

The [Urban Libraries Council \(ULC\)](#) and the Safe Routes Partnership are proposing the **Safe Routes to Libraries** as a National Leadership Implementation Grant. The 24-month initiative includes a budget request of \$249,535 from IMLS and will address IMLS Goal 2, Objective 2.3.

The **Safe Routes to Libraries** initiative will:

- Leverage existing national models for schools and parks to create a Safe Routes to Libraries pilot framework. The model will increase partnerships and programs with schools and parks, and advance OST programs for children and youth in areas with barriers in access to libraries.
- Pilot the model in five diverse communities representing varied communities, including: 1) a dense, urban area with historical physical barriers to youth reaching library branches in OST; 2) a large county system that encompasses urban, suburban and rural locations; 3) a suburban system; and 4) two single location libraries serving a rural community.
- Launch a national opportunity and media/library outreach to participate in the Safe Routes to Libraries movement with a toolkit and webinar series, hosted online by the Safe Routes Partnership.

[The Safe Routes Partnership](#) has a rich history of working with communities through their Safe Routes to School and Safe Routes to Parks programs. This project directly builds on these existing national movements to expand the models, programs and partnerships to public libraries. In addition to the national partners, Dr. Noah Lenstra (University of North Carolina - Greensboro) and the Association for Rural & Small Libraries (ARSL) will serve as senior advisors on the project.

**Project Justification:** [Local government studies](#) consistently express concern over challenges facing leaders in providing access and services to all members of their community with key barriers caused by transportation and physical barriers. The [CDC recommends](#) public libraries should be connected to other everyday destinations via active, friendly and accessible routes.

All of these challenges exist at higher levels in communities of color that have experienced redlining and [historic disinvestment in infrastructure and public amenities](#). According to [national statistics](#), ninety percent of high-income communities have sidewalks, compared to only 49% of low-income communities. People walking in lower-income areas are struck and killed by cars at much higher rates than in higher-income areas. Safe travel to and from libraries affects the safety, access to literacy programs and overall health and well-being of children in low-income families.

Public libraries have an opportunity to address these issues by taking an active role in reinvestment in public amenities that would allow youth to access their buildings for enjoyment and learning. There are a few leading libraries addressing this issue in partnership with local safe route initiatives. The Central Arkansas Library System (CALs) partnered with Little Rock Parks and Recreation to overcome racial and physical division to reconnect the Children's Library neighborhood, a primarily Black neighborhood. In Northwest Iowa, the [Sheldon Public Library hosted a Bike Rodeo](#) supported by Safe Routes to School.

For almost 20 years, [Safe Routes to School](#) programs have operated in all 50 states with high levels of success in urban, suburban and rural settings. A [systematic review of studies](#) show that, within five years, Safe Routes to School programs increase walking among students, reduce risks for traffic-related injury and are cost-effective. By combining physical infrastructure such as sidewalks, crosswalks and lights with the education and encouragement programming to teach and motivate kids to walk and bicycle safely, these programs play a vital role in creating and sustaining access to educational programming and resources and building healthy, thriving communities. In addition, every community has the potential to access funding to improve where people walk, bike and roll.

**Work Plan:** The Safe Routes to Libraries pilot will demonstrate the public demand for access to libraries as hubs of opportunity, public safety and wellness and community connectedness.

Pilots/Early Adopters Selection: The partners will issue an open call for applications and a committee of experts will select six libraries to participate based on key criteria, including community diversity, knowledge of current physical barriers to participation in OST library programs for children from low-income families, library leadership support and ability to align the work with an existing Safe Routes program. The selection committee will include the advisors and partners.

Capacity Building: Launch a learning cohort of libraries to participate in the planning, and capacity and relationship building to pilot Safe Routes to Libraries programs. Components of this include:

- Support for research on the local history of transportation inequity, neighborhood planning and library locations.
- Local conversations with schools, parks, trusted messengers, local leaders and decision makers to understand community needs, resources and partnership opportunities.
- A walking audit and potential partnership assessment to identify infrastructure and safety gaps along routes to libraries, findings to be presented to local decision makers.
- Learning how to engage youth in the planning and connection to Safe Routes to School to align priorities across these programs.
- Organizing a “Walk, Bike and Roll to the Library Day” celebration, a spin-off of the popular “Walk and Roll to School Day” celebrations held internationally in the fall.

National Model for Safe Routes to Libraries: Build a national model based on the pilots, research and lessons learned, with resources hosted by Safe Routes and ULC to expand nationally beyond the pilot group and the current focus on schools and parks. It will include a toolkit that will share research and include how to develop partnerships, host convenings with elected officials and other leaders, marketing the program and more.

Toolkit and Adoption Series: The partners will cohost a webinar series with toolkit hosted by the Safe Routes Partnership to launch the model and scale adoption beyond the original communities. Participation will be open to all libraries.

**Diversity:** Almost 70% of the Safe Routes to Schools have been shown to low-income children and communities. The pilot selection process will also prioritize communities with the most barriers to accessing library services and safe transportation and serving communities of high need.

**Project Results:** Safe Routes to Libraries will pilot the highly effective Safe Routes to School framework in a new context, with a goal of increasing safety and access to library services and enhancing community well-being. The program aims to improve equitable access to libraries in under-resourced communities, increase the number of people walking, biking or rolling to libraries to build more active communities and increase the number of libraries participating in or leading Safe Route programs.

**Budget:** The proposed budget of \$249,535 includes: \$74,500 for salaries (Director of Education 25% FTE), \$22,350 for benefits, \$100,000 for professional fees (Safe Routes, ARSL and UNC), \$30,000 for travel, including a peer learning convening and site visits and \$22,685 in indirect costs.