

Girl Scouts on Wheels Toolkit

By Katie Monroe, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

“How do I start a Girl Scout bike patch where I live?”

In 2013, the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia received a Women Bike Mini-Grant to launch a Girl Scouts on Wheels program. This was my path to bring that project to fruition. Your path might – and probably will – be different!



Some of my experiences will be consistent across Girl Scouts Councils nationwide and some aspects will vary by locale. Be flexible and patient – it's worth the effort to create something that will ultimately be sustainable and awesome.

For more information and background on the project, watch my presentation from the 2014 National Women's Bicycling Forum: <http://tinyurl.com/gsonwheels>.

Do some research

While there is definitely NOT a national-level Girl Scout bike badge on the books (if there were, we wouldn't be doing this!), some local councils might have already made a custom, local one. Key vocabulary to know: a **BADGE** is an OFFICIAL item, sanctioned by the Girl Scouts at the national level. A **PATCH** is far less formal, and that's actually the zone I've been operating in. I designed the curriculum to look like a formal badge, and got my local Girl Scout Council to give me the thumbs up to go ahead and advertise/distribute it – but in reality it's just a “patch.” Leaders can get bowling pin patches made to signify that their troop went to a bowling alley – patches aren't distributed by Girl Scouts. The Bicycle Coalition just happens to be the one distributing this particular patch. One day I hope to get this to be more official, but in the meantime, girls are getting on bikes, and that's what I really care about. But, if there's already some kind of local patch in existence already, don't reinvent the wheel! Check out the requirements, think about how you can provide programming to help troops earn it, and move forward from there.

If there isn't already a patch, create a curriculum for one

The curriculum I created is included. The purpose, stated as an affirmation by participants, that I envisioned is: “When I've earned this badge, I'll know how to safely ride a bike for fun, health, and transportation.” To get there, I created five steps: Know your bike, Safety skills, Map it out, Get rolling, and A world of bikes. Feel free to use as much of it as you like, although please give the Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia credit if you do. **Note:** If you use my curriculum, you'll definitely want to edit the local

references embedded in it (e.g. local bike trails, organizations, etc) to reflect your own local bike scene.

Reach out to your local Girl Scout Council

The local “Council” is the organizational structure that oversees all the individual troops that are active in your area. For me, it was the Girl Scouts of Eastern Pennsylvania (<http://www.gsep.org/>). You’ll want to have their approval to move forward with any kind of programming for Girl Scouts. A bit of Googling should help you figure out who your local council is and where their offices are.

Get a meeting with someone

Be patient, this process might take a while. Girl Scouts is a BIG organization, and it took me a while to find an open ear in the organizational structure. Our local bike advocacy group had a former board member whose friend was on the local Girl Scouts’ board, and that helped us. Be flexible with how you pitch a bike program - is your council focusing on health initiatives? Sports? Transportation and independence? There are a lot of angles where bikes can fit. We got in the door because GSEP was planning a Girls Triathlon and they thought a bike patch might work well in conjunction with that.

Get approval

Someone in your local Girl Scouts administration needs to give you the go-ahead, or else it looks sketchy. Hopefully once you tell them you don’t need their money, it won’t be too hard. It will be helpful to have them on board when it comes to advertising the patch.

Get some funding

I got my startup funding from the League of American Bicyclists’ Women Bike Program. Things I needed money for included:

- a. Designing the patches
- b. Printing the patches
 - i. I used www.advantageemblem.com. Reach out to Jenni Homich at jenni@advantageemblem.com
- c. Staff time, including planning and designing the curriculum, as well as actually going and doing bike rodeos and rides with troops
- d. Transportation: A Zipcar when we transported kids’ bikes to a rodeo, etc.
- e. Printing: Copies of curriculum to share with Troop leaders, and bike safety worksheets (though I was lucky to use some of our leftover Safe Routes curriculum workbooks that we weren’t using anymore!)

Get the word out

This was the cool part! We got our “New bike patch opportunity” announcement (with “Contact katie@bicyclecoalition.org for more info”) listed in one council-wide Girl Scout email, and then posted it on the blog and social media outlets for the Bicycle Coalition

of Greater Philadelphia. That's all it took for troop leaders to start e-mailing me! Girl Scout leaders are everywhere – including in the bike community – and word travels fast among them, so start with who you already know! A lot of leaders asked how much it would cost. They were really happy to hear it was free, but clearly they would have been willing to pay for the patches themselves at least, so keep that in mind: you could probably sell them if you need or want to.

Give troops options for how to earn it

I basically offered three paths for troops to earn the patch.

Big event

We had a really successful partnership with Girl Scouts at Penn, a student group at the University of Pennsylvania, that does big, all-day events during which a bunch of local troops can come and earn several patches at once, all around a theme. GS@Penn was doing a “Stand Up and Get Fit” themed event, and we ran the bike part of the day where the girls did everything they needed to do to earn the patch. We brought our normal Safe Routes waivers, as well as bikes and helmets. The girls just had to show up.

We had stations:

- Bike Rodeo
- Label the parts of a bike
- Reflective Clothes Dress-Up
- Styrofoam Cup Egg Drop (“Why you should wear a helmet” activity)

Since we couldn't ensure that every girl knew how to ride a bike before the event, and we didn't have time to do a Learn-to-Ride class, it was important to have some off-bike stations where they could linger and still feel included. At one point during the event I took a few girls who couldn't ride on a walk around West Philly and we talked about different kinds of law-abiding vs. non-law-abiding cyclists we passed! I think this model – big, multi-patch/multi-troop events a weekend day – is pretty common in Girl Scouts, so ask around for existing events you can attach yourself to!

All on their own

We had one troop earn this patch without any BCGP staffer ever meeting any of the girls. Their leader is an avid bicyclist and bike safety queen, and took it upon herself to design a three-meeting plan for how her troop would earn it.

Meeting 1: Bike Safety, with a visit from a Bike Role Model

Meeting 2: Bike Rodeo

Meeting 3: Bike ride on a local trail

The girls used their own bikes, helmets etc. I just sent her the patches at the end and asked her to send me some photos.

Some help

Some troop leaders will reach out and express interest, but not feel totally comfortable pulling it off alone. In this case, depending on your capacity, you can offer whatever educational resources you have to help out.

I usually offer to come out and help with a mini-rodeo – one person can pull it off if it's just a small troop – or help map out a local ride for the girls. I've also referred Troop Leaders to local female bike role models, who they've invited to speak at one of their meetings.

In this scenario, I have the girls provide their own bikes and helmets - but the cool thing about working with a troop structure is that usually if one girl doesn't have a bike, the leader can arrange for someone else's mom to grab an extra one out of the garage or something.

Fun option

Depending on how the troop wants to handle it, you can also come out to a subsequent Troop Meeting and formally present the patches to the girls who earned them. Or you can also just bring them and give them to the leader.

Recruit volunteers

This was really easy in our case, because I had our local Women Bike PHL community to draw upon. They were excited to help with the big UPenn event, and with subsequent smaller troop events that I went out to. This is a popular thing to volunteer for: doesn't require too much expertise, super-feel-good, one-time commitment.

Do the dang thing!

As folks express interest, work with their troop meeting schedules to help them earn the patch using whatever path they choose!

Tweak, adjust, repeat, expand, take over the world with Girl Scouts on bicycles!

Feel free to reach out to me for more advice: Katie@bicyclecoalition.org