



HOW TO HOST A WOMEN'S BICYCLING FORUM

Best practices and ideas to get the conversation started in your community

BY CAROLYN SZCZEPANSKI
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WOMEN



INTRODUCTION

Where do I even start? I remember asking myself that question in 2011. The energy and interest to address the gender gap in American bicycling was reaching critical mass, but what's the first step in addressing such a complex challenge at the national, state or local level?

You don't have to have all the answers. Sometimes the best thing you can do is simply start the conversation.

That's how the wheels started turning for the League's Women Bike program — at the Alliance for Biking & Walking Leadership Retreat in 2010. At that gathering, Alexis Lantz, then the Planning and Policy Director for the Los Angeles County Bicycle Coalition, stood up during lunch. She had a proposal that energized every female leader in the room: a Women's Caucus.



2010 Alliance Leadership Retreat Women's Caucus, photo by Yvonne Bambrick

That caucus was short and informal — but incredibly inspiring. There was so much to talk about: issues we face as women within our own organizations and the broader movement; and how we increase the number of women in bicycle advocacy and boost female mode share out on the streets.

We knew we weren't the only ones talking about these issues. In 2010, the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals conducted a Women Cycling Survey. More than 11,000 U.S. women shared why they bike, what would make them ride more and a wealth of other opinions. The insight was not only revelatory; it was also a spark for new discussion about the importance of women's voices in the national conversation.

Adding to the momentum, a local bike advocacy organization soon took a bold step to start a targeted effort at the local level. In 2011, the Washington Area Bicyclist Association hosted a local Women's Bicycling Forum that brought together a diverse panel of female leaders

with different cycling experiences and expertise — and set the course for sustained programming to address the gender gap in bicycling in the D.C. region.

Inspired and energized, we knew it was time for a national campaign to get more women on bikes.

According to the National Household Travel Survey, women are still vastly outnumbered by men, accounting for just 24 percent of bike trips in 2009. But that trend is shifting. A growing number of women from all backgrounds and communities are beginning to ride and getting more involved in the bicycle movement. Female leaders and cyclists are eager to learn from peers, share experiences and explore new ideas to connect more women to the joy of bicycling.

That's why we launched Women Bike in 2013 and why we continue to grow the National Women's Bicycling Forum as one of our signature events.

There's nothing more powerful than uniting your efforts with people who share your passion. There's nothing more inspiring than meeting trailblazing leaders who can help you propel progress in your community.

One of the League's core beliefs is that bicycling brings people together. Women Bike believes that bringing women together can be the start of a revolution in your community, as well.

So, as the number of women's bicycling forums and summits grow, we wanted to share the experience and lessons learned from events that have been held across the nation. Our hope is that this report will help guide your efforts to strategically convene and begin to grow the women bike efforts in your community in unique and powerful ways.

And we hope you'll share your success with us, as well, by posting your events and stories on our Facebook page (facebook.com/womenbike) and Twitter feed (twitter.com/womenbike)!

Carolyn Szczepanski

WHY HOST A WOMEN'S FORUM?

There's no simple solution or single remedy to address the gender gap in bicycling. And each community is different in its bike culture and range of engaged stakeholders. That's why a women's bicycling forum can be a flexible, powerful tool.

How do you know if the time is right? You may want a women's forum if...

» FEWER WOMEN ARE RIDING – BUT NOBODY'S TALKING ABOUT IT

When you commute to work or join a club ride, there are far fewer women than men. You see a disparity, but it seems invisible to others. You want to jump-start a discussion about how to address the gender gap in your community.

» FEWER WOMEN ARE RIDING – AND THERE'S DESIRE FOR IT TO CHANGE

Your community has a lower rate of female ridership but both women and men are not only recognizing the gap — but want to do something about it.

» FEMALE RIDERSHIP IS ON THE RISE – BUT THERE'S LITTLE ORGANIZED EFFORT TO CAPTURE THAT MOMENTUM

Maybe your city introduced a bike share program and you're seeing more women in the saddle. Your female friends and family members are actively interested in riding — but they're hesitant. They're looking for a supportive community, but there's no organized efforts to engage women.

» FEMALE RIDERSHIP IS ON THE RISE – AND THE NUMBER OF WOMEN'S CYCLING EFFORTS IS GROWING BY THE DAY!

From bike shops to advocacy organizations; from racing teams to family riding, women-led and women's-specific groups are actively engaged in increasing female ridership in your community. If only there were a way to connect and unify those efforts to enhance the effectiveness and reach of all...

See the appendix for additional links on the reasons and rationale for women's specific events.

WHY FOCUS SPECIFICALLY ON WOMEN?

If you're organizing a women's forum you're bound to get the question: why separate women? “If there's a women's forum, shouldn't there be a Men's Bicycling Forum?” “Aren't we working to make biking better for *everyone*?” The ultimate goal of your efforts is to unite men and women in closing the gender gap, so it's important to address rather than dismiss these common concerns. Here are some ways to frame your event and efforts.

» IT'S A SIMPLE MATTER OF STATISTICS:

Nationally, women took just 24% of U.S. bike trips in 2009, according to the National Household Travel Survey. In Washington, D.C., advocates emphasized at their first forum that just 27% of area riders were women. If there's a shared community or organizational goal to mainstream bicycling, this disparity is a strategic issue that can't be ignored.

