

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

Webinar Questions and Answers

November 12, 2009

The following questions were submitted by attendees of the PBIC Livable Communities Webinar on November 12, 2009, presented by Peter Lagerwey. Mr. Lagerwey took the time to answer questions that were not addressed during the post-webinar question and answer period. Individual questions and responses, provided by Mr. Lagerwey, are available below.

Q: What is the best way to get funding?

A: The best advice we can provide for obtaining funding is that your group have a strong plan in place to meet your goals. A strong plan will need to exhibit community buy-in, showing that the plan is a collaboration between public sector, advocacy groups, and citizens. This shows funders that there's support both in the community for a plan, and among the officials who can formalize a plan. Your plan should also include a set of priorities to ensure that your top goals are met. Showing community support and involvement, as described in the Webinar, will be key to working with officials and finding funding: remember the Power of 25 and being ubiquitous - sustained funding is a long-term strategy. To identify specific funding sources, I suggest you begin with the list of funding sources provided in Appendix D of the publication How to Develop a Pedestrian Safety Action Plan. This publication can be found in the PBIC online library at <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=229>.

Q: Do you have a model of successful bicycle improvements in a rural area with a relatively small population center, comparable to one of the San Juan Islands?

A: There are a couple of great resources we can point you to identify areas that are of specific interest to you. The first is the compendium of Case Studies produced by the PBIC. The full compendium can be found at http://www.walkinginfo.org/case_studies/. Individual case studies can be searched for at the PBIC online library - <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/index.cfm> - by doing an advanced search and selecting "case studies". An example of a rural case study is this one from northwest Georgia - <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=2920>.

Another way to identify successful areas is to check out the League of American Bicyclists' Bike Friendly Communities awardees - <http://www.bikeleague.org/programs/bicycfriendlyamerica/communities/>. Each of these communities, large and small, have gone through organizing and improvements specific to their needs. You should be able to contact relevant communities to get more information.

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

Q: How do you deal with NIMBYs (“Not In My Back Yard” advocates)? They seem to show up more readily than advocates.

A: NIMBYs are definitely a challenge to address - they surface during most projects. One important strategy for organizing your group around an issue or project is to be inclusive of as wide a range of citizens in your area as possible. This helps to avoid situation in which one small group of adjacents or neighbors can veto a plan, since it is supported by many others. It also fosters neighbor to neighbor discussions which are often more productive than NIMBY to government communications which can be more adversarial.

Q: How do you get a focus of purpose for an advocacy group?

A: Organizing new advocacy groups can be a steep challenge initially. We've found that we must go through a couple early meetings characterized by "creative chaos". That's ok. In this period, it's important to name all the issues you want to address. However, you need to put boundaries on the discussion. Put a time limit on these early discussions, so that the group forces itself to decide on priorities, and move on. PBIC offers guidance and resources for getting started to address community problems on their sites www.walkinginfo.org/problems and bicyclinginfo.org/problems. Look to other established groups for examples of concise mission statements. The Alliance for Biking and Walking is made up of dozens of advocacy groups that would be worthwhile to check out. See their list of members here -

<http://www.peoplepoweredmovement.org/site/index.php/site/memberservices/C530>.

Goals are not always static. Consider revisiting your goals once a year, perhaps at an annual meeting where you review the past year and plan for the next.

Q: I too have thought that engaging sister cities that are more bicycle and pedestrian friendly is a great way to encourage change. Which towns and cities have done just this?

A: Sister Cities are definitely a great way to share experience, and also a way to gain legitimacy for your plan by grounding it in a successful example from your Sister City. Having a member of your group on the Sister City committee can help to involve the committee with your issue. Seattle is a Sister City with Copenhagen. Seattle brought one of their bicycle planners over to speak with elected officials, department heads, managers, and citizens. Seattle has also sent delegations to review Copenhagen's facilities. This is leading to some new ways for designing facilities and tracking progress on implementing their Bicycle Master Plan.

