



Open Streets Frequently Asked Questions

The below FAQ should be used with the [Open Streets Guide](#) and the [resources section](#) on the Open Streets Project Website.

How do we start?

Open streets initiatives are a chance to engage new groups and neighborhoods about walking, biking and health. The first step to a successful open streets initiative is getting the support of residents and businesses along the potential route. Attend meetings held by community groups, neighborhood associations, business improvement districts, chambers of commerce and other groups that represent members of the community. Ask for their ideas on how they would like open streets to look and feel. Form host committees in neighborhoods along the route to get community input and buy-in so that community members are involved in every step of the planning process.

How do we get the city on board?

Getting support from elected leaders and agency officials is key to the sustainability of the initiative. Form a coalition of organizations and community members that support open streets. Be sure the coalition represents the diversity of your city before approaching officials. When selling the initiative, talk about how open streets are more than biking and walking events; they are community gatherings that promote city businesses and encourage healthy lifestyles among residents.

Should we partner with existing street closure events?

Partnering with existing events – like ethnic festivals or block parties – is a great way to help get your initiative off the ground, especially if you are having trouble convincing your city to support open streets. Some cities choose to host open streets initiatives directly before or after a festival or block party to take advantage of the gathering crowd and closed-off streets. However, when partnering with existing events, be sure to include your own branding and informational materials so that participants understand what open streets are. Once you feel your initiative is a known entity in your community, it may be beneficial (and easier) to organize your initiative as a stand-alone event.

Where can we find partners to promote open streets?

Don't limit your partners to city agencies. Along with community-based organizations, think about state and regional groups and businesses that are involved in health, transportation or recreation. Also consider businesses that are already active in your city's civic life. Consider approaching your local chamber of commerce or likeminded nonprofit associations concerned with issues of sustainability, transportation, social justice, and public health. Partners can bring



Open Streets Project

Opening Streets to People, Sharing Resources, Transforming Communities

new and exciting dynamics to an initiative based on their area of expertise, so think broadly!

How do we keep costs low?

With the many levels of permitting and bureaucracy that comes with planning an open streets initiative, many cities have turned to professional event planners to streamline the logistics. Getting in-kind sponsorship from local media outlets can give you increased publicity for your initiative at a fraction of the cost. Using the same route multiple times can also reduce some of the training and logistics associated with using a new set of streets. The biggest costs for most initiatives are police, traffic control and barricades. Work with your city to see how and where these costs can be minimized, including using volunteers instead of paid city staff for certain positions along the route.

How do we plan our open streets route?

When planning your route, think about connecting parks and businesses to neighborhoods. Parks are already centers of activity in neighborhoods. Additionally, they can serve as a place to hold a supporting activity like a dance or yoga classes, or simply a space for participants to take a break during the initiative. Businesses along the route can turn into some of your biggest proponents once they see thousands of potential customers passing in front of their store. Consider neighborhoods that are most prone to health risks related to lack of physical activity, as there may be a stronger interest from non-profits and foundations working on health issues in these neighborhoods. Think about local politics as well: a route that includes multiple wards or districts allows more politicians to appear at your initiative and champion open streets.

Any route will offer trade-offs. Busy streets may get more initial pushback from traffic engineers or local residents and businesses, but such routes may also draw more participants and create more businesses supporters in the long run. Neighborhood streets offer fewer political problems but won't draw as many participants. Keep in mind that if your route has supporting activities, you will need to ensure that you maintain a safe place to bike and walk along the route when positioning your activity areas.

How should we promote our initiative?

Approach local TV, radio, print and digital media outlets to become in-kind sponsors of the initiative. In exchange for recognition at the initiative, they will promote your open streets. Working with a wide spectrum of partners will engage a diverse cross-section of the city, as each partner spreads the word to their staff, customers, members, and constituents.

When creating the messaging for your initiative, don't just talk about biking and walking. Market the initiative as people reclaiming their streets and the opportunity to view the city from a different perspective. Talk about supporting local



Open Streets Project

Opening Streets to People, Sharing Resources, Transforming Communities

businesses, connecting neighborhoods and creating a social space for the community. Remember that your message may change depending on the audience.

How can we make open streets events happen more often?

Once you have held a few initiatives and worked out some of the kinks, you may feel ready to hold your initiative more frequently. Gathering data on your initiative is a key to demonstrating the need for expansion. Statistics showing a boon for businesses, the number of people who participate and/or increased physical activity will show stakeholders that open streets are more than just a feel good event.

Just as you should recruit the support of residents and businesses when starting your initiative, continue to tap into your current support base as you try and expand. Utilize community meetings, online forums and other forms of communication to promote expansion and respond to what community members think.

What should I look at when evaluating my initiative?

You should always be evaluating your initiative to determine how you can improve. Talking with participants is a good first step, but having a set of questions or a survey is even better. Include basic questions about the initiative – why participants came to an event and how they heard about it, as well as questions on how the initiative affects their feelings about the city or neighborhood. Gathering demographic information is also important when looking at which groups are under- or over-represented at the initiative. Ask a variety of stakeholders how they feel about the initiative, including business owners, sponsors, partners and city officials. View a [sample survey from St. Louis](#).

What should I be doing between events to keep my initiative relevant?

It's important to stay visible in the time between events. Many initiatives use social media to update supporters on the planning progress of the next event and help them plug in as volunteers. Hosting walks and/or rides of potential routes lets people explore the route and interact with organizers and other supporters. You should also use this time to evaluate your initiative, analyze data you've collected and look for trends. Share this information with local media and blogs to keep your initiative in the news.

This FAQ represents just a small portion of the wealth of information that has been collected on open streets. Find information about cities of all sizes from across North America at www.openstreetsproject.org and download the [Open Streets Guide](#) for more information.