» WOMEN ARE CRITICAL AMBASSADORS:

Women control 80% of household spending and are key influencers of their friends and families. Women are teachers and role models for their children and disproportionate caretakers of their elders. Getting more women on wheels is vital to the future and the reach of the bike movement.

» WOMEN HAVE DIFFERENT NEEDS AND PERSPECTIVES:

As we described in our 2013 Women on a Roll report, women have opinions and travel patterns that are distinct from men. While we can't generalize what ALL women think or do, there are research trends and commonly cited barriers that indicate the need for a more robust discussion to address women's views.

» IT'S TIME TO TRY SOMETHING NEW!

If current strategies were truly addressing the needs of “everyone” we'd already see equal leadership and participation from women.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S BICYCLING FORUM



PHOTOS BY BRIAN PALMER

WHY SET A GOAL

There's many reasons to host a Women's Bicycling Forum and many formats to make it happen. To ensure your event is as successful as possible, you have to start by defining your goal.

For the first National Women's Bicycling Forum, our goal was twofold: to build on the burgeoning conversation within advocacy circles and highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of the gender gap to make the case for a coordinated national effort to address it. That goal informed everything that followed, from where it was held to who was invited.

Advocates who have hosted forums in their community have also identified a goal — which can also become the event's tagline — for their events.

» JUTA GEURTSSEN, BOISE BICYCLE PROJECT

To create a safe and supportive environment where women could discuss the barriers and concerns they have in regard to riding more — a place where no question is a silly question.

» NELLE PIERSON, WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

1) Raise awareness on the gender gap within staff, board, membership, supporters, and the press. 2) Generate an idea of bicycling barriers that women generally experience and determine whether or not these issues are more often experienced by women. 3) Determine whether or not WABA should step in and create women's specific programming and, if so, begin brainstorming what that programming would look like.

» JESS MATHEWS, OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT

To empower, educate, and activate more women in Ohio to ride

» LISA CURCIO, WOMEN BIKE CHICAGO

To encourage more women to ride for transportation and recreation

» ANNE PIACENTINO, UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS (SC)

To invite women to socialize, connect and learn with female bicyclists of all levels

IOWA WOMEN BIKE MEET UP

Every year, the Iowa Bicycle Coalition hosts a state summit and expo attended by thousands. In 2013, Women Bike worked with IBC leaders to help organize a women's bicycling session. As we discussed the goals of the event, we zeroed in on the opportunity to get women's input on the four prongs of IBC's mission. Here's the agenda and approach we came up with.

The goal of this meeting is to have a discussion on how make bicycling and bicycle advocacy better for women.

The discussion will be set in three parts. The first will be an informal panel of women to speak about their perspective on bicycling. The second part will be small group discussions to create suggestions on how the Iowa Bicycle Coalition agenda could be more effective for women who bicycle.

Each table will self select three topics they would like to offer suggestions on. The small group will report back to the large group on their suggestions. The small groups will be shuffled and tasked with finding three more fresh suggestions.

TOPICS WILL INCLUDE:

» Build Partnerships: What types of partnerships as relates to getting more women riding in Iowa?

» Educate Iowans: What type of education is needed or resonates most with women in Iowa?

» Establish safe and enjoyable bicycle transportation: What encouragement campaigns or other outreach can get more women riding for transportation, especially given different travel patterns and household responsibilities?

» Establish safe and enjoyable recreation networks: How can current and future rides and recreational initiatives can engage more women?

WHY KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

Setting a goal goes hand-in-hand with identifying your intended audience. After all, before you can determine what kind of speakers to invite or topics to address you have to know who you're talking to — and who you're trying to reach.

For instance, the predominant audience of the National Women's Bicycling Forum includes already-engaged riders from bike advocacy, industry and cycling clubs. When we're planning the program we consider what over-arching topics are common to these diverse audiences — and also what unique trends or lessons learned we can provide for each segment.

Before you move into the program agenda, consider who you hope and expect to attend your event. Here are some of the intended audiences advocates in other communities have identified for their events — starting with the most common.

- » WOMEN WHO DON'T CURRENTLY RIDE – BUT ARE INTERESTED
- » NEW BICYCLISTS
- » LONG-TIME BICYCLISTS
- » RECREATIONAL BICYCLISTS
- » BIKE COMMUTERS
- » ADVOCATES
- » RETAILERS
- » POLICY MAKERS
- » MOUNTAIN BIKERS
- » STAFF / BOARD / MEMBERS
- » RACERS

Once you've identified your target audience consider any needs that audience might have. For instance:

- » If you're expecting or hoping to engage families, will your event provide childcare?
- » If seeking to engage non-riders, will there be adequate parking or transit access?
- » If reaching out to non-English speakers, will you provide translations?



2014 National Women's Bicycling Forum break-out session (Brian Palmer)

THE MILLION DOLLAR QUESTION: HOW TO REACH NEW AND NON-RIDERS?

Finding ways to reach non-bicyclists is a challenge many face in their events and program outreach. Here are two helpful questions to start your brainstorming.

» WHERE DO THE WOMEN WE WANT TO REACH SPEND THEIR TIME?

Consider posting your fliers at day-care and employment centers, yoga studios, doctors offices, churches, coffee shops and other places women in your community frequent. Go beyond the downtown district or neighborhoods where bicycling is already common.

» WHAT ORGANIZATIONS ALREADY CATER TO WOMEN?

It's likely that members of your organizing team are involved in other groups in the community. Consider how you can partner with area health groups, parent and neighborhood associations, women's political clubs, and more.

