

# Mayor Daley's Bicycling Ambassadors



## Problem

The Chicagoland Bicycle Federation (CBF) has produced bicycle safety publications for Chicago and Illinois since 1994. These materials were effective at delivering a message to those who read them, but CBF suspected that many in the target audience (motorists, adult and child bike riders, and infrequent and non-cyclists) were not reading them.

## Background

In delivering education programs in Northeast Illinois since the mid-1990s, CBF observed that the region's cycling population could be divided into three categories of knowledge and confidence related to bicycling in an urban traffic environment:

- **Confident bicyclists** — These people have little fear of bicycling in traffic. However, many still lack the skills needed to avoid the most common car/bicycle crashes.
- **Ready-to-learn bicyclists** — These are adults and children who want to bike on the streets and trails of their city or town. With education, they can become safe and confident cyclists in traffic.
- **Fearful bicyclists** — Members of this group do not see bicycling on Chicagoland roads as safe or even possible in existing traffic conditions.

All of these cyclists could benefit from safety education. Motorists are also part of the target audience for bicycle safety information: even attentive drivers may endanger cyclists if they don't understand how to share the road correctly. However, CBF had concluded that many people in this audience didn't think the need for safety education applied to them and therefore didn't read CBF's publications.

CBF believed that a personal, hands-on approach to educating Chicago area bicyclists and motorists was needed, and knew of Toronto's Cycling Ambassador program. CBF already worked closely with the City of Chicago's bike program staff; together, they proposed that the Chicago Department of Transportation (CDOT) apply to the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) for Section 402 (federal) funds to support a bicycling ambassador program in Chicago.

## Solution

CBF has educated motorists and bicyclists in the City of Chicago through a group of community outreach specialists called Mayor Daley's Bicycling Ambassadors (MDBA) since 2001. (CBF works as a contractor to CDOT.) The educational campaigns target bicycle riders of all ages and competencies, non-bicyclists, and motorists. The Ambassadors deliver bicycle safety and road-sharing information in a variety of languages at public venues such as festivals and community events. MDBA employs up to eight full-time staff each year.

In the **Bicyclist** campaign, Ambassadors deliver specific information about ways that bicyclists can avoid car/bicycle crashes, including how to watch for the traffic situations that cause crashes, use bike lanes safely, and communicate effectively with other road users. Ambassadors don't just stand behind a literature table — they deliver their expertise personally in demonstrations, conversations, and in television, radio, and newspaper interviews.

In the **Motorist** campaign, Ambassadors share information on the purpose and use of bike lanes and teach drivers to maneuver safely alongside bicycle riders using one-on-one conversations and targeted literature distribution at public

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events. They also work with motorists on streets with bike lanes. This campaign focuses on three messages: don't cut off bicyclists when turning, avoid dooring bicyclists, don't park or drive in bike lanes.

In MDBA's first three years of operation, the annual Road-Share Fair put members of the car-driving public in pedal cars to drive alongside cyclists in a simulated traffic environment. The five-minute course gave motorists hands-on, critiqued experience about right and left hooks, sideswipes, and dooring. The Road-Share Fair educated hundreds of motorists using a three-quarter-scale traffic intersection with working traffic signals, parked cars, and simulated storefronts. Details can be found on page 20 of the 2002 annual report at <http://www.bicyclingambassadors.org/annual.html>

In the **Child Safety** campaign, MDBA teach children ages 12 and under how to check their bikes for safety, how to choose and wear helmets and why they should, bike-handling and communication skills, where to ride on sidewalks and streets, and how to look for obstacles and dangers. The Ambassadors educate children at venues such as summer camps, carnivals, library reading groups, police safety events, and block parties. At these events Ambassadors give presentations and lead hands-on exercises. They also check children's bikes for safety and fit bike helmets. Mayor Daley's Bicycling Ambassadors have reached a steadily increasing number of children and youth — from about 3,000 in 2001 to over 21,000 in 2006.



Bicycle Ambassadors reached more than 15,000 children in Chicago in 2006.

An annual 16-week program with training by MDBA and CBF teaches 50 young people Bicycling Ambassador skills (including bicycle maintenance and safety) and employment and presentation skills. The training is sponsored by After School Matters, a local non-profit. The program works cooperatively with the Chicago Park District, which hires 10–16 of the graduates to work during the summer as Junior Ambassadors, teaching bicycle safety in the city's day camps.

The Ambassadors distribute any of a dozen booklets, flyers, and pamphlets in several languages tailored to each of the campaigns. All publications are on the program's website.

## Results

During the five-month season in 2006, Bicycling Ambassadors attended 377 events, spoke to 41,800 people face-to-face, and reached another 2 million through local broadcast media appearances. Forty-six percent of the face-to-face contacts were with children. Junior Ambassadors teaching at 159 Chicago Park District day camps helped educate more than 15,800 children and 3,600 adults in just six weeks. Recently MDBA has also begun to evaluate performance by tracking the results of pre- and post-contact quizzes.

## Costs

A traffic-safety grant from IDOT (federal Section 402 funds) pays for forty to fifty percent of the program's approximately \$250,000 annual budget. CDOT applies for the grant; the City of Chicago funds the balance of budget. The amount of local funds required by IDOT has varied from year to year; in some years the grant has

For more information, please visit the Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center Web site at [www.walkinginfo.org](http://www.walkinginfo.org).

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covered 100 percent of the MDBA budget. Because the Ambassador program continues to be successful, the grant has been renewed each year; the city plans to apply for these funds indefinitely. The budget covers staff salaries and the cost of producing brochures. Program sponsors provide in-kind donations of equipment and support.

## Web site

<http://www.bicyclingambassadors.org>

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