UP

In addition to the guide, *take a look at a sample timeline* to help you plot out planning tasks for your event.

STEP 1: ENVISION THE EVENT

Identify a theme for the event that is drawn from the community's experience, such as concern for the environment or a healthy lifestyle, or a focus on safety. Then, decide if the event will be for walking to school, biking to school – or both! Planning needs are different for these events. Read more about *types of events and ways to participate*. Consider these four examples of events:

Example #1: Walking School Buses on Walk to School Day
Publicize the locations of Walking School Bus stops throughout the neighborhood, and designate Walk Leaders to lead each group starting at a designated time. Once the groups arrive at school, they are greeted by the principal and teachers who give out toast, jam, and coffee. The principal gives a short speech to the students and parents in an outdoor assembly to explain the environmental benefits of biking and walking, rather than driving to school.

Example #2: Remote starting point

A nearby church with a large parking lot is identified as a "Park and Walk" location. Parents arrive at the church at the designated time and park their cars. Buses drop off students there as well. With the help of local law enforcement, the group forms a parade, walking to school carrying signs and banners with this year's theme. At school the mayor holds a brief press conference to talk about the need for safe walking and biking routes throughout the town.

Example #3: Bike Train Event

Students and families are encouraged to meet at a nearby neighborhood park to participate in a bike ride to school. The principal joins them, along with several dignitaries and a local athlete. Prior to the ride, helmets are checked for a proper fit and extra helmets are available for students who don't have them. The group rides to school where they are greeted by teachers who give them T-shirts and reflective bike safety gear.

Example #4: Walk AT School Event

The event kicks off in the gymnasium with an assembly. The principal makes a pledge to get fit, and challenges the students to do the same by logging all of their walking and biking activities. The principal introduces a contest between classrooms. Each class will log the number of walking and biking trips they make in a month. Students are encouraged to walk (or run) around the track or the playground during recess, and teachers reward good behavior by giving students extra walking time. The winning class receives the Golden Shoe Award.

I really liked [Walk to School Day] because I was walking with my friend. We had good exercise and it was really great!
–Third grade student, OH



There are tons of ways to plan an event. Remember that none of these ideas are “required” - they’re just options to get your creative juices flowing. Consider whether you want to incorporate any of the following ideas:

1. **Stickers, wristbands and other incentive items:** When students arrive at the school, a small reward can reinforce their efforts to get to school under their own power. Visit the **Promote the Event section** for templates to make your own incentive items, and gain free access to even more materials by **creating an account**.
2. **Pre-event pedestrian and bicyclist safety: Tip sheets** and handouts are available and, if teachers are willing, can be integrated to fit academic learning standards. Walk or Bicycle to School Day can be a great way to conclude pedestrian and bicycle safety education classes.
3. **Guests:** Invited guests might walk with students or speak to them when they arrive. They can serve two purposes: inspiring students and getting buy-in from local leaders. For instance, students might be excited to see members of the high school football team. A local politician might enjoy the opportunity to show support for pedestrian or bicycle improvements. To reach out to potential speakers, **learn about engaging your community**. To help your speaker prepare for the event, **review Walk to School Day/Bike to School Day Talking Points**.
4. **Refreshments:** A bagel, juice, fruit...a healthy snack is a nice way to greet walkers and bicyclists. A local grocery store or restaurant might be willing to donate food. For tips on approaching partners and sponsors, **visit our Sponsorships and Partnerships page**.

Tips on providing refreshments: If you plan to provide refreshments on the morning of Walk and Bike to School Day, be aware of the following:

- If you are providing food, it should be healthy, and should meet your school’s rules for providing food to students.
- It can be difficult to provide food only for event participants, and not the other children who are arriving at school at the same time. If food is provided, you will probably need enough for every student, regardless of whether they walked or biked.
- Providing food just for adults does not work unless it is out of sight of arriving students.

5. **More ideas:** You can find tons of ideas in the **Event Ideas section** and by perusing event descriptions at **Who’s Walking**.

STEP 2: GET BUY-IN FROM THE SCHOOL

Make sure the school principal supports your event before you begin any further planning. For tips and strategies on approaching the school principal about the event, review the **Involve and Engage Your Principal page**.

STEP 3: REGISTER YOUR EVENT

Don’t worry if you don’t have all the details ironed out at this point. You can always log in later and update your entries. Registered events appear on the **Who’s Walking/Biking page**.

When you register your event you get free access to members-only materials such as templates for stickers, certificates and badges! **Click here to register now**.

Parents, residents and the media visit the **Who’s Walking/Biking page** for their communities to see which schools are participating each year and what events are planned. Furthermore, registration is the only way that the event can be tracked at the national level. Being able to demonstrate participation is invaluable in showing local, state and national leaders that walking and bicycling to school are valued.

STEP 4: APPROACH PARTNERS AND RECRUIT VOLUNTEERS

Build a team of people. There’s no reason to go it alone and there are likely others who want to rally together to promote walking and bicycling to school. When thinking about whom to approach, consider:

- School administrators/principals
- Teachers
- Parents
- Law enforcement
- PTA/PTO
- Crossing guards and school district transportation coordinators
- School champions
- Businesses
- Public officials and local government
- Health/safety/student advocacy groups
- Bicycle shop owners and bicycling advocates



Approaching partners

Partners can contribute all sorts of support to your event, from an elected official walking in the event to law enforcement officers ensuring safety around cars.