Q: In my community great distrust between the city and bike/pedestrian advocates developed during the creation of our first citywide bike plan. The city was afraid of angering major business institutions that objected to the concept, and also felt they would be ‘giving in’ by developing the plan in concert with advocates. Advocates felt the city was developing the plan without their input, and felt the final product was watered down. The city felt they did too much to appease “whiners.” The advocates felt the city

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

simply blew them off. How can either group work to overcome the jaded view of the other?

A: Developing and maintaining harmonious city-advocacy relations is key to enacting your plan. There are some good strategies to improving this relationship. Looking back at the material from the Webinar, elevate the legitimacy of your advocacy group by becoming ubiquitous. Make your advocacy group look like the entire community through the Power of 25. Also, providing positive feedback, instead of only criticism, will put public officials on your side. Commend their efforts at the same time that you advocate for improvements. One tactic is to hold an awards banquet and recognize an elected official for the work they have done in relation to your goals.

Q: I've noticed that businesses in my community are advertising their location to roadways with 25,000 ADT - single occupancy vehicles. Is there a way to change this trend?

A: Businesses need to come to the conclusion that walkers and bikers are good business and therefore should also be advertised to, accommodated, and to help sponsor their efforts. Encourage businesses to advertise locations of bike racks, or include public transit options in the directions (web site) they publish to their locations. See the new Bike Friendly Businesses designation program of the League of American Bicyclists. Businesses appreciate any sort of positive attention they earn in their community, so encourage them to seek this sort of designation as great advertising for them. Alternately, your group can sponsor your own awards given to local businesses that attempt to reach out to the walking and biking community. For research and real world examples, I encourage you to search through the PBIC compendium of case studies available at <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/library/> and <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/>. An example of this is a case study from Toronto entitled Bike Lanes, On-Street Parking and Business, available at <http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=4391>.

Q: Most pedestrian fatalities occur on high speed urban arterials, not on neighborhood streets. The suggestion of going to the neighborhoods misses the major problems affecting pedestrians. Neighborhood groups are often opposed to connectivity and density.

A: Thank you for comments on this issue. I caution you that your premise for this argument is too general for all communities, and I suggest more rigorous data analysis on which to target your efforts for the improvements you seek. For example, there may indeed be more fatalities on high speed/high volume arterials, but those locations may not exhibit higher crash rates. Also, analyze the demographics - crashes can be broken out by age, typology, speed, and neighborhood. Looking at data like this, you may see that more children are involved in pedestrian crashes in certain area, and that will help to isolate where your group wants to target improvements. If it is your experience that

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

neighborhoods are not interested in connectivity, engage them in a discussion of speeding and traffic calming, or the safety of children and the elderly.

Q: Please discuss how those of us who don't do this for a living can increase our influence. When advocacy committees are made up of people who are there for their jobs and they meet during the work day, the rest of us "regular" folks are left out. Interestingly, we're the ones the advocates think they are helping - without asking what we want or need. (And yes, we do the power of two contacts)

A: Advocacy groups need to have non- professionals involved if they are going to be successful. If they are institutionalizing to the point that citizen input is not gathered anymore, then they cede their original purpose. Advocates within government will be constrained - advocates outside the official boundaries of government have the freedom to "tell it like it is" (always within the boundaries of civility and relationship building). If there is a specific group like this in your area, encourage them to hold regular meetings at convenient times for outside of work hours. If your needs are not being met, consider forming your own new group, and getting your own volunteers involved with local planning issues.

Q: Regarding messaging: we've done some polling in MN and found that the most resonant message is to talk about "creating walkable, bikeable communities to support the health and safety of all residents, especially kids and seniors."

A: Thank you for the good information. We'll share.

Q: Ideas for creating motorists acceptance and awareness for changes to safe multimodal travel for all...motorists education and enforcement strategies for equality.