WHEN TO HOST YOUR EVENT

Once you've set your goal and identified your audience, you'll be able to determine the best timing for your forum or event.

Because the goal of Women Bike is to influence the national conversation and inspire and inform top advocates and industry leaders, hosting our events at the National Bike Summit and the Pro Walk Pro Bike Pro Place conference is a natural fit as it already convenes the group we hope to address.

There might — or might not — be a similar fit in your community. For instance, the Boise Bicycle Project held its women's forum during Pedal 4 the People Month when the city — both riders and non riders — is already focused on bicycling. To capitalize on one of the largest cycling events on the East Coast, Velojoy.com convened

a Girls' Guide to Biking in New York City at the 2013 Bike Expo New York.

In Chicago, organizers learned a quick lesson about the season of their event — with an outdoor demonstration area they found that moving their event from late winter to spring would be more comfortable for participants and volunteers alike!

It's also helpful to reflect on the time of day and day of the week. Consider the work and household responsibilities of the women you're hoping to engage. If your event starts at 6 p.m. on a weekday evening will it be difficult for women who work — or women with families — to attend? If its held on a weekend would that make it accessible to a larger population?

A FORUM WITHIN A SUMMIT

GEORGIALINA BIKE SUMMIT:

Thanks to the leadership of female advocates and retailers in Georgia and South Carolina, recent bi-state summits have included women's forums. As League Equity Initiative cofounder, Hamzat Sani, wrote of the 2012 discussions:

"Moderated by Rebecca Serna, executive director of the Atlanta Bicycle Coalition, the forum included women's insight and advice, not just about getting more women on bikes but how influential women have been in advocacy efforts. Robin Bylenga highlighted how cycling and style have some together, while Mathilde Pilard gave pointers on how to engage with women on social media. Zahra Alabanza from Red, Bike and Green-Atlanta spoke on utilizing cycling as a community building tool with women acting as the leadership, while Rebecca gave great pointers on how women can be effective advocates for bicycling policy on the local political level. The topics were awesome — and the conversation spilled out of the session."

COLORADO BIKE SUMMIT:

With a wealth of initiatives and leadership increasing women's cycling in the Centennial State, the 2014 Colorado Bike Summit included a session on *Getting More Women Riding*. Dorothy Nichols, a Women Bike Advisory Board member and national sales manager for shebeest apparel, was a lead presenter and the session was structured as an interactive workshop.

INFORMATION (20 MINS): Presentation of the findings of the League's "Women on a Roll" report

INSPIRATION (3 MINS): Video of girls mountain biking

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION (20 MINS): Participants break into eight groups — each with a team leader identified ahead of time. Each group brainstorms answers to three questions:

- » How do we get more women to cycle in Colorado?
- » How do we put the "fun" in women cycling without having a jungle gym of barriers?
- » How can we engage & elevate women in the cycling industry?

WRAP UP (10 MINS): See the appendix for ideas generated!

WHEN TO START PLANNING

While there's no specific formula for planning a great forum, a survey of advocates found that at least eight weeks of preparation — if not significantly more — was needed to organize their event.

For the National Women's Bicycling Forum each March, planning begins in September or October, with conversations about key themes and top speakers with League leaders and the Women Bike Advisory Board.

Organizers of past day-long events, like the Day of Dialogue and Demonstration hosted by Women Bike Chicago and the statewide Ohio Women's Bicycling Summit, had similar timelines, beginning their planning six and eight months in advance, respectively. For shorter events, like WABA's three-hour Women's Forum and Boise's Women on Wheels, preparation started two or three months in advance.

While it's certainly possible for one passionate organizer to plan and execute a Forum, it's both helpful and advisable to have a small group of engaged volunteers or staff members to not only provide logistical support but also share their perspectives and insight on the content of the event. When you're recruiting your steering committee it can be helpful to consider:

» **PASSION:** Are your steering committee members energized and committed to closing the gender gap in bicycling in your community? Is this a topic that ignites their passion?

» **SKILLS:** Do members of your steering committee have experience in important areas like fund-raising, marketing, and outreach that will be important in making your event a success?

» **DIVERSITY:** Do the members of your steering committee represent the diversity of your community and the range of stakeholders you hope to engage?

2012 NATIONAL WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT STEERING COMMITTEE

When Women Bike hosted its first event at the 2012 Pro Walk Pro Bike Pro Place conference in Long Beach, Calif., we wanted to ensure a range of interests and stakeholders were engaged in the planning of the event, and worked with the below list as the event steering committee.

Members:

- » Pasqualina Azzarello, Youth Bike (national)
- » Melissa Balmer, Women on Bikes SoCal (CA)
- » Robin Bylenga, Pedal Chic (bike shop) (GA)
- » Veronica Davis, Black Women Bike (DC)
- » April Economides, Green Octopus Consulting (CA)
- » Kristin Gavin, Gearing Up (PA)
- » Helen Ho, Recycle-a-Bicycle (NYC)
- » Karen Hopper, National Council of La Raza (national)
- » Alexis Lantz, Los Angeles County Dept of Health (CA)
- » Kate Powlison, People for Bikes (national)
- » Fionnuala Quinn, Alta Planning + Design (VA)
- » Caroline Samponaro, Transportation Alternatives (NYC)
- » Sarai Snyder, Girl Bike Love / CycloFemme (national)
- » Claire Stoscheck, Cycles for Change (MN)
- » Marin Tockman, Bike Easy (LA)
- » Dorothy Wong, The Team (CA)

Timeline and commitment:

The committee was established in May 2012 and held monthly or biweekly call from June through September. Between calls, members reviewed planning documents, including drafts of the agenda and panel topics — and in some cases, volunteers to moderate or help organize sessions that aligned with their interest or expertise.



