ENGAGING MORE WOMEN IN BICYCLING

Key steps and best practices to improve and advance women’s specific bicycle advocacy

BY LIZ CORNISH JONES
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**THE WOMEN & BICYCLES PROGRAM** at the Washington Area Bicyclist Association was conceived and created by Nelle Pierson, the organization’s Outreach Programs Coordinator, in 2013. The program was awarded a Women Bike Mini-Grant in its founding year to help launch the initiative and share its lessons learned with the wider movement.

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INTRODUCTION

When the League of American Bicyclists began the Women Bike program, our goal was to organize and elevate the conversation on how to get more women on bikes. Since its inception, we’ve granted more than $30,000 to community programs focused on women’s bicycling outreach and encouragement. We’ve convened four separate national events bringing together women leaders in the bike movement and we’ve shared, through various media, ideas, best practices, and programs that are increasing women’s participation in bicycling.

Our role at the League is to help drive the national conversation and share out the amazing work happening in our local communities. So while advocacy toolkits we’ve gathered from other grant recipients have provided helpful, practical advice for creating similar programs in your hometown, we felt that a dimension of the conversation was missing. We hadn’t yet fully addressed the question: “Why reach out to women?”

Why is it important to have a specific outreach initiative focused on women? Are we that different? What role does gender play in the overall advocacy landscape? How can we address the nuances and cultural differences that play out in cities across the country, versus promoting a one-size-fits-all approach to outreach and encouragement?

We felt it was time to do some deeper analysis into the outreach and encouragement initiatives we were funding, because despite their overall success, none have been able to concretely state what efforts increase ridership among women. To conduct this case study we selected the program that received the largest grant and has grown to serve the largest number of participants.

In 2013, we awarded Washington Area Bicyclist Association (WABA) $15,000 to help seed their Women & Bicycles program. We worked with the founder of Women & Bicycles and WABA Outreach Coordinator, Nelle Pierson, to design a 23-question survey and evaluation tool to assess the program’s progress and outcomes. The survey was distributed in December of 2014.

More than 570 of an estimated 2,500 active members responded. In this report, you’ll see results from the survey as well as Pierson’s analysis highlighted in the red boxes on each page. To further illustrate the impact of this program, we included profiles of women engaged in the Women & Bicycles Roll Model program, the heart and soul of the model. Throughout the report you will hear from Women Bike, our analysis of how to integrate women-specific outreach as part of an overall advocacy strategy, how it creates a culture of health, and provides the basis for a lifetime of civic engagement.

This report is designed for advocates interested in creating a successful women’s outreach and encouragement initiative in their community. In addition to some practical advice on how to design programs that are inclusive, culturally relevant and financially sustainable, we define some of the philosophical underpinnings of women-specific bike advocacy to help you make your case.

We hope this report will make you feel ready to begin planning your own women’s outreach and encouragement initiative and confident explaining to others why reaching out to women is critical to building a bicycle-friendly America for everyone.

Liz Cornish Jones
Women Bike Manager
In many American cities, bicycling is making a comeback. People are dusting off their old bikes and fixing them up for their daily commute. They’re purchasing cargo bikes and special trailers to shuttle their children around town. Cities are responding with road improvements and dedicated bike facilities.

It’s a renaissance of people committed to active living, environmental sustainability and economic security. And bicycling isn’t just healthy, inexpensive and efficient — it’s fun, too.

Still, despite all the momentum of the modern bike movement, women made up just 24% of all bicycle trips in the United States in the most recent National Household Travel Survey in 2009. So it’s not surprising that one question that is often asked in regards to the Women Bike program is “What’s the number one thing that can increase ridership among women?”

Our response: “Which woman?”

Gender is just one aspect of our identity. Outreach and encouragement initiatives seeking to get more women on bikes must be designed to meet women at the intersections of their identity.

Is this woman also a parent? Does she work outside the home? If so, how far does she travel to get there? Is she an immigrant without experience operating a vehicle on American roads?

The second question we are often asked is, “Why?” Why is there a separate program focused on women at the League? Why is there a whole day of the National Bike Summit dedicated to issues related to women and bicycling?

Women Bike doesn’t believe that every woman should ride a bike. But we do believe that, as citizens, women’s needs and desires should be a factor in how our cities are designed. Women Bike wants every woman to feel that, if she wants to ride a bike, it wouldn’t feel like a risky choice or a herculean feat.

For too long, planners and bike advocates have ignored the intersectional lives women lead. The landscape for bicycling has been predominantly constructed from a male point of view. Women Bike believes that diverse perspectives can lead to ingenuity, and solutions that stick. Events like the National Forum on Women and Bicycling are designed to convene important conversations that lead to robust — and complex — answers that get more women in leadership roles in the bike movement.

Here’s the thing: Men and women travel differently. Women often link trips — stopping at, say, the pharmacy on the way home from work — at a higher rate than men. Women are also more likely to travel with passengers, often small children. These things can make choosing to bike feel inefficient, impractical and in some cases unsafe.
But as more women take to the streets on two wheels, biking is becoming more normalized. Women may make up a smaller percentage of bicyclists on the road, but when they do ride women are more likely to bike to work or run errands than men.

This has huge implications as we work toward design solutions and effective encouragement that leads to more active communities that prioritize the health and economic stability of all its citizens.

If we can create communities where bicycling is efficient, practical and safe for women, we create a community where more men and children would ride bikes, as well. This means that the more women there are riding bikes, the more normalized bike riding becomes.