A: This is a challenging and important topic, as it touches general awareness and education. Remember, some things you do to benefit cyclists' safety also benefit motorists. Use your advocacy group to get bike safety information into the state drivers' manual, and a unit for driving instructors to teach. Bus driver training also needs a module on bikes and peds. On the enforcement side, meet with your police department to discuss your safety concerns. Police have to handle many varied and complex issues. Make sure they know that bicycle/pedestrian safety really is a key concern within your community. When discussing ticketing, make sure that you advocate for a balanced approach, and argue for the most important infractions. Encourage police to pay attention to speeding motorists and endangering behavior toward bikes/peds. But also ask them to warn cyclists, and focus on those behaviors that are most likely to get them injured or killed. There are three things that hurt cyclists most: wrong way riding, riding at night without lights, and ignoring traffic control. Finally, awareness. Motorists will get on board as they see more and more bicycles on the streets. Advocate for policies and planning of more bike facilities - riding will increase, and over time, safety will as well. "Safety in Numbers," a paper in Injury Prevention offers some research to support this understanding - <http://www.walkinginfo.org/library/details.cfm?id=2464>.

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

Q: What are some advocacy strategies in responding to those who think bicycles shouldn't be on the road with cars because of:

- Danger to cyclists
- Lack of space for bike lanes
- Loss of street parking

A: Thank you for your questions. One of the most effective advocacy tools is good data and analysis. Once you understand what the real safety threats are, your group can debunk myths with positive message campaigns, and target improvements that really will improve safety. Another approach is education. Use your advocacy group to get bike safety information into the state drivers' manual, and a unit for driving instructors to teach. Bus driver training also needs a module on bikes and peds. Finally in response to on-street parking, remember that parking is a controversial issue that angers people. When advocating for new bike facilities, do not immediately seek solutions that take away street parking - reserve it for later. It is often easier to gain space for bicyclists by reducing the number of lanes (road diet) or reducing lane widths (lane diet). In some cases, on-street parking can be a benefit to your group's cause. In terms of safety, it offers a buffer to pedestrians on the sidewalk, and it acts as traffic calming. Also, parking does help and please adjacent businesses, and establishing and maintaining good relationships with local businesses can only benefit your group.

Q: Can you explain "green streets"?

A: "Green streets" are specialized, traffic-calmed streets that have been purposefully built to be friendly to walking and biking, and limit speeds of motorists. They are found in low-volume areas, and create a park-like setting. Land use will vary from residential to mixed-use near a downtown area. PBIC has an article on green streets here <http://www.walkinginfo.org/engineering/calming-street.cfm>. To point you to one real-world example, Portland, OR has adopted a Green Streets policy - <http://www.portlandonline.com/BES/index.cfm?c=44407>.

Q: What are some of the new or up and coming ideas concerning pedestrians and bicyclists?

A: Some great ideas being adopted for bikes are sharrows, painted bike lanes, new way-finding signs as described in the new MUTCD, and bike boulevards. A few places are also trying out bike boxes. For pedestrians, we are seeing a recommitment to what we used to do, build good intersections. One hot topic for pedestrians is the work being conducted through Safe Routes to School, which organizes communities around the issue of ped improvements and also provides access to federal funds. See the National Center for Safe Routes to School Web site at <http://www.saferoutesinfo.org/>. Finally, an important new movement we are seeing is Complete Streets - cities adopting policies to design streets that accommodate all users. The National Complete Streets Coalition is a good place to start to find out more - <http://www.completestreets.org/>.

The Power of 25: Advocacy Strategies for Creating Livable Communities

Q: What cities should we look to that are implementing these new ideas?

A: Cities of varied sizes and challenges are making improvements and getting results. Here's a short list: New York City, Seattle, Portland, Chicago, San Francisco, Sacramento, Minneapolis, Tucson, Philadelphia, and Davis, Palo Alto, and Marin County, CA.