From R: Steering committee members Samponaro, Gavin, and Stoscheck with Allison Mannos of Multicultural Communities for Mobility and members of the Ovarian Psycos

HOW TO ORGANIZE A GREAT FORUM

Since each forum or summit is different, every planning process is unique. To get some input on common trends and lessons learned, we asked five different women's forum organizers to share some insight into their process.

» JUTA GEURTSSEN, BOISE BICYCLE PROJECT

Myself (Development Director), our Board Chair and another female Board member led the efforts and our Events Committee (all women) worked on the logistics. We designed what we wanted the event to look like and met four times. We brought on a food and beverage sponsor to handle that part of the event. Our Board Chair was in charge of getting the panelists together and moderating the forum. I handled logo design, invitations, and RSVPs. We brought on a local outdoor consignment shop to handle the fashion show aspect of the event. We all got together as a group to screen print the goody bags, make spoke cards and stuff bags with local cycling information we had gotten from different organizations. We started six weeks out and, after the event, learned that it would have been helpful to start earlier and targeted our invites more specifically.

» NELLE PIERSON, WASHINGTON AREA BICYCLIST ASSOCIATION

In the run-up to its Forum, WABA employed a summer intern, Jesse Cohn, focused on women's outreach. Her duties over several months included: Setting up informational interviews with the eight panelists; reserving the library meeting room; communicating logistics with the panelists; creating a communications plan; creating a participant survey; and laying out the forum format and questions. Additionally, two WABA staff members, Pierson and Dan Hoagland, provided oversight, brainstorming, organizational background, community connections, coordinating press and promotion and miscellaneous organizing, like recruiting a sound professional. Jesse, Dan and Nelle met weekly to check-in, while Jesse worked on average 5-7 hours per week.

» LISA CURCIO, WOMEN BIKE CHICAGO

We were and are very grassroots with no formal organization in place (yet). Some of the original group knew one another or knew of one another. Some connected for the first time as a result of the group. That core gathered in a few others. Responsibilities were distributed, but from time to time, back-up had to be called in to complete the work. We originally met once per month, but as the event grew near we started meeting every two

10 THINGS EVERY ORGANIZER SHOULD DO

- » Convene a steering committee or organizing team
- » Identify a specific goal or tagline to frame your event
i.e. to empower, educate and active more women to ride in Ohio
- » Assess funding needs and potential revenue
i.e. \$5,000 for program materials + venue; fee of \$20 per participant + \$3,000 in private sponsorship
- » Create a timeline or calendar that sets major milestones
i.e. secure private funding by Feb 1, open registration March 1
- » Assign deadlines to complete the major tasks
i.e. if registration opens on March 1, logo design complete by Feb 20
- » Based on the interests, expertise and community connections of organizing members, assign responsibilities for major tasks
i.e. marketing expert responsible for creation of fliers
- » Create a marketing and outreach plan, including social media
i.e. set up a Facebook event, create a promo kit with sample blogs and Tweets other can use to spread the word
- » Identify needs for the day of the event and recruit volunteers
i.e. 5 people for set-up, 3 for sign-in table, 2 for social media during the event
- » HAVE FUN at the event!
Spoiler alert: It won't be perfect, but enjoy the ride -- with a smile!
- » Solicit feedback and say thank you
Publicly thank your sponsors and attendees and make sure you get their feedback in an event survey

Read more event planning tips in the League's NATIONAL BIKE MONTH GUIDE: www.bikeleague.org/bikemonth

weeks or every week. Since we are "ruled by committee" it was sometimes difficult to get things accomplished without having meetings. One thing we have changed is making better use of time at meetings. Going forward, we need a formal organization and we need to expand the group of worker bees. While we began planning in late fall 2012 for a March 2013 event, the majority of work didn't start until the beginning of the year.

» ANNE PIACENTINO, UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS (SC)

Recognizing that there is a lot of overlap in the cycling community and our reach would be greater by working together, two advocacy groups from two separate cities got together to plan a regional event. Separately, we gathered groups and contacts who wanted to be involved. We separated duties to our various areas so that we could divide and conquer! We started four months

out and that was enough — but, one lesson learned was that we needed more volunteers involved in the planning in order to delegate the work to a larger group. For our first event, a lot of the logistics and initial promotion was left to just two people.

» JESS MATHEWS, OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT

I had two co-organizers working with me. We met at least once a month for the first Summit, and created deadlines. We created a solid foundation with a mission statement, design logos, and broad topics for discussion, so we could reach a wide range of women riders. We did this on purpose with the intent that the evaluation process would allow participants to highlight what they'd like to hear and learn about for the 2014 Summit. We started eight months out and that was enough time.

HOW TO FUND YOUR EVENT

Depending on the size and scale of your women's forum, you may need or want to raise funds to cover the costs or kickstart a new initiative or group in your community.

With enough passionate volunteers and a free venue space, it's certainly possible to host a women's forum at no cost. By using public library space and skipping the snacks, WABA was able to pull together its Women's Forum without incurring any fees for attendees or the organization. Women Bike Chicago did the same.