There’s a ripple effect when women learn about their power to create change in their communities through advocating for better bicycling. When they tap into that power, they’re more engaged in how all decisions are made where they live. Advocating for bicycling gives women a platform at city council meetings to share their experiences and shape the future of their community. For many, it is the start of a life of civic engagement.

Bikes empower women to lead — and that’s a critical ingredient in creating an advocacy community that not only works for political power and works to add value to current trends, but also values diverse perspectives and prioritizes effective solutions to complex problems.

In Washington, D.C., we refer to our local Department of Transportation bike count and, according to DDOT, we saw 24% female ridership in 2012. We rely on Census data for Maryland and Virginia, which showed 21% and 26% female ridership, respectively, in 2012.

It’s clear from conversations and from observations that the Women & Bicycles group makes participants feel more connected to their region, their community, and the work being done around them to get more people biking. Participants gain access to a calendar of events that bring them to new parts of town – not to mention all the bike/non-bike related events posted on the forum. They have access to women from all walks of life — and the connections are formed in a relaxed and laid-back environment, unlike most local networks that are often career-based. This brings people out of the homogenous little pockets of daily life that we find ourselves in, which is particularly important in our transient region.

Like every other major city, there are endless, ongoing, important opportunities to get involved within our organization or within the bike community. We’ve channeled women into those roles through the program. The way participants interact with the program ranges from the casual participant who maybe comes to an event or two, maybe follows along on the forum — to an engaged organizer within the program who puts together a workshop, or fundraiser, or goes out and finds a bike-related group to get involved in.

Sure, these anecdotes aren’t purely the result of the Women & Bicycles program, but the existence of this supportive, informed, eager community certainly accelerates the prospects and process of greater involvement.
Better defining our outcomes is critical to professionalizing bike advocacy and accurately measuring its impact. One area where this is most apparent is when we assume and state that women-specific encouragement and outreach efforts are designed to close the gender gap in bicycling. This claim warrants a bit more investigation.

There is a dominant narrative among bike advocates and progressive city planners that if we simply “Copenhagenize” American cities, the bicycling gender gap will disappear. Often, women’s aversion to risk and the lack of widespread dedicated bike facilities explains away the disparity in ridership numbers.

What that philosophy fails to point out is that cities with women’s ridership in excess of 50% tend to be in countries with a higher priority on citizen welfare — and a higher cost of living to support that priority. The effects are wide ranging, but most notably it has led to greater rates of gender parity.

The World Economic Forum in its Global Gender Gap Report 2014 estimates that it will be 2095 before we reach gender parity in the workplace. The United States currently ranks 20th globally for overall gender parity. Behind the unsurprising countries like Iceland, Norway, and Denmark, are more surprising countries like Nicaragua and Rwanda.

While globally the narrowest gaps exist in health and access to education, 40% of countries surveyed now have a wider gap in health and 30% have a wider gap in access to education than they did nine years ago when the study began.

To see impacts on the gender gap in bicycling, bike advocates must broaden their vision and partner with and incorporate aspects of the health, environmental justice, social justice, education, and economic development sectors.

Getting more women on bikes isn’t simple addition. It’s less a question of which came first — bike facilities increasing ridership or more riders leading to increased facilities — but rather a complex equation of interlocking variables.

Changing one number has implications for the entire system. Encouraging more women to bike is critical, but there are many other factors before the equal sign.

Below: According to a 2014 survey of Women & Bicycles participants, the overwhelming majority do not have children. Left: Women & Bicycles is working to address those barriers, partnering with Kidical Mass DC to host events like The ABCs of Family Biking.
What if we shifted our focus from closing the gender gap in bicycling, which is tied to other gaps in health and economics and the social equality of women? What if, instead, we got clear on our real focus: increasing ridership, which is a goal we’re much better positioned to accomplish?

This isn’t just semantics. Getting clear on what we can and can’t claim responsibility for as bike advocates is key to creating strategies that are more effective and sustainable. Thinking deeply about these goals to increase women’s ridership challenges organizations to think intersectionally.

This will lead to improved outreach efforts across all populations they serve — and, ultimately, more people choosing to ride bikes.

**INTERSECTIONALISM** is a concept describing the way different forms of oppression (sexism, racism, homophobia, ableism, classism), can’t be addressed separately or teased apart. In bike advocacy, viewing our programs through a lens of intersectionalism is a way to ensure we consider all forms of oppression that might be a barrier to riding a bicycle.

Women & Bicycles was created to address barriers to bicycling identified by women who ride in the Washington Area. WABA looked to create specific programs that would address the barriers directly in hopes of encouraging more women to ride.

Even though they have been successful on many fronts, this particular model struggles to engage a diverse cross section of women. Creating an inclusive programming environment is challenging. If diversity of participants is a desired effect of programming, one must take intentional steps to create it. Community partnerships can be critical in bridging the gap to populations you seek to serve. As Women & Bicycles enters its third year of programming, they have made a conscious effort to design programs and host events that include more diverse women.

The important thing to remember is that taking on too many goals, especially ones you have no method to evaluate will do your program and your participants a disservice. Part of Women & Bicycles success is linked to their ability to tack on the complex issue of women engagement in manageable chunks. After a few years of growing support for the program, and establishing strong volunteer leaders they are ready to take on the challenge of increasing diversity.
WOMEN & BICYCLES PROGRAM: GOALS

by Nelle Pierson

To create our Women & Bicycles program, we used information we collected from our Women’s Cycling Forum to shape the goals and content of our program. The cycling forum asked women who already bike whether the gender gap is the result of more barriers to women, and if so what are those barriers.

