



# Partnering With Business for Safe Communities: A Message for Community Program Coordinators

Business support and participation are vital to the success of Safe Communities for three key reasons. First, the workplace is probably the most important source of social influence for people once they leave school, and often the only channel for reaching adults with messages and motivation to change their behavior. Second, commuters and business drivers account for a significant proportion of local traffic and hence local traffic injuries. Third, motor vehicle crashes are the number one cause of on-the-job fatalities. Nevertheless, in many communities business involvement in traffic injury prevention has been minimal.

Too often, the only role businesses are asked to play in traffic injury prevention is to provide financial support for activities sponsored by others. Their motivation comes from a sense of civic responsibility and an awareness of the public relations benefits of community involvement. However, many businesses will eagerly assume a more active role once they learn how much traffic crashes cost them and their communities. The opportunity to reduce these costs is one of the most compelling incentives for businesses to partner with others in preventing traffic injuries and improving the quality of life in their communities.

Businesses, whether large or small, have been largely unaware of the economic impact of traffic crashes on their profits, productivity, and morale. Even those with large fleets of vehicles and good fleet safety programs may see only part of the traffic injury picture. Consequently, traffic injury prevention will be new to many businesses, and getting them involved in Safe Communities will call for creative new approaches by traffic safety advocates.

## Steps Toward Involving Business

As a traffic safety advocate seeking business partners for Safe Communities, you are likely to encounter several challenges:

- ▶ Making the appropriate contact(s) in each business
- ▶ Convincing management of the impact of traffic injuries and the benefits of prevention on their productivity and profits

- ▶ Demonstrating the intangible costs of traffic injuries and the humanitarian benefits of revention within the work force and the community
- ▶ Providing easy, but meaningful, ways for businesses to get involved with Safe Communities at their individual comfort levels
- ▶ Providing ample technical assistance and ongoing reinforcement for businesses' fledgling traffic safety activities
- ▶ Assisting businesses with evaluation strategies that enable them to assess the value of their traffic safety activities

## Making the Right Contacts

The best person to contact about business participation in Safe Communities will vary from one organization to the next. In fact, identifying the appropriate contacts and setting up meetings with them may be some of the most challenging aspects of securing business participation in Safe Communities.

Ordinarily, your best bet for an initial contact in a business will be a manager in one or more of the following departments:

- ▶ Public Relations
- ▶ Safety
- ▶ Health and Wellness

Your contact, ideally, should be someone who can secure access to the CEO or to the CEO's support team. Access to high levels of management is important because ultimately, decisions about collecting data and committing resources to support a business's participation in Safe Communities must be made at these levels. Your contact should also have a broad perspective on the factors involved in the business's operating costs, as well as strong concern with cost containment. An excellent initial point of contact may be a business' representative to another traffic safety organization. This person can probably help you identify and gain access to the appropriate contact in his or her business.

## Introducing the Concept

If a Safe Communities Coalition has already been formed in your area, invite your business contacts to one of the meetings as a way of introducing them to the concept and to the individuals and organizations that support it.

If your Safe Communities Coalition is still in the formative stages, an efficient and motivational way to introduce the concept is by bringing together all potential members for an informational meeting. The group should include representatives of business, health care, government, law enforcement, and education, as well as traffic safety advocates and any other logical stakeholders. Broad presentation will help enlist business support because businesses generally want to be on the bandwagon with programs that draw support from other key players

in the community. Another way to help ensure business attendance is to hold your organizational meetings in settings where business representatives will feel most comfortable, for example, hospital board rooms, as opposed to police stations.

## **Making the Best Approach**

Paying attention to details is important as you approach businesses about participating in Safe Communities. For example, you should take care to adhere to each business's norms with regard to dress and communication style. Where the customary style is "business casual," it is best to lean more toward "business" than "casual" in your dress and communications.

## **Conducting the Briefing**

The guidelines for successful presentations to businesses are similar to those for dress and communications style. Your presentations should be patterned as closely as possible on the ones businesses are used to. In general, they should be concise, logical, and attractive. Many businesses expect presentations to be supported with slides or overhead transparencies, as well as handouts.

## **Support Materials**

A complete packet of support materials conveys a particularly businesslike impression. So, if possible, compile your handouts and other support materials in a pocket folder or portfolio, instead of distributing them individually. A wide variety of Safe Communities support materials is available from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), and many more are under development. Presenting these materials in a folder, along with local traffic-crash statistics and related data, will help make a good impression on your business audience.

## **Timing and Content**

The timing and content of your presentation can also help impress your business audience. The formal briefing should take no more than about 20 minutes, and the entire presentation, including discussion and questions, no more than an hour. Your most persuasive points will probably focus on facts and statistics showing the impact of traffic crashes on employers' profits and productivity, followed by figures showing potential savings from traffic safety activities. Including local traffic crash data will help emphasize the importance of an integrated community approach to injury prevention.