In some situations, though, you may need to raise money to print fliers or secure a comfortable space for your event. If you have businesses or corporate partners who are interested in getting involved, this is a great opportunity to solicit modest financial or in-kind sponsorship. Charging a small fee for participants — \$15 or \$20 — can also help create buy-in from registrants and give you a more accurate count of who will actually show up! Women Bike Chicago learned that, while they technically sold out their free event, a high percentage of women didn't attend. If your event is free, account for at least 20% no-show rate.

If you do charge attendees, consider a sliding scale or scholarships for folks with financial need. Provide a discount for those who register in advance, so you can incentivize early RSVPs.



Here's some insight from organizers on how they funded their forums.

» JUTA GEURTSSEN, BOISE BICYCLE PROJECT WOMEN ON WHEELS

We went to existing relationships we already had and sold them on the idea. They got their logo on the invitation, spoke card, materials in the goody bag and were included in any press.

» ANNE PIACENTINO, UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS FORUM

The Spartanburg Cycling club was offering a grant proposal at the time so we included the event as a part of a funding request to connect to underserved members of the cycling community. They were extremely receptive and supportive. We presented the information, and the request for funding was approved.

» JESS MATHEWS, OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT

For sponsorship, person-to-person contact was most effective for me. When I speak about the importance of women being seen on bikes, the funders see it and feel it. The funders also grasp that we are doing something ground-breaking not only for Columbus but for the state of Ohio. Businesses are finally beginning to understand the value of being a 'bike-friendly' business and how that positively affects their bottom line. The businesses we approached were very excited.

HOW TO PROMOTE YOUR FORUM

Whether there's already a lot of buzz about women and cycling or you're just getting the conversation started, you'll need to prioritize promotion for your event to be a success.

In some cases, you may want to find — or already have within your organizing committee — a graphic designer to create a logo and/or collateral for your event. Remember: The creative process is not quick and logos are among the most difficult to produce, so plan accordingly. If you do consult with a designer be sure to include all channels through which you'll be promoting the event. For instance, do you need a Timeline Cover image for your Facebook event posting? A banner for your organization's website? A postcard to hand out at related events?

When it comes to promotion, the opportunities to connect with potential audience grows almost daily. Here are some of the ways past women's forum organizers have spread the word about their event.

- » **STORIES IN THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA:** newspapers, radio, etc
- » **PRINTED MATERIALS:** posters and postcards distributed to relevant locations and/or events
- » **BLOG POSTS** by organizing group(s) and other popular / related sites
- » **E-NEWS** from your organization and/or partners
- » **LISTSERVS** that reach your intended audiences
- » **FACEBOOK:** event, shareable memes, latest news and more
- » **TWITTER:** event hashtag, Tweets from speakers, latest news
- » **INSTAGRAM / PINTEREST:** promo photos, past event pics
- » **WORD OF MOUTH!**

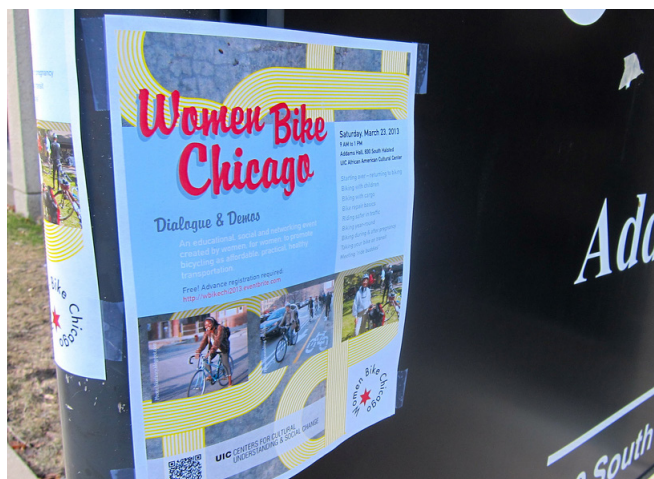
You'll quickly discover that, based on the interests and activity patterns of your organizing committee, intended audience and community landscape, certain promotional avenues will prove more significant than others.

For instance, in Washington D.C., WABA found that mainstream media coverage and blog posts drove attendance for their forum, while printed materials, like posters, were important for organizers in Ohio. While Boise got a great response from Facebook and e-news, a uniquely active listserv called the Chainlink spurred registrations in Chicago.

PROMOTING YOUR MESSAGE DURING THE EVENT

Getting the word out doesn't end when your forum begins. Inevitably, there will be interested participants who aren't able to attend but want to be engaged — and people in the audience who want to be involved in the conversation.

- » **CREATE AN EVENT HASHTAG:** For Twitter and Instagram And post it prominently on all your promotional materials before and during the event.
- » **DESIGNATE SOCIAL MEDIA LEADERS:** If possible, tap several organizers or volunteers to live Tweet and post photos on Instagram to build the buzz beyond the walls of your event.
- » **FIND A PHOTOGRAPHER:** Great photos will help you share the energy and enthusiasm at your forum and be a huge asset in promoting your NEXT event!
- » **CAPTURE VIDEO & AUDIO:** If funding or volunteer skills allow, consider recording your panel or top presentations.