We learned that the BARRIERS fell into four categories:

» **Perception of safety:** Fear, inexperience, confidence in one’s body, poor or lack of infrastructure

» **Logistics:** Office facilities, preparedness, gear, time commitment, bike storage

» **Social norms and expectations:** More responsibilities as a mother/woman, bike shop intimidation, street harassment, professionalism, misconceptions about femininity and athleticism, double standards for men and women, hardcore-ism, social status

» **And social support:** Less access to supportive and encouraging friends and family that already bike and want to share biking

In 2012, the first year of the program, OUR GOALS were:

» Recruit and engage 10 program Roll Models to facilitate mentorship

» Create and centralize educational materials, experts, and facilitate open dialogue

» Work with a diverse coalition of groups who already work to empower women

» Ensure that our outreach and marketing of the program reach diverse audiences

» Coordinate 30 skillshare events throughout the region (10 workshops, 10 rides, 10 meetups)

» Enable and encourage participants to continue bicycling and mentor women in their lives

» Track and report lessons learned along the way to share with other women biking initiatives

We knew access to information and support were central to addressing each of these individual barriers, and that’s why we placed so much emphasis on recruiting and engaging Roll Models.

Mentorship is the heart of the program and the Roll Models are selected on the basis of understanding the value of bringing together women in their networks to expedite the process of learning all the ins and outs as a new rider, in a way that’s comfortable and encouraging. We had 10 mentors the first year, and 42 mentors in the second year, each of whom took on their own personal approach to mentoring.

The first meetup event is generally a 2-hour discussion, with 5-10 women from the Roll Model’s network, where questions, concerns, tips, and tricks are shared. After the meetup, the Roll Models often organize a follow-up bike ride with their group, or a trip to the bike shop — or they’ll meet up at a WABA bike class.
The Women & Bicycles Workbook, *The Ins and Outs of Urban Bicycling*, has been a crucial resource in the program. It’s used as a conversational guide during meetups and is a central tool to learn about bicycling, in a way that’s fun, palatable, and visually effective. In writing this workbook, we made sure to validate and explore bike barriers that people experience, and tackle them directly. It covers the basics, and bike-related information specific to most women that isn’t readily available and easy to find in a bike shop or online like: dresses, periods, hygiene, hair, etc.

We invite experts within our group to lead our workshops and lend support to our rides. We’ve hosted workshops on women’s health, street harassment, bike fitting, maintenance, family biking, and more (see calendar). It’s been a great way to facilitate new leaders and organizers within the group, to partner with other organizations, and to tackle sensitive issues that can be tough for bike organizations to address.

Conversation is generally open and fun. We make an effort to be very conscientious of people’s time, and respect their decision to join us, so we pack a lot of information into short events, and make it as enjoyable as possible. Setting a comfortable, trusting tone is so very important in creating “safe spaces” to discuss these sensitive issues. Because we’ve emphasized this tone from the start we’ve built expectations into our events and people seem to come in with a natural sense of trust and openness.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
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<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2/5/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Survey Happy Hour</td>
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<td>2/9/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Meetup: Lolly</td>
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<td>3/2/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>#WebiketoDC Ride to DC Party</td>
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<td>3/6/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workshop: Sadie Hawkins Craft Night</td>
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<td>3/9/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ride: Bike Washy Party</td>
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<td>3/10/2014</td>
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<td>Workshop: Velocity Bike Clinic</td>
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<td>3/14/2014</td>
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<td>Sadie Hawkins Dance Party</td>
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<td>Women’s Coalition Meeting</td>
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<td>4/27/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ride: Beach Drive Picnic Ride</td>
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<td>Ride: Cyclofemme</td>
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<td>5/12/2014</td>
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<td>Bike to Work Day Buddy Happy Hour</td>
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<td>5/25/2014</td>
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<td>Ride: Anacostia Riverwalk Trail Picnic</td>
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<td>5/28/2014</td>
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<td>Pop-up Outreach with the BA’s!</td>
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<td>6/8/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workshop: Coordinating group rides</td>
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<td>6/18/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workshop: Street Harassment</td>
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<td>6/19/2014</td>
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<td>Happy Hour: Bikesshare Backpack</td>
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<td>6/20/2014</td>
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<td>LCI Seminar</td>
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<td>7/13/2014</td>
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<td>Workshop: Women’s Health</td>
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<td>Movie night</td>
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<td>7/17/2014</td>
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<td>Roll Model Training</td>
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<td>7/31/2014</td>
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<td>Movie night</td>
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<td>8/16/2014</td>
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<td>Ride: Ice Cream Cycle Tracks</td>
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<td>9/7/2014</td>
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<td>Roll Model Training</td>
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<td>9/21/2014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Workshop: Family Biking</td>
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<td>9/27/2014</td>
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<td>Ride: Farm Tour</td>
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<td>Roll Model Training</td>
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<td>10/11/2014</td>
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<td>Workshop: MTBike!</td>
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<td>12/14/2014</td>
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<td>Holiday Party</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Wednesday Coffee Clubs</td>
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**Women & Bicycles Calendar of Events**

LEFT: Women & Bicycles workshop, RIGHT: Participants go for a ride
Roll Model profile:
ELIZABETH LYTTLETON

Elizabeth Lyttleton has three children, ages 10, 7, and 2. Before starting her family, Lyttleton recalls a time in her life where she regularly rode a bike, and even commuted to work. But once her family grew, the “kid-hauling problem” halted her riding.

