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Making Streets Safer For Our Children: 4 Ways To Get Your Traffic Safety Project Going

by Scott Kelly

Whether our children are riding their bikes to school or just playing outside, they face serious danger from speeding traffic. In many U.S. cities, being hit by cars is the number one cause of death among kids 5-14 years old. Of those that survive, many more are seriously injured. To reduce these tragic accidents, the federal government has set up a variety of grant programs to help slow speeding traffic. Many cities have also adopted specific programs designed to calm traffic and increase overall pedestrian safety. Unfortunately, economic realities have resulted in severe cuts to many of these programs. Asking your city to take action and install a speed bump, erect a radar speed sign or even get police to monitor trouble spots can be a real challenge. There is hope, however. Neighborhood groups and organizations across the country continue to organize successful efforts to slow speeding cars and improve the safety of their streets. Here are a few tips on how you can get your own neighborhood safety program off the ground.

- **Join a civic group or form your own.**
Groups and organizations have a much higher success rate than individuals do at gaining approval for traffic calming projects. Many federally funded traffic improvement grants are open only to established groups. Consider combining your efforts with existing groups that have similar goals such as a local bicycle club or school safety board.
- **Investigate local programs.**
Most cities have comprehensive programs in place for evaluating and prioritizing requests for traffic-calming measures. While program cutbacks might make it harder to get approval for your project, going through the process provides valuable insights into the "system." Even if your project is rejected, any ranking or evaluation you receive could come in handy when applying for other programs.

- **Learn about effective solutions.**
It used to be that cities relied solely on speed bumps, crosswalks and other old-tech methods for slowing traffic. Recently however, new solutions have emerged. Photo speed cameras for instance, now provide 24-7 monitoring. Radar speed signs can be programmed to change speed limits during various times of the day or collect traffic data. Also, research has yielded some surprising results that put in to question the effectiveness of many traditional solutions. Some up-front research will ensure you campaign for a solution best suited for your situation. A quick review of various traffic calming solutions and related research can be found at www.stopspeeders.org. This site also provides examples of traffic-calming programs throughout the U.S. and helpful hints on grant writing.
- **Apply for a grant.**
There are three types of grants generally available for traffic safety programs: federal grants, state grants and private grants. Thanks to the Internet, finding potential grants is as easy as Googling key words such as "pedestrian safety" or "traffic calming." A good place to start is www.cfda.gov, a database of all federal programs available to state and local governments.

About the author: For more than 6 years, Scott Kelly, founder of Stopspeeders.org has been educating and empowering neighborhood groups and other organizations looking to improve pedestrian safety. Stopspeeders.org is sponsored by IDC, a Portland, Oregon-based manufacturer of traffic-calming solutions.