WHAT TO INCLUDE IN YOUR FORUM

For the first National Women's Bicycling Forum, we kept it (relatively!) simple — kicking off the event with a keynote presentation from a cycling author and moving into a panel discussion with a diverse group of female leaders. But, in subsequent years, that structure has evolved: We've expanded to a full day of programming, added a pop-up shop with female cycling entrepreneurs, and, in 2013, included a pre-event social bike ride and happy hour.

In other communities, women's forums have taken different forms. Here are a few examples.

» WABA WOMEN'S BICYCLING FORUM

Held on December 12, 2011, from 6 to 8 p.m., the event included a moderated panel of nine women from diverse bicycling and non-cycling backgrounds and audience Q&A.

» WOMEN BIKE CHICAGO: DAY OF DIALOGUE AND DEMONSTRATIONS

Held on March 23, 2013, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., the event included break-out sessions and an outdoor fix-a-flat and bike demo area.

» OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT

Held on May 10, 2013, from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m., the event included opening remarks from the First Lady of Ohio, multiple presentations and a ride to a local cafe for a post-event happy hour.

» BOISE BICYCLE PROJECT "WOMEN ON WHEELS CYCLING FORUM"

Held on June 13, 2013, at 6 p.m., the event included a panel discussion, an outdoor demonstration, a no-drop group ride to a fashion show organized by Outdoor Exchange and was followed by a wine and cheese tasting provided by Whole Foods.

» UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS FORUM

Held on November 13, 2013, from 6:30 to 8 p.m., the event including three speakers and time for women to meet and socialize over snacks and beverages.



1) Women Bike Chicago created a map for attendees to find bike commute buddies and 2) provided the opportunity to test out different types of bikes. 3) The Boise bicycle Project included a fashion show and 4) group ride during its Forum activities. 5) The National Women's Bicycling Forum includes a pop-up shop for female entrepreneurs to sell their bike products.



WHAT TOPICS TO COVER

Women are not a homogenous demographic — and closing the gender gap is a complex issue. When determining the content of your forum, consider again the goal of the event and the interests and needs of your intended audience.

Often a women's forum will be the start of a larger conversation, and it will be challenging to determine where to begin. Here are some of the topics and sessions from past women's forums.

LEAGUE WOMEN BIKE FORUMS

Keynotes:

- » Leah Missbach Day, cofounder, World Bicycle Relief
- » **[In conversation]** Georgena Terry, industry pioneer
- » Congresswomen Tammy Duckworth (D-IL)
- » New York City Transportation Commissioner Janette Sadik-Khan
- » **[TED-Style]** Short presentations from diverse female leaders in industry, government, advocacy, marketing
- » Terry O'Neill, Pres, National Organization for Women
- » **[In conversation]** Kristy Scrymgeour, cofounder Velocio apparel, owner Specialized/lululemon racing

Break-out sessions:

- » Beyond Spandex, Toward Social Justice
- » Family Biking and Low-Car Living
- » Women in Bicycle Sports
- » Women and the Political Process
- » Young Women Who Ride
- » Media & Marketing: Who's Selling Cycling to Women?
- » Insight from the Industry:
- » Community-Based Bicycle Advocacy
- » **[TED-Style]** Sparking Change: Big Ideas and Bold Steps to Better Bicycling
- » Rides and Races that Engage more Women
- » The Bike Shop Barrier: Making Retail more Welcoming to Women
- » Winning in Women Bike Advocacy
- » Power of Storytelling to Engage Women in Cycling
- » **[Pecha Kucha]** Bike Ed: Coloring Outside the Lines
- » **[Pecha Kucha]** Cultivating the All-Powerful Bike Lobby
- » Gearing Up, Climbing to the Top (Leadership)
- » Streetfilms U



In conversation: Frame builders (L) Natalie Ramsland and (R) Georgena Terry



TED-style talk: Nicole Freedman, Director of Bicycle Programs, City of Boston

THINK BEYOND THE PANEL PRESENTATION

Women Bike has experimented with different types of presentations — to great response. Here are 3 ways we've covered our topic areas:

» **TED-STYLE TALKS:** In recent years, TED talks have become popular means of sharing innovative ideas and personal stories, going viral on the internet and providing an engaging conference format. Learn more at TED.com.

» **"IN CONVERSATION" INTERVIEWS:** The 2013 National Women's Bicycling Forum opened with a lively conversation between two female bike frame builders of different generations. Like a talk show, this "in conversation" format allowed for an organic discussion between two passionate experts.

» **PECHA KUCHA:** Pecha Kuchas are rapid-fire presentations told through a series of 20 slides viewed for 20 seconds. Several Pecha Kuchas on a similar topic can be brought together for an engaging session. Learn more at pechakucha.org.

LOCAL WOMEN'S FORUMS

- » Commuting by bike
- » How to dress comfortably
- » How to ride with children
- » What to do when visiting a bike shop
- » Getting back on a bike after a crash
- » Biking again after a long time not riding
- » Outdoor demo area: Basic bike check, how to fix a flat
- » Dispelling myths and barriers
- » Biking is sexy (body image, clothing, who's doing it)
- » Bicycling as transportation (more than a sport)
- » Economic benefits of bicycling
- » Community engagement
- » Bike safety
- » Bike fit
- » Rules of the road
- » Role of women in advocacy
- » Why we want more women riding
- » Volunteering with bicycling organizations
- » Bike shops as means to reach and inspire women
- » Barriers to bicycling

SPEAKERS

So who's leading these conversations? The most common types of speakers invited to present at local women's forums included the following, starting with the most common.



