

## 2023 Information and Application for the Safe Routes to Parks State Accelerator Program

This technical assistance award program will help a team of cross-agency staff from a state's departments of transportation, health, and natural resources work together to improve safe, convenient, and equitable walking and biking routes to parks and open spaces and implement projects and programs that better support local communities' park access needs. We are looking for leaders within agencies who are excited to try new approaches for high-impact outcomes improving safe, convenient, and equitable access to local parks. This technical assistance award comes at no cost to participants and is funded through generous philanthropic support.

### Timeline:

Call for Applications Opens: August 9, 2023

Application and Letter of Interest Due: October 9, 2023

State Teams Selected: November 2023

Program Period: November 2023 to October 2024

### About the Safe Routes to Parks Accelerator:

Over 12 months, Safe Routes Partnership will provide consulting services customized to support each state team. We will use a hybrid model, combining virtual trainings, regular consultations, and peer learning opportunities, with the potential for an in-person site visit. Through this program, you can expect to:

- Maximize the opportunities of existing state funding and staff capacity to support park access and identify opportunities and models for expanding on those existing resources.
- Strengthen the agency practices and policies that can transform roadway networks for safer and more convenient walking and biking
- Build lasting, productive working relationships between state agencies to support safe access to everyday destinations.
- Develop the messaging that works best to frame your work on Safe Routes to Parks to agency leadership and local partners.

### Program Focus Areas:

To maximize the impact state teams can have in this one-year program, we are asking applicants to select a focus area. These focus areas are based on lessons learned from the first year of the SRTP Accelerator Program. This year, focus areas include funding and policy/practice change. These are areas where Safe Routes Partnership staff can provide significant support, and state teams can make a positive impact on safe, convenient, and equitable access to everyday destinations in their state. We have included summaries of the two program focus areas and examples of what goals could be in each focus area. State teams do not have to limit themselves to one of the options we have included below, but we do expect applicants to share their interests and barriers related to these areas in the application. We have included non-exhaustive examples of how our team would work with yours to advance these strategies.

**Funding: Make it easier for communities to get grants to support community connectivity and access.**

**What this could look like...**

- **Update Existing Grant Program Selection Criteria:** For state-controlled funding opportunities in transportation, natural resources, and/or public health, adapt selection criteria to incentivize local governments to improve access to essential community destinations like parks, schools, grocery stores, etc. Our team can help assess opportunities for change and strategize with you to update scoring criteria to achieve your state's goals.
- **Leverage Multiple Funding Streams to Help Applicants Meet Required Match:** Our team can recommend flexibilities in law to get creative on local match solutions to make funding more attainable for communities, including identifying opportunities to braid funds to meet funding match requirements for programs. For example, utilizing trail/park funds as match for transportation projects that connect to those locations.
- **Make Funding More Accessible:** Make state-managed grants easier to access by assessing what stage of the process local communities struggle with. Is it getting high-quality applications submitted or managing projects once awarded? Our team can help you navigate the best way to match community need with technical assistance that can be provided by state agencies. Potential opportunities include setting aside funds for specific populations, increasing education/awareness, grant planning assistance (funding and writing), engineering assistance, changing the match requirements, point priority, administering projects, helping with engineering, and supporting project implementation costs.
- **Build a Funding Program:** Establish a flexible and responsive fund for relatively small improvements (traffic calming, sidewalk repairs, wayfinding signage, etc.) that does not require the same regulatory/reporting steps as bigger projects. Our team can pull together examples from across the country that you can use to model a program adapted to your state's context.

**Policy and Practice Change: Make it easier to install infrastructure that makes walking and biking to everyday destinations more safe and convenient.**

**What this could look like...**

- **Pilot Traffic Calming Zones:** Pilot Traffic Calming Zones around sensitive destinations like parks and schools where traffic calming elements can be proactively installed. Our team can help review the opportunities to update factors like warranting requirements that have to be met for safety improvements (i.e. certain number of pedestrians crossing per hour or a certain number of crashes). We can help identify best practices for traffic calming, craft messaging to frame the opportunity for stakeholders, plan community engagement around the pilot project, and create an assessment plan to demonstrate impact.
- **Zoning:** Create recommendations for zoning updates statewide to support Safe Routes to Parks and active transportation. Our team can recommend the specific opportunities for states to support local zoning updates to facilitate more safe, convenient, and equitable access to everyday destinations. We can also draft tailored educational materials to help people understand the connection between active transportation, health, and zoning.
- **Shared Use:** Incentivize shared use of green spaces such as school playgrounds with the public during out-of-school hours to expand park access and fund safe routes to that. Our staff can help state staff figure out how to prioritize these kinds of projects via financial incentives, address legal concerns, and create model policies tailored to your state.
- **Review and Update Design Guidance:** Create policies and change design guidance to allow for more flexibility on installing safe biking and walking infrastructure on state highways that are