Statistics like the following are a good ways to highlight the problem of traffic deaths and injuries in the workforce:

- ▶ Injuries are the leading cause of death for people ages 1 to 44, millions of whom are in the prime of their working lives.
- ▶ Motor vehicle injuries are the number one cause of on-the-job fatalities and the leading cause of injury-related deaths for ages 5 to 27.
- ▶ For every traffic-related death, there are 19 traffic injuries leading to hospitalization and 300 requiring medical attention.

You can move on to show how businesses bear a disproportionate share of the costs of traffic injuries in our society. These costs are both tangible and intangible, and few businesses will be aware of all of them.

## **Tangible Costs**

Tangible costs fall into three main categories: fringe benefits, non-fringe benefits, and wage premiums. Because some of this information may be new to your audience, be sure to summarize it on a slide or handout. Here are some examples:

### **Health Fringe Benefit Costs**

This category includes the cost of workman's compensation, medical and disability insurance, health insurance, sick leave, Social Security disability, life insurance, private disability insurance, insurance administration, and overhead.

### **Non-Fringe Costs**

This category includes the cost of motor vehicle property damage and liability insurance, crash-related legal expenses, and unreimbursed vehicle damage and replacement. Businesses are often aware of these costs, but may not have considered others in this category. These include recruitment and retraining costs resulting from employee death or long-term disability, salaries for temporary workers, and increased taxes required to fund police, fire, and ambulance services.

### **Wage Premiums**

This category includes the cost of higher wages that must be paid to employees for accepting risky jobs, a kind of advance payment for possible future losses.

## **Intangible Costs**

After summarizing the tangible costs, you can move on to the intangible ones that do not show up on a balance sheet and that businesses are much less likely to factor into the cost of crashes. These include time spent in such as impromptu conversations about employees' and family members' crashes, time devoted to insurance and absence-related paperwork, and countless other productivity robbing activities associated with traffic injuries. Even less obvious, but costly, are hidden costs such as the emotional impact on coworkers from crashes involving employees and their family members.

## **The Injury Price Tag**

Still, nothing is as compelling as concrete financial data for convincing businesses of the costs of traffic crashes and the benefits of traffic safety programs. You do not want to overwhelm your audience with statistics, so present the data slowly, allowing plenty of time for your listeners to digest these

facts. (Tip: To keep your audience from frantically trying to take notes while you speak, include the information in a handout, and assure them that they have it.) The following are some of the most important economic reasons for businesses to be concerned with traffic injury prevention:

Motor vehicle crashes on and off the job cost employers \$55 billion in 1994, up from \$53 billion in 1992.

Motor vehicle crashes cost employers almost \$22,000 per crash and \$110,000 per injury.

In 1994, motor vehicle crashes killed an estimated 2,000 people while they were working and injured 323,000. Over half of these injuries caused employees to miss work.

Off-the-job motor-vehicle crashes account for 78 percent of the health fringe benefit costs to employers. If a crash results in injuries, this figure rises to 88 percent.

## **The Prevention Dividend**

The costs of injuries alone are not enough to persuade a business to participate in Safe Communities or launch its own traffic safety program. You will also need to give examples of tangible ways businesses can benefit from traffic safety activities. The following figures should help make this point:

A comprehensive traffic safety program is estimated to save businesses \$50,000 for every million miles of vehicle travel.

Family-oriented safety policies save businesses money, too. Each child safety seat saves employers \$85 and each bicycle helmets \$30.

## **A Call to Action**

Throughout your presentation, concentrate on responding to the WIFFM (What's in it for me?) question. The more concrete and "turn-key" a program is, the better businesses like it. Most importantly, end with a call to action. Be very clear about what you're asking a business for at this stage. At first, some businesses may be willing to commit only to hosting a Safe Communities meeting or donating door prizes for an event. Others, may be convinced to start capturing data on the cost of injuries and designing coordinated programs to address the problem. Just remember that any kind of commitment to Safe Communities, even at a low level, can lead to increased involvement later.

## **Offering Easy Ways to Get Involved**

Business managers will seldom be ready to make a firm commitment to Safe

Communities after just one briefing. However, if possible, it is important for you to leave that first meeting with a “yes” to some initial level of involvement. At the very least, identify a date for a follow-up meeting, and try to get the business to commit to sending a representative to it. Ideally, you will have found out enough about the organization ahead of time to request or suggest the department(s) you think would be most appropriate. Even if a business is not ready to participate in Safe Communities right away, try to identify a contact person, and ask if you may include that person on your mailing list.

Another helpful tool in securing business involvement in Safe Communities is a list showing examples of various ways in which businesses can participate. This approach offers the kind of flexibility businesses like at the beginning of a relationship. Be sure to emphasize the value of all levels of participation, and create a mental picture of some ways a business could be involved. The more creative you can be in devising roles for businesses, the more likely you are to secure their participation. The important thing is for businesses to see that there are many ways, other than cash donations, to participate in an injury prevention campaign. Here are just a few of the possibilities:

Attend meetings.

Serve on a steering committee.

Serve on an issue-oriented committee, such as pedestrian safety, teen driving safety, red-light running, bicycle safety, etc.