Four years ago, a friend suggested she purchase a long tail bicycle so she could ride and carry her children. At the time, there wasn’t a place in D.C. to purchase a long tail, so she ordered online and put the bike together herself. She gingerly rode it to the nearest bike shop to make sure she assembled it correctly (she did!) and she’s been riding with her kids ever since. They ride year round, taking a six-week hiatus in the winter to avoid the coldest weather and icy conditions. Since riding with her children she’s lost 15 pounds and, before the birth of her third child, she rode until the seventh month of pregnancy.

Now the two “big girls” ride their own bikes and the baby rides on the back. Riding has become a necessary part of Lyttleton’s life. She rides to the grocery store and takes the kids to the pool in the summer. She’s only in the car when it’s absolutely necessary. She recognizes how difficult it can be for mothers to make the time to stay healthy. “It’s very hard to say I’m going to take this time versus doing the laundry,” she says. “So for me, just making it a part of how we get places is hugely important.”

When Lyttleton became a Roll Model for the Women & Bicycles program, she knew it was unrealistic to ask parents to get together for coffee or burritos to talk bikes, so instead she made it her goal to stop and answer questions anytime she was asked about her bike. With very few long tails in D.C., she’s helped a number of parents purchase long tails and box seat bikes — and estimates helping at least half-a-dozen families make the leap into family biking.

Lyttleton has a vested interest in getting more parents on bikes. “So much of the program is the formal Roll Model program, but I think the most important is the informal mentoring that occurs,” she says. “I live right off the Metropolitan Branch Trail and I see a lot of bicyclists, but still not too many women. It’s a huge goal of mine to normalize bike riding.”

Lyttleton also sees family biking as a necessary step in raising the next generation of riders. “My children see bikes as transportation,” she says. She believes policymakers will take more interest in bicycling when they realize it’s entire families out there riding, and that getting more families on bikes will encourage better infrastructure to make cycling safer for everyone. “Women & Bicycles gives me a mouthpiece,” she says. “It gives me a really great place to encourage other people. I’m able to touch more people this way.”

Becoming involved in Women & Bicycles has encouraged her to take other leadership roles in bike advocacy, including becoming a League Cycling Instructor (LCI). “That was a huge step in formalizing what I’m doing, she says. “I felt like doing the LCI class gave me actual qualifications to bolster my advocacy work and talk to other people.”
#3 CULTIVATING PARTNERSHIPS

One common refrain we hear from successful women’s outreach and encouragement programs is the value of strong partnerships. Whether your program is part of the local bike advocacy organization or facilitated by a group of dedicated volunteers, partnering with an existing organization with a reputation for working with the population you seek to serve will help to ground your program in success.

In 2014, Women Bike Mini-Grant recipient Marin County Bike Coalition (MCBC) hosted a learn to ride program for women living in the Canal Area of San Rafael, CA. They dubbed the program Latina Women on Wheels. They felt it important to empower this group of women by helping them gain access to independent transportation. They knew that in order to be successful, they would have to align themselves with the community and understand their needs.

This led to a partnership with Parent Services Project, a nonprofit focused on strengthening and supporting families in Marin County. They worked with Parent Services Project to recruit and register participants. This allowed MCBC to work with bilingual staff at Parent Services and capture more interest by going where the families they wanted to reach were already utilizing services. The partnership with Parent Services Project allowed them to provide childcare and meals during the program, removing some barriers these mothers might have to participating.

WE Bike NYC, another Women Bike Mini-Grant recipient, also stressed the importance of partnerships in their outreach and encouragement initiatives. Reaching out to community organizations can help get the word out about your program and help with cultural transitions. Establishing strong relationships with organizations that have ongoing relationships with women you seek to serve can also ensure you are designing and offering programs and services that are responsive to the community’s needs. For example, a well intentioned women’s bike maintenance clinic might be premature if most of the women you are hoping to reach out to still aren’t confident riders.

WOMEN & BICYCLES: CULTIVATING PARTNERS

by Nelle Pierson

We are very self-aware that our program participants are mostly young, white, middle-income, and mostly without children. It’s important and our responsibility to seek out, involve, and make our group accessible to groups of underrepresented women. Aside from trying to recruit Roll Models from underrepresented groups and targeted promotion, partnerships are the best way for us to address gaps in our group’s demographics.

We often work with bike shops or other bike groups, which is a fabulous way to lift each other’s presence and support each other’s work, but we risk limiting our audience to people who are already plugged into biking. We’ve tried to maintain a balance in working with groups that are already tied to biking to avoid insularity.