Tips on approaching and including these partners in your events are further explained in the *Involve the Community* section.

- **Law Enforcement**
- **Public Officials**
- **Partners and Sponsors**

Recruiting Volunteers

Volunteers can help with event preparation and on the event date itself. You can recruit volunteers in many ways: through PTA meetings, via email or on the listserv of groups who regularly volunteer for student activities. Remember to take advantage of your local school and community newsletters. It helps to be specific about the tasks that require assistance. This allows potential volunteers to envision themselves getting involved based on their own strengths. Some people have great skills designing marketing materials. Others might love the idea of offering stickers to students and families as they arrive at the school.

Specific tasks might include:

- Design, print and distribute flyers for the event
- Contact potential speakers and help the speakers prepare for the event
- Organize student activities
- Help test walking and biking routes
- Lead walking and biking groups
- Coordinate logistics for a park-and-walk event

Additional guidance for recruiting volunteers:

- **School champions**
- **Schools**
- **Parents**

STEP 5: FINALIZE EVENT PLANS

This is when you put the pieces together and move from brainstorming to concrete action. Now is the time to follow up on tasks that were delegated in Step 3. For example, a park-and-walk event or a bicycle parade will need pre-determined walking and bicycling routes. If you are offering rewards for participants, now is the time to follow up on any ordered materials.

Tips on Finalizing Event Plans

- **Some coordinators use their event description to let families know what to expect.** If that's your plan, now is a good time to update your registration with your event description if you haven't done so already. Your event description, along with the school name and school contact, appears on the *Who's Walking or Biking Page* after you register. Parents, community members and the media view these pages to see who is participating.
- **Decide what students and families will do when they arrive at school.** Are students supposed to report to their classrooms? Are students meeting outside together? Are they meeting in one central location in the building? Where will helmets and bicycles be stored?
- **If your event requires a temporary road closing, make sure to publicize this** multiple ways so that the community is not only aware of when/where/how long the closure will last, but also why the event is special. Provide background about what the event means for the kids. Use local news media, listservs, signs, banners, etc.
- **For any group walk or bike ride, review a short list of ground rules with the participants.** This is the time to explain basic safety measures. Children especially need to be told to stay behind group leaders, along with other safety messages, depending on whether they are *walking* or *bicycling*.
- **It may be helpful to have a megaphone or other amplifier handy if there are plans to speak to a large crowd of students and their parents.** Make sure at least one adult chaperone has a first aid kit.



STEP 6: PROMOTE THE EVENT

We were on TV as a result of our participation!

– Event organizer, NH

A few weeks before the event, parents, students and the greater community should all be aware that the event is going to take place. Here's an example of how promotion could be done:

- One to two weeks before the event: Post an announcement in the school and community newsletter. If roads will be closed temporarily for a group walk or group ride, it may be helpful to get this information out in a local news source. You can also use banners and signs along the walking/biking route to keep the community informed. Explain why your school is organizing the event and why the event is important nationwide. Want more guidance? **Read our talking points.**
- 1 week before the event: Send home flyers that outline event logistics. If you have multiple walking routes, **show a map of the routes** with meeting times along with contact information for adult walking leaders. If possible, include safety reminders such as “wear bright clothing” or “wear a helmet.” To start, check out our basic **flyer templates**. Designate a spokesperson to speak to the media. Send a **media advisory** to newspapers, radio and television stations that you hope will attend.
- Several days before the event: Send home educational materials for parents to review with their children. We offer **tip sheets on teaching safe walking and biking skills at home**.
- On the day before the event: Send a reminder home with the students. This can be a sticker, a half-sheet flyer, or a postcard. Intercom announcements are a nice way to remind students and get them excited. Send out a press release to local media contacts. View our **press release template**, which is available for download and customization.
- After the event: Gather information about the event. How many people participated? What media coverage did the event receive? Did someone take great photos that will be useful? Remember to **share your insights and photos!**



STEP 7: CELEBRATE WALK OR BIKE TO SCHOOL DAY

Best wishes for a great event! A few day-of suggestions from fellow coordinators include:

- Arrive at the meeting location 15 minutes early.
- Have a designated spokesperson to talk with media.
- Before a park-and-walk, a parade or anything else where there's a remote group start location, give a brief overview of the event, the theme and/or why the day is special. Review any ground rules which depend on the event but might include things like staying on the sidewalk or obeying law enforcement officer instructions.
- Congratulate walkers and bicyclists.
- Thank dignitaries, sponsors, volunteers and participants in a public announcement.
- Record the number of participants.
- Take lots of photos and video.
- Have fun!

STEP 8: EVENT FOLLOW-UP

To streamline planning for the next event you may want to:

- Save materials and keep track of contacts. **Click here for a template to keep track of contacts** and notes that you can record during the planning process and can continue to update year after year. Be sure to save all of the electronic files for your flyers, sticker templates, etc. in one place that is easy to find. If you plan to pass along event leadership to someone else, organizing this type of information can be particularly valuable.
- Keep track of photos and press coverage, and archive them somewhere safe and accessible if possible.
- Now is also the time to send thank you notes or emails to all volunteers and partners. You may want to send them a **certificate (available to members for download)**.
- Don't forget to share pictures, highlights or a description of your event with the Virginia State SRTS Coordinator. Your story and photos might be used in the SRTS newsletter or other statewide promotional items.