

Take Action: Roles for Law Enforcement in Safe Routes to School Programs

Many types of law enforcement agencies and many types of officers can help local Safe Routes to School (SRTS) programs in different ways. Law enforcement agencies can take the lead in SRTS initiatives or a supporting role. One critical supporting role you can play is to serve as an active member of a local SRTS steering committee. Your presence as a law enforcement representative will be important because you will be able to provide guidance, information and expertise on a range of issues and activities related to SRTS programs.

Typical Steps in a SRTS Program and How Law Enforcement Can Help

Typically, SRTS initiatives develop over a period of years. Below is a list of seven typical steps in the early life of a SRTS program. Law enforcement agencies and personnel are likely to have something to offer every step of the way. For more detailed information regarding how different officer types can be involved, choose an officer type from the list on the right.

SRTS Step 1: Help Bring Together the Right People.

To ensure broad-based community representation the SRTS team should include a variety of members with differing backgrounds and expertise.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Join the SRTS steering committee. Along with the school principal, parents, teachers, local health officials, transportation planners and engineers, students and others, you will help ensure a well-rounded team that represents the community's needs.

Patrol Officers Can Support SRTS

"If nothing else, most local police agencies should be able to support a local SRTS initiative by directing its routine neighborhood patrols to protect select bicycling and walking routes to and from a participating school. While no city has sufficient police to monitor every route for every school, select patrol units can be directed (on a periodic basis) to problem areas that are within their overall patrol assignment."

Sgt. Trudy Rampy, Michigan State Patrol

- Use your expertise. Law enforcement officers are often in touch with sectors of the community that may be marginalized or less involved in community affairs, and they are often more in touch with the pulse of a community and can speak to issues related to safety and crime concerns.

SRTS Step 2: Participate in a Kick-off Meeting to Set a Vision.

An initial meeting is essential to determine the vision for a local SRTS program.

More Ways Law Enforcement Agencies Can Help Local SRTS Programs.

Police agencies may be able to help in other ways including:

- provide student bicycle and pedestrian safety education
- provide safety education and training of teachers, school administrators, parents and the general community
- provide training and monitoring of adult crossing guards and student safety patrols
- offer assistance for parents and school administrators with "stranger danger" or neighborhood bullying issues
- offer assistance with non-traffic related crime and neighborhood security issues that affect the ability of children to walk or bike to school safely
- provide enforcement including speed, failure to yield, and other identified infractions around schools

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Share your knowledge. Ensure that the vision for the local SRTS program takes advantage of existing youth or community-related law enforcement initiatives that

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are already underway in the school catchment area, such as youth crime prevention programs, DARE programs, gang prevention programs, etc. Let folks know about these and other resources you are aware of.

- Answer questions the community may have about traffic safety and crime hot spots. Stranger danger may come up as an important concern.

SRTS Step 3: Help Gather Information and Identify Issues.

This is an important first step in developing a SRTS plan. Issues may be real or perceived by the community.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Access data. Law enforcement agencies and patrol offices have access to important information the SRTS team will need to build a targeted program, such as:
 - pedestrian, bicycle and motor vehicle crash data in the community and/or vicinity of the school
 - local patterns of traffic violations
 - any positive impacts resulting from prior traffic law enforcement initiatives.
- Share anecdotal information. Officers have much to contribute based upon their daily observation of human and driver behavior in the street environment.
- Assist the steering committee in evaluating the safety of existing walking and biking conditions.
 - identify problem intersections and areas
 - establish safer biking and walking routes for students to us.

SRTS Step 4: Help Identify Solutions and Potential Interventions.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Provide guidance regarding the effectiveness of various enforcement methods.
- Suggest ways enforcement can support other activities planned in the areas of engineering, education and encouragement.

SRTS Step 5: Help Develop a Plan.

Prioritizing solutions and formalizing a plan are important next steps and often a requirement for submitting a grant application to various funding sources.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Help the community prioritize recommendations into a sound SRTS plan.
- Formally endorse the plan. Formal endorsement of the plan and proposed activities by the law enforcement agency may help ensure that it gets SRTS funding by the State.

SRTS Step 6: Help Get the Plan and People Moving.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Implement a recommendation. Law enforcement officers are typically action oriented. By the very nature of your work, you tend to be the first to address project issues.
- Motivate others. You can be helpful on a SRTS steering committee as a motivator that sets the project into high gear.

SRTS Step 7: Evaluate, adjust and sustain the effort.

Ongoing evaluation and adjustment is important to a successful program.

How Law Enforcement Officers Can Help:

- Determine if the methods and level of effort being applied is having the desired effect.
- Help ensure that appropriate and efficient program evaluation occurs and that the proper adjustments are made.