We’ve worked with a women’s shelter to host five classes and workshops for residents and hope to work with similar organizations moving forward. We’ve partnered with the region’s library systems to help us promote and host events. We’ve worked with women’s empowerment organizations, family groups, meetup groups, and local businesses. But it still doesn’t feel like enough. We could do more to build interconnected partnerships around the region and we could do a lot more to do on the ground outreach in targeted areas, like fliering and posting in targeted neighborhoods.
**STEPS TO ESTABLISHING AND MAINTAINING SUCCESSFUL PARTNERSHIPS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conduct a Community Scan to identify trusted organizations in the community you seek to serve</th>
<th>Where are the women you’re looking to engage in bicycling already spending their time? A local community center? A school that their children all attend? A health club? Conducting this inventory will show the services already available in your community, and reveal natural partnerships. Becoming invested in the big picture of health and wellness for women in your community, and not exclusively focused on bicycling, will position you as a trusted ally in their community and inspire future collaborations.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reach out to leaders at the community organizations from your Community Scan</td>
<td>When you meet with these leaders, get to know their organization. Travel to their site for the meeting. See where they work. Learn about their successes and challenges. Some of the best collaborations across organizations are when one organization has resources but an inability to connect to participants, and another organization has participants but lacks capacity or relationships to obtain resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Design programs that allow partners to showcase strengths and share in success</td>
<td>Too often organizations waste valuable resources creating systems they could easily outsource to community partners. But sharing responsibilities comes with an obligation to share in the program's success. Spend some time at the beginning of the partnership coming up with a shared communication plan for both program promotion and public relations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formalize the relationship to protect both parties from risk</td>
<td>Create a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and a formal invoicing process if payment is going to be exchanged. Make it clear whose liability insurance would cover participants in case of an incident. Make sure any services are appropriately compensated and invoices are paid on time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use partnerships as way to attract new funders</td>
<td>Funders love to see partnerships, especially when both organizations have been thoughtful to create a partnership that allows for efficiency when using resources. Developing creative partnerships allows both organizations to expand their donor base and elevate their profile to donors that previously weren’t looking at their work. It also allows for an opportunity to grow support from an existing, shared funder if you can demonstrate the partnership will deliver outcomes not achievable if working alone.</td>
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<td>Maintain and nurture the relationship in informal ways</td>
<td>After the program is over, maintain the relationship by keeping lines of communication open for future collaboration. Sign up for their e-news and follow them on social media. Cross-promote special events and other programs when appropriate. Attend community events and volunteer opportunities. You may not always have the capacity to pay an organization for their services exchanged, but showing up for them in other ways, like promoting their events or volunteering your time, can also hold value.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thank, recognize, and celebrate</td>
<td>Include a partner’s logo on a program description page that links to their website, honor them in your annual report, or have participants write thank you notes. If a project was particularly challenging or successful, host a small celebration for all staff to meet and thank each other in person. These small things have a big impact when creating community. That’s what meaningful partnerships are all about: creating a cohesive community working together to meet the needs of the people they serve.</td>
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(LEFT) Team Sticky Fingers partnered with WABA to (RIGHT) raise money for Women & Bicycles with a fundraising ride called the Hains Point 100
Renee Yvonne Moore learned to ride a bike while on a first date.

Moore grew up in Washington, D.C., but it wasn’t until she was 25 years old that she started to notice more and more people riding bikes. She wanted to learn. So when a date asked her what she wanted to do, she suggested they bike along a nearby canal — and she learned to ride on the trail.

A move to Texas made her realize that it wasn’t as easy to travel by bike everywhere in America. While in the Lone Star State she competed in a few triathlons and rode recreationally, but never felt comfortable riding in the road. When she returned to D.C., she was met with a challenge: Her mother had a stroke and was staying at George Washington Hospital. She wanted to visit her mother everyday, but parking was $22. To save money she started riding her bike — and the experience was freeing. No more parking tickets — and the discovery that she could get anywhere she needed to on her bike.

To get more comfortable riding in traffic she took a city cycling class with Black Women Bike D.C. It was through her involvement with Black Women Bike that she learned about WABA and discovered Women & Bicycles. In using the Facebook group she learned about being a commuter in the rain and snow, and more about local bike shops. Living East of the River, she doesn’t often see other bicyclists, so the group was particularly encouraging. “It was nice to know there were other women riding,” she says.

After a few months with Women & Bicycles, she signed up for the Roll Model training. Moore created a meet-up group called Bicycling in the City and plans short trips by bike to get to various destinations. She’s planned trips to the ice skating rink, a painting class, and a trunk show. She keeps the excursions to less than five miles and tries to meet at a Capital Bikeshare station, so even women without a bike can participate. Since starting the group, she’s had almost 100 people sign up and has met new people on her rides. She also started a coffee club East of the River to assist Women & Bicycles and Black Women Bike D.C. extend their outreach efforts in that area.

For Moore, the Women & Bicycles program has offered “an excellent resource and network of very knowledgeable women.” And bicycling has had a significant impact on her physical and financial health. Since she started biking for transportation, Moore has lost 35 pounds: “Biking is your own two-wheel gym!” she says. And she also enjoys the benefits of not worrying about gas, insurance and parking — all the trappings of owning a car.

“Bicycling makes you feel powerful,” she says. “It feels good to be outside in the fresh air. And you’re kind of a bad ass!”
Sometimes as bicycle advocates we allow objectives to become shortsighted. Often those engaged in bicycle advocacy say their aim is better policies and infrastructure to make biking safer, or ensuring riders have the same rights to the road. But those phrases describe the “what” of our work, not “why” we do it.

Individuals and organizations are inspired by bikes for different reasons, but we’re more powerful as a movement when we can clearly articulate “Why bikes?”

Biking is an inexpensive tool that carries us toward better health, improved mobility (and therefore access to jobs), and a cleaner environment. In many communities it’s still quite challenging to get around by bicycle. Bike advocates are working to change that, not because bicycles in and of themselves are important, but because the health, economic and environmental outcomes they lead us to are invaluable.

Many bike advocacy organizations are heavily focused on policy and education. This has attracted staff well-versed in the complexities of lawmaking and politics, and teaching bike safety skills. Not surprisingly, staff that excel in these areas don’t always have the program design or community outreach skills to engage in the cultural aspects of encouraging bicycling — for instance, overcoming the stigma of bicycling in some communities that bicycling is a mode of transportation utilized only by the poor.

We’ve been conscious about moving women up the ladder of engagement through the forum, workshops, and conversations. It wasn’t originally tied to a goal or strategy we outlined but started to happen organically.

