Bike Walk **Kentucky**

Finding Champions & Building Support

A Practical Field Guide for Community Advocates

Community change starts
with **people**.

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Community Change Starts with People

Most community improvements do not begin with funding, engineering plans, or construction . **They begin with people.**

Across Kentucky, communities have improved sidewalks, trails, parks, crossings, and public spaces because local residents, leaders, and organizations worked together around a shared goal. Progress rarely happens because one person has all the answers. It happens when people build relationships, create partnerships, and stay committed to the work.

Most community improvements move forward because of people, partnerships, and persistence.

Successful Communities Often Share These Characteristics

- **Local Champions**
  People who care about an issue and are willing to help move ideas forward.
- **Strong Partnerships**
  Collaboration among residents, schools, businesses, health organizations, local governments, and community groups.
- **Community Support**
  Listening to community needs and creating opportunities for people to participate in the conversation.
- **Clear Communication**
  Helping others understand why a project matters and how it benefits the community.
- **Patience and Persistence**
  Recognizing that meaningful improvements often happen through steady progress over time.

Field Note:

Every successful project started with a conversation.

Finding Champions in Your Community

Community champions are people who help move ideas into action. Some have official titles. Many do not. The most effective advocates learn how to recognize different types of champions and engage them in meaningful ways.

Connectors



Know who to call and who should meet.

They introduce people, open doors, and help ideas reach new audiences.

Influencers



Help ideas gain visibility.

Their support can build awareness, credibility, and community confidence.

Decision Makers



Can move ideas from conversation to action.

They often control approvals, funding, priorities, or implementation.

Community Builders



Bring people together around shared goals.

They recruit volunteers, build partnerships, and help sustain momentum.

Signs You've Found a Champion

- ✓ They ask thoughtful questions.
- ✓ They introduce you to other people.
- ✓ They offer ideas and solutions.
- ✓ They stay engaged after the conversation ends.
- ✓ They look for ways to help.

Potential Champions You Might Overlook

- School nurses
- PTA leaders
- Hospital staff
- Recreation volunteers
- Running clubs
- Senior centers
- Library directors
- Faith leaders
- Downtown merchants



Field Note:

Many champions begin as curious observers.

Starting Conversations That Build Trust

One of the biggest mistakes advocates make is leading with a solution before understanding what others care about. People are more likely to support an idea when they feel heard, respected, and included.

Instead of starting with:	Try opening with curiosity:
"We need a trail."	"What transportation, safety, or quality-of-life concerns are you hearing from residents?"
"We need sidewalks here."	"How do people currently move through this area?"

Five Simple Conversation Tips

1. **Listen First.**
   Seek to understand before seeking agreement.
2. **Ask Questions.**
   Learn about local priorities, concerns, and opportunities.
3. **Stay Curious.**
   You may discover challenges and opportunities you had not considered.
4. **Focus on Shared Goals.**
   Look for common ground rather than differences.
5. **Follow Up.**
   Relationships grow through continued engagement.

Common Mistakes to Avoid

- **Showing up only when you need something**
- **Leading with complaints**
- **Assuming people oppose your ideas**
- **Talking more than listening**
- **Expecting immediate results**

Strong relationships are often built through multiple conversations over time.



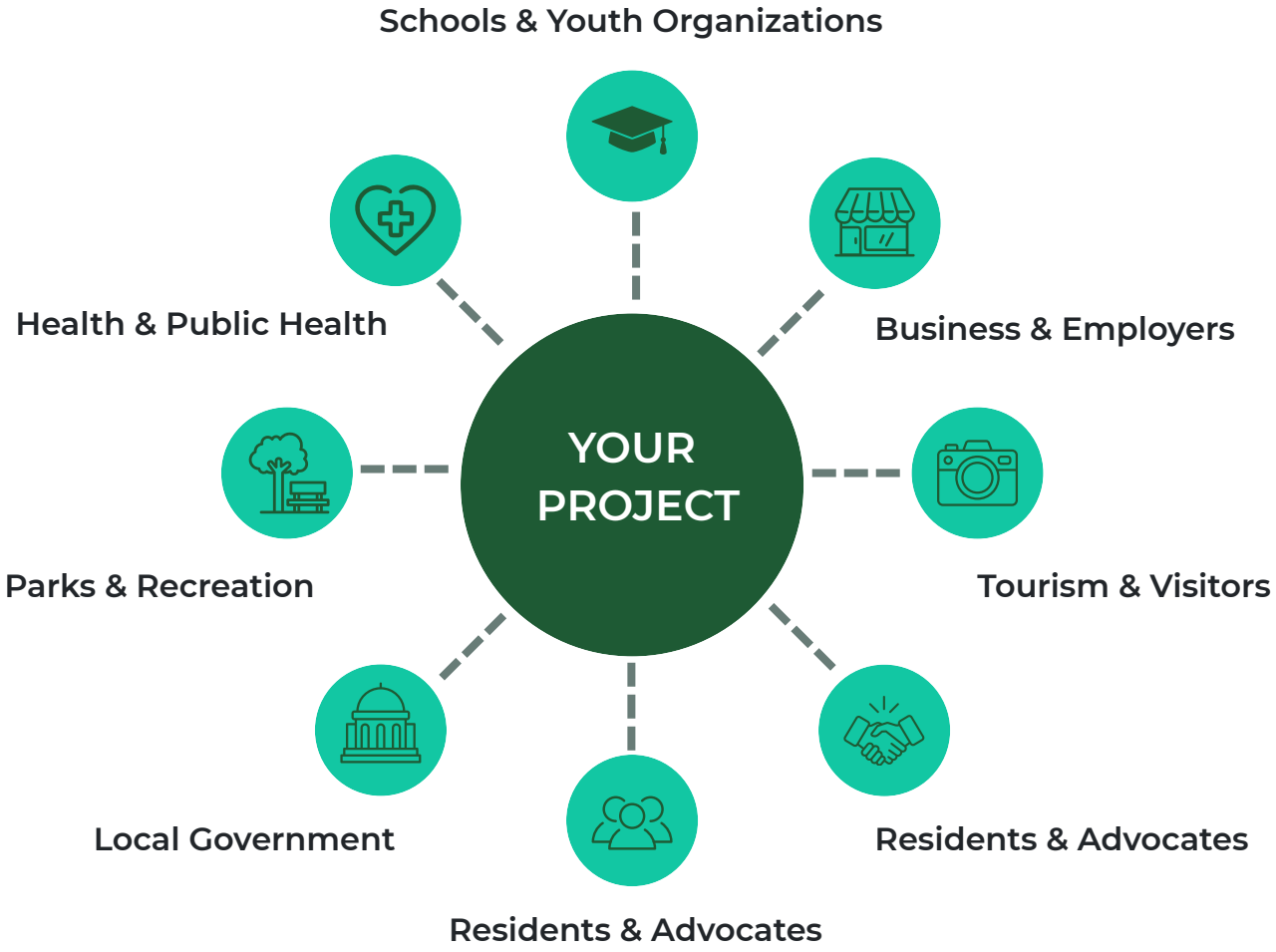
Field Note:

The first meeting is rarely about getting a yes.

It is about building a relationship.

Building a Coalition

Community improvements rarely move forward because of one advocate alone. Strong coalitions bring together people, organizations, and leaders who share a common goal.



Why Coalitions Matter

- ✓ Expand community support
- ✓ Increase credibility
- ✓ Identify new opportunities
- ✓ Strengthen grant applications
- ✓ Sustain momentum over time

Kentucky Example

Many successful Kentucky projects have grown through partnerships among local governments, schools, businesses, volunteers, and community organizations.

Progress often happens when multiple partners see how an improvement supports their own goals while benefiting the broader community.

Field Note:

People support what they help create.

Connecting Your Idea to Community Priorities

Different people care about different outcomes. Successful advocates learn how to connect active living improvements to the priorities that matter most to their community.

People Support Projects for Different Reasons

Safety



- **Safe sidewalks.**
- **Safe crossings.**
- **Safe routes to school.**
- **Safe places for people of all ages and abilities.**

Health



- **Opportunities for everyday movement.**
- **Improved physical health.**
- **Improved mental well-being.**
- **Healthier communities.**

Economic Vitality



- **Attracting visitors.**
- **Supporting local businesses.**
- **Strengthening downtown districts.**
- **Increasing quality-of-life investments.**

Community Pride



- **Creating places where people want to live.**
- **Creating places where people want to stay.**
- **Creating places that reflect community values.**

Messaging that Connects

Instead of saying:
"We need more bike lanes."

Consider saying:
"We want safer transportation options for people of all ages."

Instead of saying:
"We need a trail."

Consider saying:
"We want to connect neighborhoods, parks, schools, and businesses."

Focus on benefits people can see, feel, and experience.



Field Note:

People support projects for different reasons.

Focus on shared outcomes, not identical motivations.

Kentucky Champions in Action

Communities across Kentucky are demonstrating what happens when local champions, partnerships, and persistence come together.

Calvert City
Planning + Partnerships + Persistence

A small community that combined local leadership, trail development, partnerships, and long-term planning to become Kentucky's newest Bicycle Friendly Community. Kentucky's active living workshops use Calvert City as an example of intentional planning leading to recognition and momentum.

Read the Story.

Lexington Bike Bus
Parents + Schools + Volunteers

A simple idea that brought together families, school supporters, and community advocates to create safe, active trips to school.

Read the Story.

Bowling Green
Partners + Collaboration + Shared Goals

Local organizations, community leaders, and advocates working together to support walking, biking, and active transportation opportunities.

Read the Story.

Paducah
Grassroots Leadership + Community Momentum

Community members identifying opportunities, building relationships, and creating momentum for future improvements.

Read the Story.

Field Note: Every community starts somewhere.

You're Not Doing This Alone

Bike Walk Kentucky is here to support local champions, community advocates, and organizations working to create healthier, safer, and more connected communities.

How Bike Walk Kentucky Can Help

- **Active Living Workshops**
  Regional workshops designed to help communities understand planning, partnerships, funding opportunities, and active transportation strategies.
- **Educational Resources**
  Guides, publications, and tools that support local active living efforts.
- **Community Connections**
  Opportunities to learn from communities across Kentucky and connect with others doing similar work.
- **Technical Assistance**
  Assistance identifying resources, partners, and next steps for local projects.

Field Note:

Every community improvement started with someone willing to take the first step.

Tell Us Your Story

Have you helped improve walking, biking, trails, parks, or active living opportunities in your community?

We'd love to hear about it.

Share your successes, challenges, lessons learned, and ideas so we can continue building a stronger network of community champions across Kentucky.

Scan to Share Your Story

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