also main streets and/or adjacent to parks, schools, trails, or greenways. Our staff can do in-depth review of existing design guidance and warranting processes that dictates roadway design and compile recommendations to increase flexibility for biking and walking infrastructure. We can also produce a policy scan to understand how states across the country handle this challenge.

Within the above categories, we are open to discussing strategies that have not been listed. There is space within the application to share additional specific strategy ideas within the program focus areas.

### **Benefits of Participation:**

Each team will have access to expert technical assistance from Safe Routes Partnership staff and can expect to have a tailored coaching plan to support the action or change they plan to implement during the 12-month program. Examples of how we can help include but are not limited to:

- Conduct policy scans to identify existing commitments and opportunities for collaboration on Safe Routes to Parks across agencies
- Identify state and federal funding opportunities for implementing park access improvements.
- Facilitate cross-agency working sessions to build collective strategies.
- Provide significant staff time towards project management, including coordinating tasks among agencies to advance the work in between meetings
- Outline opportunities to efficiently use new provisions in state-managed federal funding programs
- Compile examples from comparable states to understand precedents for funding and policy options
- Highlight opportunities to align project schedules to increase efficiency
- Identify potential partners to build project capacity
- Design, develop, and implement workshops and training to build staff knowledge and fluency on Safe Routes to Parks
- Provide content expertise on community engagement best practices
- Assist with drafting policy language that supports Safe Routes to Parks
- Document implementation plans for states to operationalize big goals
- Identify strategies to sustain this work after the end of the program

### **Participation and Eligibility:**

Safe Routes Partnership will select three states to participate in the Safe Routes to Parks Accelerator. Participating state teams should be ready and excited to increase their potential for achieving high-impact, sustainable and equitable outcomes, and sustain their Safe Routes to Parks work well after the completion of this program.

Teams must identify at least one strategy within the program focus areas (either a strategy listed above or another option proposed in the application and approved by Safe Routes Partnership). They must demonstrate agency readiness and cross agency support to begin work on the selected strategy.

## Program Commitment:

States will assemble a Safe Routes to Parks team that includes representatives from various state agencies, including, but not limited to transportation, public health, and natural resources. Each agency must dedicate a lead staff person to be the primary contact and to coordinate the internal working meeting that will take place between technical assistance calls to move tasks forward.

Each team member can anticipate dedicating up to 6 hours per month to this program. This time includes team check-in calls twice per month, preparation time for those calls, three scheduled program trainings and optional quarterly peer-to-peer learning sessions with other state teams. The Accelerator will help your team integrate Safe Routes to Parks into existing work, and the program commitment accounts for dedicated time to kick-start your work.

## How to Apply:

Each team should fill out this [brief form](#) and submit a 1-2 page Letter of Interest that highlights why your state would like to participate in the Safe Routes to Parks Accelerator.

Letters of interest are due 10/9/2023 and should address the following questions:

- What does your team hope to gain by participating in this program?
- Do you have an established cross-agency partnership that can advance Safe Routes to Parks? If so, please describe how you work together. If not, is your state interested in establishing this and is there a staff member who would manage the group?
- Considering the SRTP Accelerator program areas you are interested in, what existing funding program(s) present the best opportunity for state agencies to address walking and biking barriers to parks and other everyday destinations? What challenges do you anticipate?
- Considering the SRTP Accelerator Program areas you are interested in, what policy/practice area(s) present the best opportunity for state agencies to address walking and biking barriers to parks and other everyday destinations? What challenges do you anticipate?
- How has your state demonstrated a commitment to equity? This could be through policy, plans and/or practices.
- How has your agency demonstrated adaptability or innovation through the adoption of new processes or novel approaches?
- Describe any other relevant partnerships or partners you anticipate building relationships with to advance Safe Routes to Parks.

Letters of Interest should be no longer than two pages and can be emailed to [parks@saferoutespartnership.org](mailto:parks@saferoutespartnership.org)

If you have any questions, please email [parks@saferoutespartnership.org](mailto:parks@saferoutespartnership.org).