People post volunteer, job, and involvement opportunities on the forum. We’ve hosted an advocacy workshop once a year and always pass along news on advocacy projects or opportunities to get involved in specific campaigns. This information gets circulated throughout conversation at our events, as well.

The group naturally highlights and celebrates women who are doing awesome work in the field, too. Women who are deeply involved in their Bicycle Advisory Committee, or at a bike shop, or on a board are bringing a face and insight to their roles and inspiring others to get more involved.

Program participant and engineer Fionnuala Quinn (above, black shirt) organized a workshop on becoming engaged in the public planning process for Women & Bicycles Program participants and engineer Fionnuala Quinn (above, black shirt) organized a workshop on becoming engaged in the public planning process for the Alexandria Spokeswomen, a group
Today, advocacy groups realize that political shifts occur at a faster rate when bolstered by the support of a diverse body of constituents. To that end, many are devoting more resources to the important work of encouragement and outreach programs. Additionally, in many communities, as access to living wages and affordable housing decreases, bicycle advocacy organizations find themselves in a new role of working in different ways to find solutions to these social inequities.

Bicycling is no longer seen as merely the leisure pursuit of the Lance Armstrong generation or the transportation choice of eccentric environmentalists. Mayors across the United States continue to make investments that recognize its widespread value in creating a healthy, economically vibrant city.

Our role as bike advocates has now expanded, and we have an opportunity and a responsibility to professionalize our efforts. This begins with improving our encouragement and outreach efforts.

We must look to sectors outside of transportation and bicycling to truly understand the best practices of community engagement. How are they addressing issues like equity? What are some ways they’ve addressed barriers, like language or finding appropriate child care while accessing services?

While there are certainly shining examples of organizations out there doing encouragement and outreach in truly inclusive and innovative ways, many advocacy organizations are just beginning to do the self examination required to establish effective initiatives.

Policy and outreach work should not be seen in competition to one another, or reaching a different demographic. These two programmatic arms of an organization should be collaborating so that participants in outreach initiatives are being encouraged to become more involved in formal advocacy efforts.

How often have you seen an outreach program for an underserved population be successful in teaching people how to ride bikes, but not educating them on how to take an active role in the organization’s advocacy work?

We must ensure a platform for all our constituents’ needs to be heard and create a meaningful pathway to leadership in advocacy.

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**WAYS TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS IN OUTREACH INITIATIVES TO ENGAGE IN ADVOCACY**

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<tr>
<th>Add program participants to e-mail lists</th>
<th>Who in your organization decides who receives policy-related communications, like action alerts? Cast the net wider to include participants involved in education or outreach initiatives. Never assume certain people are disinterested in advocacy.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Invite new participants to important meetings with city officials</td>
<td>Many underserved populations have a history of feeling unwelcome at official city meetings. As advocates, it’s our job to change that. Extend personal invitations. Offer to assist with transportation or childcare to remove barriers to participation. Make staff available to those interested in learning more about policy work. Think less about creating another meeting for people to attend, and instead focus on one-on-one interactions with influencers in the community you want to see take a more active role in policy discussions.</td>
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<td>Create opportunities for formal training and certification</td>
<td>Host a course to allow participants to become certified League Cycling Instructors. Create a formal mentorship development program that trains volunteers on challenges faced by new riders. Advocacy organizations that offer ways for members or individuals to gain credibility in the community and legitimize their work as volunteer advocates and educators help expand the network of bike advocates in the community. When new positions open up on the staff or board, draw from this group of engaged members to fill those roles.</td>
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“It took me forever to learn to ride on two wheels,” says Caitlin Gould. But she still remembers the day she finally got it. Her dad had gone into the house after another failed attempt. Gould, with elbows skinned, sensed his frustration and allowed it to fuel her determination. That same determination has kept her riding until today.

At college in western Massachusetts, she rode her mountain bike to class, as well as using it to hit the trails nearby. While in graduate school, she traveled by bike because it made financial sense and helped her stay healthy. “Being stressed was my M.O.,” she says, “and biking was a great way to relieve that.”

When she returned to D.C., she had two friends who were already bike commuters, so she started riding to work. At her first job, she was one of the few commuters at first, but by the time she left, “you couldn’t get a rack spot on nice days.” She now commutes 20 miles round trip to her new job in Silver Spring, Md. “Biking is my life,” she says. “I can’t imagine not riding.”

Gould has been evangelizing bicycling to her friends for some time and has been part of the Women & Bicycles Facebook group for years. She appreciates the sense of community and, on days when the weather is poor and she isn’t excited to ride, she thinks about those other women and knows that many of them will be out their riding — and it motivates her to hop on her bike. “It’s a great positive influence,” she says. “I do it because I feel a sense of community pride.”

By participating in the Roll Model program, she now feels she has better tools to do the outreach that was already so organic to her daily life. Even though Gould had been encouraging friends to bike for years, she was amazed at the thoughtful and tough questions that came up at her first meet-up discussion, simply by creating the right space. “Giving my friends a forum to ask questions and not feel judged was huge,” she says. “That impact was underscored to me as a Roll Model.” Since she gone through the Roll Model training, those types of interactions are happening more and more. “It legitimized the outreach I was already doing,” she says.

Building the community of female riders, she recently formed a coffee club in Silver Spring. “I used to be a lobbyist, so I like to share things I’m passionate about,” she says. And even for an experienced rider like Gould, she still finds the resources incredibly valuable. One example: After learning more about distance riding, Gould completed her first half century last fall. Where did she hear about the ride? From the Women & Bicycles Facebook group, of course!
Evaluating success

Too often we see well-designed programs being stewarded by bicycling organizations unable to determine if their efforts have been successful. Despite numerous women-specific engagement efforts happening across the United States, no one has been able to report the exact programs that increase ridership.