2012 National Women's Bicycling Forum: Andrea Garland, Alta Planning + Design

PANEL PITFALLS: 5 COMMON MISTAKES

Whether your event is a single panel or a number of break-out sessions, the traditional set-up of multiple speakers sharing their expertise can be a lively, targeted discussion — or a meandering conversation. Here are some common mistakes to avoid and keep your panel on track.

» **TOO MANY PANELISTS:** While you rightly want to engage a variety of perspectives, keep your list of speakers short(er than you think!). If it's helpful, do the math: Say you have 60 minutes for panel discussions and 7 speakers. That's less than 10 minutes for each to share. Is that enough time? Or would it be of greater benefit to invite 3 great presenters who will have 20 minutes to impart their insight?

» **NOT MEETING IN ADVANCE:** Don't wait until the day of the event for your panelists to meet. Convene a coffee or conference call so all the speakers are familiar with the unique perspective and interest of their co-panelists.

» **MODERATING ON THE FLY:** If you want your panel to stay on track, you have to map the path to your destination. What information or action do you want this panel to inspire? In collaboration with your speakers, come up with the most important questions to frame the discussion. Be open to organic developments during the discussion, but don't veer off course!

» **OVERESTIMATING YOUR TIME:** Even the most expert facilitator and prepared panelists tend to run out of time. Make sure you have a time-keeper who can tip off the moderator to make any changes to the flow of questions to ensure the most important topics are addressed.

» **FORGETTING THE FUN:** While you want to inform your audience, you also want to engage and inspire them. You want them to leave with valuable insight AND a great experience. Sometime the best presenters aren't necessarily the top experts but really great public speakers who know how to captivate a crowd. Don't get so hung up on titles that you miss out on a uniquely memorable speaker.

WHERE TO HOLD YOUR FORUM

For the 2012 National Women's Bicycling Summit — the first multi-session Women Bike event — we partnered with the Pro Walk Pro Bike Pro Place conference, which generously donated several rooms within their already reserved convention center space. Because free, comfortable and adequate space is hard to find, this can be a significant benefit of working with a larger event.

Of course, that's often not possible or advisable for local women's forums, and organizers have tapped into a variety of different spaces that have fit their financial and logistical needs.

» UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS FORUM [5]

We worked with a local hospital and used their community room. Pros: The couches and fireplace set a friendly casual atmosphere — much better than the typical auditorium seating. It had ample parking and was centrally located between our two counties. Cons: We didn't have a lot of time to set up because the space functions as the lobby area during business hours.

» BOISE BICYCLE PROJECT "WOMEN ON WHEELS CYCLING FORUM" [4]

We used our bike shop and Whole Foods. Pros: By hosting it in our shop we got people into the space which is one of the resources we were offering. Cons: Multiple locations to manage.

» WABA WOMEN'S FORUM [1]

We used a local, public library meeting room. Pros: Free, easy reservation system, little to no coordination with venue, accommodations for a number of people. Cons: Not aesthetically pleasing, limited by closing at 9 p.m.

» OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT [3]

We used a local park shelter house. Pros: Free parking, plenty of space and central.

» WOMEN BIKE CHICAGO: DAY OF DIALOGUE AND DEMONSTRATIONS [2]

We used the space of a local college / school. Pros: It was free, and the space was protected from traffic so we were able to have a good space for the "bike corral." The University was supportive. It was easily accessed by public transportation. Cons: The inside space was small, and we were limited in the number of people we could have inside. The location on the campus was difficult to find from the street, and too much signage was needed to direct people from every possible entrance.



WHERE DOES THE FORUM LEAD?

A women's bicycling forum is often the first step toward a larger or more coordinated effort to get more women riding in the community. For the League, successful forums led to the formation of the Women Bike program. For WABA, it highlighted the need for a dedicated women's outreach initiative.

To better understand your next steps, make sure to create a feedback survey for the participants of your event, so you can improve your next event or follow-up with effective action steps to keep the momentum going.

Below are some of the impacts and next steps for local forum organizers.

» UPSTATE WOMEN ON WHEELS FORUM

We hear so often that women want to start riding but have no one to ride with. I felt it was inspiring for women to come into a room and find many other women who loved to do the same thing. The impact was immediate in that it connected and reconnected women who cycle and motivated them to be more active in speaking out for women in bicycling.

» OHIO WOMEN'S BICYCLING SUMMIT

New partnerships were formed. The Ohio Women's Bicycling Summit was a success to where it has now become an annual event. Again, the vision of OWBS is to create a statewide ground swell of support and have it balloon into the Midwest Women's Bicycling Summit. Women are showing up to more public meetings regarding their neighborhoods and how their neighborhoods and streets should be designed. Cities and their decision-makers are, for the first time, understanding that they will not truly be bike-friendly cities unless women and children are seen riding.

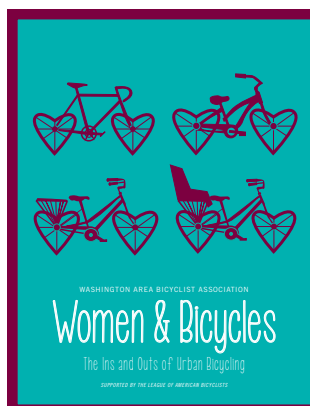
» WABA WOMEN'S FORUM

The panelist/audience conclusion: Women experience bicycling differently, generally experience more barriers than men and we should do something about it. The take-away: We believe there's a lot of room in the bike movement to begin addressing these issues — and we'll need your help to begin. The result was lots of good press; staff, board and membership buzz; buy-in for a dedicated women's program (Women & Bicycles) and an example for other similar initiatives.