Host a meeting on or off site.

Provide refreshments for a meeting.

Sponsor or co-sponsor an event such as a safety belt challenge among local employers or educational institutions.

Provide door prizes for a traffic safety campaign or event.

Provide in-kind printing, graphic design, or similar support for a traffic safety project.

Provide volunteers for traffic safety events.

Have their public affairs department or legal department write to legislators in support of safety legislation.

Provide public relations support for events.

Donate paid advertising time for Safe Communities Public Service Announcements.

Donate staff time to the Safe Communities campaign.

Donate computer time or staff to support data collection and analysis.

Provide services of research staff in support of program evaluation.

Provide injury data in support of community injury database.

## **Offering Technical Assistance and Support**

Partnership in Safe Communities not only gives businesses new ways to promote the safety and well-being of their employees and communities; it also gives them access to a wealth of technical assistance and support through their traffic safety partners. Any appeal for businesses participation in Safe Communities should emphasize these reciprocal benefits, since uncertainty about how to conduct traffic safety activities is sometimes the main obstacle to business involvement.

### **Basic and Advanced Technical Assistance**

Sometimes all a business needs to get started are some “canned” materials for publication in internal media, some ideas for promotional activities, and the assurance of further help as needed. Even something as simple as help in getting on the mailing lists for Network of Employers for Traffic Safety (NETS) or for the NHTSA Quarterly Planners can be the genesis of an ongoing traffic safety campaign.

Other simple but effective forms of technical assistance you can offer include help conducting traffic safety events such as safety belt surveys, educational campaigns, child safety seat inspections, holiday highway rest stops, alcohol-free celebrations, and similar activities. Once a business has a model to follow, it is usually able to supply the staff and material resources to support a traffic safety event or campaign.

Of particular value to businesses is assistance with tools and techniques for tracking and calculating the costs associated with injuries. In a results-oriented environment, businesses need ways to show upper management the rationale for and effectiveness of injury prevention programs. One helpful tool is NHTSA’s Crash Cost disk (a cost calculator software program currently under revision by NHTSA), which can provide estimates of the cost of crashes at the national, state, and local level. In addition, NETS offers a model a business can use to track the cost of its own traffic crashes. However, businesses are generally unaware of these tools. You are providing vitally important technical assistance to your business partners simply by linking them with these resources.

### **Reinforcement and Reward**

Providing reinforcement and rewards to businesses with traffic injury prevention campaigns is another way you can support your Safe Communities business partners. Public recognition of community-friendly and family-friendly programs is very important to most businesses. Some of the forms this recognition can take include awards ceremonies, media reports, or listing in an honor roll. For example, helping businesses qualify for the NHTSA Seat Belt Honor Roll and then securing local media publicity are simple, but highly effective motivators for continued traffic safety activity. Recognizing an employee’s contributions to traffic safety pays similar dividends. Businesses, likewise, can help by having their

public relations departments develop news releases and place news stories to publicize the efforts of other Safe Communities partners.

The variety of technical assistance and support you can offer is limited only by your imagination and resources. The important thing is to make sure your Safe Communities business partners have ongoing recognition and reinforcement for their progress in injury prevention.

## Assisting with Evaluation

After your business partners have traffic injury prevention programs up and running in their workplaces and in the community, they need measurable results to justify an ongoing commitment to Safe Communities. You can help by providing them with tools and expertise for evaluating these programs. The NETS cost calculator is one tool that can be used to measure progress over time in workplace programs. In addition, a variety of other evaluation tools and resources are available through health care organizations, college social science and business departments, and other local and state traffic safety groups. Many businesses have ample resources for conducting follow-up surveys and similar research. All they need is a little encouragement and guidance in getting started.

Businesses may need particular help and encouragement in evaluating injury prevention activities in the community, where success represents a major benefit of participation in Safe Communities. For example, a business that has played an active role in a Safe Communities campaign can justifiably claim credit for contributing to an overall increase in safety belt use or decrease in impaired driving in the community. Similarly, a business could rightfully claim credit for contributing through a Safe Communities Coalition to the passage of legislation such as bicycle helmet laws or graduated licensing. A safer, more pleasant place in which to live and work will, in turn, help businesses attract and retain employees and customers.

## Following Up

As with any new venture, follow-up on Safe Communities injury prevention activities is imperative for sustaining interest in the program and attracting others to it. Such simple strategies as regular meetings featuring engaging speakers every month or two, an attractive newsletter, and frequent phone calls, electronic mail, and faxes are particularly important for helping a business feel involved and appreciated in your campaign.

## Conclusion

Securing and sustaining business involvement in Safe Communities boils down to a few key steps:

- Convincing businesses of their economic and civic stake in injury

prevention

Providing businesses with a varied but meaningful choice of roles in Safe Communities coalitions.

Offering businesses ample technical assistance and reinforcement for their injury prevention activities

A Safe Communities partnership with businesses as active stakeholders offers much greater and longer lasting rewards for everyone than a model in which businesses contribute only funds and safety organizations contribute only programs.

## About the Author

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