Is this because they haven’t been successful at encouraging women to ride bikes? Probably not. More likely, it’s due to a lack of capacity around evaluation. Evaluation is critical for two reasons.

1) Evaluation allows us to objectively examine our efforts and make programmatic adjustments that lead to better results.

Many times a program might have great optics: 600 women at the start of a ride. But if the goal of the ride was to encourage new women to become bicyclists, how do we know if those riders were new to biking versus bicyclists who were already aligned to the cause? If we aren’t including a system to measure our efforts against our desired outcomes we might continue to devote precious resources to programs and events that might have other great outcomes, but not the one we were seeking.

2) Evaluation allows us to accurately measure the success of our efforts and can be the key to financial sustainability.

Many foundations and even private donors will be happy to give an organization capacity building funds to design new programs and be experimental. But those funds can only be relied on in the short term if you aren’t able to prove that your efforts were either successful in meeting your goals or critical learning has occurred to lead to vast improvements in program design. As bicycling advocates, we’re competing with many other sectors for the same dollars and need to hold ourselves to the same standards of evaluation and reporting.

One important thing to understand about evaluation is the difference between an outcome and an output. Historically, bike advocates have been focused on measuring and reporting outputs. These are things like census data, local bike counts, attendance at events, membership—numbers and demographics.

Outcomes instead focus on what happened as a result of those people coming into contact with your program—and are inherently more difficult to measure. They require posing the question ahead of time: defining the outcomes in the program design stage, and, as an organization, being accountable to those outcomes.

Often you’ll have to build it into the timeline of your program. Maybe you ask participants to complete a survey or interview participants for follow up. Either way, it requires staff and potentially program time be devoted to capturing the effects of your program on the participants. Those things should be built into job descriptions and program budgets before embarking on new efforts.

Given the competition for funding, evaluation can no longer be placed on the organization’s wish list of things it would do if only it had more capacity. It has to be placed centrally in systems of program design and organizational culture to ensure that efforts are meeting the goals of the organization and that your efforts remain credible with key supporters.
### TIPS FOR CREATING STRONG SYSTEMS OF EVALUATION

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<th><strong>Do a staff skills inventory</strong></th>
<th>It’s possible your program leader may not have skills in statistics or data analysis, but potentially someone else on your staff does. Learning where deficits are may inform your next hire, or lead to some shifts in responsibilities so that strong people are being maximized to their fullest potential.</th>
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<td><strong>Hire out</strong></td>
<td>If you don’t have staff who are strong in this area and aren’t in a place to hire someone full-time, contract out the evaluation design and data analysis. Work with local colleges and universities to identify courses that could potentially take on your organization’s program evaluation as a class project. This requires lead time to be written in a professor’s syllabus, but can prove to be a great sustainable resource. It’s also a great way to employ consultants who are strong in areas of evaluation. Often, a one-time contract can set you up with an evaluation tool and data analysis tool that can be used for years. It may seem like an investment up front, but it’s a strategy that could save money in the long term, while giving you a high quality method of program evaluation.</td>
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<td><strong>Look for creative data collection methods</strong></td>
<td>You aren’t bound to eternally pre- and post-test participants. Many models for evaluation exist. Search for one that doesn’t take away from the experience of the program, but still delivers the information you need. Lots of technologies are available to make collecting data easy and unintrusive. Explore mobile technology that allows people to use their smart phones to complete surveys on their own, or provide iPads or computers to folks after the course or event so data is automatically entered — saving staff time in transferring data from a piece of paper to a spreadsheet.</td>
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<td><strong>Done is better than perfect</strong></td>
<td>Often we allow the fact that we don’t have a data guru on staff stop us from making attempts at collecting data on our programs. We believe that evaluation is only worth attempting if we are certain our efforts can stand up against scientific scrutiny. While we should always try to design the best evaluation tools we can, opting out because we don’t feel we can do it perfectly only stands to hurt our program’s efforts. It is best to encourage staff to make their best efforts to assess programs to the best of their abilities. Don’t let perfection stand in your way of getting the best information you can from participants and clients.</td>
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LEFT: Participants with the Women & Bicycles Workbook. RIGHT: Women & Bicycles 2014 Cyclofemme Ride
Roll Model profile:
ANDREA ADLEMAN

I moved to D.C. without a car and relied on public transit and car-sharing. I wasn’t a bicyclist then, but I harbored bike-curiosity. After eyeing Capital Bikeshare for years, I succumbed to curiosity and tried it for a day. It was deliriously fun and I bought an annual membership in June 2013, marking my beginning as an urban bicycle commuter. That month, I went to Women & Bicycles’ very informative Pedaling Professionally seminar and I knew I was in my element.

Two months later, I benefited from ad-hoc Roll Models who answered my call for help when I was afraid to ride on city streets. Three veteran cyclists joined a novice friend and me on a city streets training ride, which left me with an overpowering sense of confidence, support and gratitude that I hadn’t experienced in decades.

Now I give back by cheerfully participating in Women & Bicycles’ online and in-person events. I take the initiative to organize social events at least once a month.

I got directly involved in bicycle public policy through Women & Bicycles. When an activist posted information about the D.C. Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC), I followed through and attended a meeting. The BAC is a governmental body of residents appointed by the Council of the District of Columbia and its function is to issue formal policy recommendations to lawmakers. At the meeting I attended, I was recruited to chair a BAC committee, a position I still hold. Thanks to Women & Bicycles, I have an institutional role in the municipal policymaking process.