VENUE CHECKLIST

When choosing the space for your women's forum here are a few helpful questions to consider.

- » IS THERE A ROOM FOR CHILDCARE?
- » IS THE VENUE ACCESSIBLE FOR FOLKS WITH DISABILITIES?
- » IS THERE A SPACE FOR WOMEN WHO ARE BREAST FEEDING?
- » IS THERE AN OUTDOOR AREA FOR DEMONSTRATIONS?
- » DOES THE VENUE HAVE EASY ACCESS TO TRANSIT?
- » IS THERE ROOM FOR BIKE PARKING, VALET OR OTHERWISE?
- » IF IT'S A LARGER SPACE, WILL AUDIO EQUIPMENT, LIKE MICROPHONES, BE PROVIDED?
- » HOW MANY MICROPHONES WILL YOU NEED, INCLUDING FOR AUDIENCE Q&A
- » IF YOUR SPEAKERS ARE PRESENTING, WILL THE VENUE PROVIDE A PROJECTOR AND/OR SCREEN?
- » HAVE YOU CREATED ADEQUATE SIGNAGE TO DIRECT ATTENDEES TO REGISTRATION?
- » IS THERE WI-FI ACCESS? IF SO, WHAT'S THE PASSWORD? IF NOT, MAKE THAT CLEAR IN ADVANCE TO ATTENDEES
- » DOES THE VENUE ALLOW OUTSIDE FOOD AND DRINK?
- » IS THERE A SPACE FOR FOLKS TO NETWORK AND TALK?



TOP TIPS

What have organizers learned from their women's forums? When asked to share their top three tips, they highlighted the following.

- » Start smaller and see what works, you can always assess the need and grow it in the future.
- » Don't expect to target all women cyclists in one event.
- » Start the conversation and let the need determine future events.
- » Don't underestimate the importance of marketing and word of mouth promotion.
- » Timing is critical — keep things on track.
- » Make it social and fun.
- » Recruit effective panelists, prepare them and jazz them up.
- » Pack the room and invite as much press as possible
- » Have a follow-up/next step/action item for everyone in the room.
- » Use good data in your marketing and communications that back up the need for the conversation/event.
- » Don't waste your time and energy on frivolous things (food/T-shirts/swag, etc), unless you have the extra time and energy.
- » Recruit interns.
- » Keep good track of your materials, and collect as much data from your participants as possible (contact, perspective, ideas, demographics, bike demographics).
- » Take lots of pictures.
- » Give useful education materials for participants to read beforehand, or take home after the event.
- » Have your next event already planned.
- » Bring in other social/women's organizations to be panelists and use this to initiate a local coalition.
- » Have enough volunteers.
- » For your first organized event, make it small enough to where you can control it.
- » Have one or two people with the overall responsibility for planning and who will follow up with individuals with specific tasks.

CONTINUING THE MOMENTUM

You want your participants to leave your event feeling energized and inspired to action. Make sure you have a means to incorporate their ideas but also provide a pathway for continued involvement.

» ASK FOR FEEDBACK

If possible, create your feedback survey before the event and share it with participants while they're still at the forum. Follow-up with the link as soon as possible! See the appendix for survey examples.

» THANK YOUR SUPPORTERS AND SPEAKERS

In addition to publicly thanking your sponsors and presenters before and during the event, follow-up with a handwritten note or card highlighting their hand in the success of the event — and your hope for their continued support!

» PROVIDE RESOURCES

Create handouts or share information with participants so they can access resources and community after the forum. See the hand-out from Boise Bicycle Project in the appendix as an example.

» KEEP THE CONVERSATION GOING

You may need time to reflect on the themes presented and assess participant feedback before you chart your next steps. But, even if it's just a Twitter hashtag or a monthly coffee gathering, provide a means for folks to stay connected. See the WABA Women & Bicycles toolkit in the appendix for a wealth of great, low- or no-cost ideas.

APPENDIX / RESOURCES

Resources listed in the order they appear

Page 4:

» **REASONS AND STATISTICS TO FRAME YOUR FORUM**

Women on a Roll report: <http://bit.ly/ijdaNP2>

Why we need a separate women's forum: <http://bit.ly/ii5UdTo>

Page 8:

» **COLORADO BIKE SUMMIT WOMEN'S BRAINSTORM**

Ideas to get more women riding: <http://bit.ly/1kIia45>

Page 12:

» **PROMOTION EXAMPLES**

Ohio Women's Bicycling Forum Facebook page: facebook.com/OhioWomensBicyclingSummit

Twitter highlights from 2014 National Women's Bicycling Forum: <http://bit.ly/1mjAWyr>

Photos from Women Bike events: www.flickr.com/photos/bikeleague/sets

Page 14:

» **SESSION TOPICS**

Descriptions and links to past Women Bike sessions: bikeleague.org/forum

Page 17

» **FEEDBACK SURVEYS**

2013 National Women's Bicycling Forum feedback survey: <http://svy.mk/1gPMHeO>

Page 18

» **RESOURCES AND NEXT STEPS**

Boise Bicycle Project WOW Resources handout: <http://bit.ly/1md2c43>

WABA Women and Bicycles Toolkit: <http://bit.ly/1iIX5w3>

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