



Wood County: Rural Bike Share



Key players:

- Community foundation
- Health department
- Rotary Club
- Hospital
- Community volunteers
- School district staff
- Community groups (e.g., bike clubs)
- Clean Green (environmental coalition)
- Encourage Teen Leadership Program
- Local businesses, including a restaurant and a publishing company
- Planning and Zoning department representatives

In Wisconsin Rapids, community collaboration led to the creation of a low-cost way to increase bicycle use in the community. Although Wisconsin Rapids has many bike paths and routes, residents and visitors who don't have bikes are unable to take advantage of the bike lanes and trails. A community coalition decided to make it easier for everyone to access the biking system by creating a bike share program. Through a community-driven effort, the River Riders Bike Share was created and has received 65 donated bicycles that will be available to use for free at four strategic locations in Wisconsin Rapids starting in fall 2014.

First steps

Members of a local coalition of community partners interested in promoting healthy living in Wood County met to update the bicycle/pedestrian and comprehensive plans and looked into other active communities best practices, including bike sharing. They contacted staff from Vallo Cycle, a rural bike-sharing program in Alabama, who provided the coalition with development and implementation information. The coalition reached out to other community organizations, including a Wood County teen leadership group, for input and assistance. The teens conducted a bike share assessment that evaluated bikeability in each city census block and identified areas of highest need. Four locations were selected as ideal sites to host the bike share: a YMCA, Riverview Hospital, a hotel, and a grocery store. A bike share survey was also conducted in the summer of 2013 to gauge community knowledge of and interest in a bike share program.

Starting the conversation

The coalition knew that this program would require significant community backing and wanted to involve partners from across the community. When approaching potential partners, coalition members focused their conversations on how the built environment shapes the community and how changes to the built environment provide access to healthy choices.



Gaining community support

Coalition members stressed the value of all partnerships and focused on the wins, particularly how the bike share program could tie in with the partner's personal or professional interests. By showing some early successes, the coalition was able to demonstrate that there was value in the partner's getting involved.



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Challenges

Implementing a program without significant funding can be difficult. The coalition succeeded by engaging community partners in all steps of the planning process and demonstrating the value the River Riders Bike Share will bring to the community.

The coalition needed to ensure that the project was sustainable, even without funding. Community members with mechanical knowledge volunteered to check the bikes regularly and fix them as needed. The sites that are hosting the bike share will facilitate the rental and return process. Eventually, an annual membership or day-pass fee may be used to help sustain and expand the program.

Key lessons

- Be transparent with partners about how long it will take to plan and implement the program.
- Involve as many community members and organizations as possible to increase investment in and use of the program.
- Planning is the key to success, but it's important to show progress or people may lose interest and motivation.
- Be creative when identifying potential partners. In addition to offering invaluable help in the planning process, the teen leadership group also provided a unique perspective on how to get younger citizens invested in health.

Get started in your community

Do you want to start a bike share program in your community? Start with these steps, and consult the [Active Community Toolkit](#) and the [Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance website](#) for more resources.

- Establish a workgroup to develop an action plan, recruit community partners, and coordinate the planning and implementation of your bike share program. See Key Players on page 1 for ideas on whom to include.
- Consider conducting a communitywide survey to gauge community knowledge of and interest in a bike share program. Begin promoting the bike share program through media outlets, town meetings, and in-person conversations with potential community partners.
- Conduct a bike audit to determine where a bike share station could be easily and safely accessed. See the Active Community Toolkit for detailed information on Bike/Walk Audits. Select sites near popular destinations for residents and visitors.
- Recruit a local business or establishment near each selected site to facilitate the rental and return process. Engage other community partners who might be interested in donating time, money, or resources to the project. Determine who will regularly check and fix the bikes once the program has launched.
- Promote community involvement by holding promotional events. Consider holding a communitywide vote on the name of the program, the logo, and the design of the bike racks.
- Establish a process for renting the bikes and provide training for the rental sites. Once bike racks are installed, hold a launch event and continue promoting the program through media and in-person outreach!

Resources:

[Active Community Toolkit](#)

[Wisconsin Active Communities Alliance website](#)

[Public Health/Planning Terms](#)