Drawing on my 20+ years as a community organizer and political operative, I can share some observations. I’m impressed by how open and collaborative the group is. Participants can shape it, internalize a deep sense of ownership, take initiative to assume great responsibility and execute events with full autonomy. It’s a bottom-up, membership-driven organization in theory and practice.

Women & Bicycles could benefit from some changes to ensure that it’s truly welcoming and comfortable to first-time participants and beginning cyclists. There should be signage, representatives in T-shirts or other highly visible ways for newcomers to find the group at our weekly coffee clubs, for example. These are informal events where newcomers just have to approach the group and ask if we’re Women & Bicycles. There should be a more identifiable way to find the group, plus a sign-in sheet, name tags, literature and other such materials that make it look more substantial and official.

I think more could be done to support mainstream transportation cyclists who don’t relate to the sporty, athletic side of cycling. I imagine there are a number of people who aren’t participating in our group rides out of concern they’d be too fast or too long. An urban transportation cyclist or Bike-share member may have no idea of their speed. Figuring it out may be intimidating. They may conclude that even a Women & Bicycles ride classified as a social pace of 8 mph is too fast. Slower social rides described as “Bikeshare” or “rush-hour traffic” speeds might draw more first-time participants.
#6 WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM WOMEN & BICYCLES

One of the key strengths of the Women & Bicycles program comes from the many opportunities for engagement. A robust calendar of events that cater to all types of riders, and do their best to accommodate participant’s varying schedules and geographic locations has allowed the Women & Bicycles network to deepen and grow. Their successful Facebook group was intentionally designed to be a welcoming, safe space for women to ask questions, seek encouragement, and build community.

In our analysis we found that while Women & Bicycles excelled at building a community of bike riders, it wasn’t clear if they were increasing ridership among new riders.

The program was also really successful at turning bike riders into bike advocates. We saw this with an increased commitment to membership to Washington Area Bicyclist Association after participating in the Women & Bicycles program. As the program continues to grow, becoming clear about intended outcomes and creating a formal process of evaluation will be the key to identifying where the program is making strides. The number of women they have engaged is commendable. They are certainly on a trajectory toward continued growth and meaningful community impact.

EVALUATING THE WOMEN & BICYCLES PROGRAM
by Nelle Pierson

For Women & Bicycles, we track: the number of events, attendance, and contact information, as well as the number of people who join the Facebook group and our email list. We have a sense of how it’s growing but we don’t have a clear sense of how it’s working other than anecdotal feedback.

We host member surveys each year that seek to gauge demographic information, how people found out about the program, how they interact with it and with WABA, and how the program has affected their relationship with biking. We know that people are deriving value from our program, and we know WABA is, but we haven’t adopted a formal evaluation that shows us what’s working and what’s not working.

We’re missing the evaluation piece that documents how effective we are at facilitating mentorship. I’d like to borrow and adopt a method similar to el Hadas Madrinas en Bici, a women’s mentorship group in Ecuador. They have mentees self-evaluate their relationship to biking before and after they’re formally mentored and track progress of participants as they go.

WAS YOUR PARTICIPATION A FACTOR IN PURCHASING OR RENEWING WABA MEMBERSHIP?

- **YES, I became a WABA member because of Women & Bicycles** 37%
  - Joined WABA or renewed because of the Women & Bicycles program
- **YES, I renewed my WABA membership because of Women & Bicycles** 26%
  - **NO, I was already a WABA member before I participated in Women & Bicycles** 63%
  - 11%
WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY...

» It’s great to be part of an inclusive, enthusiastic community of women. When I’m going somewhere that I could bike or take public transit, I think of Women & Bicycles and choose to ride. It’s an inspiration.

» The tone of Women & Bicycles is one of compassion, understanding, and support, which fosters a really incredible community. I love that it’s a non-competitive atmosphere, and where ladies will “cheer” for your accomplishments, whether that’s riding to work one day a month or riding across the country. I’ve gained so much from having a supportive community that I can reach out to for bike-related or non-bike-related questions and concerns.

» We hear again and again how the group has made so many women confident to ride in all conditions and distances. I also think it’s remarkable how the program has led non-WABA staff to step up and become volunteers and bicycle advocates on their own time and dime. If one believes there is power in the “each one teach one” model, this is absolutely the way to go.

» I love Women & Bicycles. Probably the best thing about the group is how empowering it is for women in general, not just on the bike.
CONCLUSION

Creating a community of women bicyclists should be neither complicated nor costly. But the cost of not working to create a women-specific outreach and encouragement initiative should be clear.

Getting more women on bikes is the lynchpin to creating communities of health, improved mobility, and actively engaged citizens. The goal of women-specific outreach is not simply to replicate a successful program, but to design one to meet the specific needs of the women where you live.

How do people prefer to gather? What do they need in order to feel invited, included, and heard?

Professionalizing our efforts by emphasizing outcomes and evaluation will lead to more successful programs and clear pathways toward increased ridership. And developing strong community partners will ensure our efforts extend across the entire community.

Our hope is that this report serves as a guide to help you develop a program that speaks specifically to your community needs and is designed to be inclusive and sustainable for years to come.

Creating a community of supportive women bicyclists is an essential component to building a bicycle-friendly America for everyone.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to Nelle Pierson (pictured above), whose enthusiasm and vision for this work created a perfect community to examine this issue more closely. I appreciate your time in helping to encourage survey responses, providing insight and analysis, and your tireless work fostering a sisterhood of cyclists in the D.C. metro area.

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