# What Gets Measured Gets Managed:
A Step-by-Step Guide to Evaluating Safe Routes Projects from Beginning to End

Improving safe routes throughout communities takes more than completing discrete projects; it takes sustained commitment to making continuous improvements over time. Evaluating both the process of creating safe routes and the outcomes can help build momentum toward change that extends beyond one stretch of sidewalk or a new stop sign. Evaluating as you go can help you identify opportunities to improve and adjust your approach along the way to be more effective and impactful. Additionally, baseline data can give better context for your project's impact; the average speed of cars after a traffic calming demonstration is far more informative if it is compared to the average speed of cars before the demonstration. This factsheet offers evaluation techniques for all phases of safe routes efforts as well as how and when they can be most useful so that you can incorporate evaluation from the beginning, rather than solely at the end.
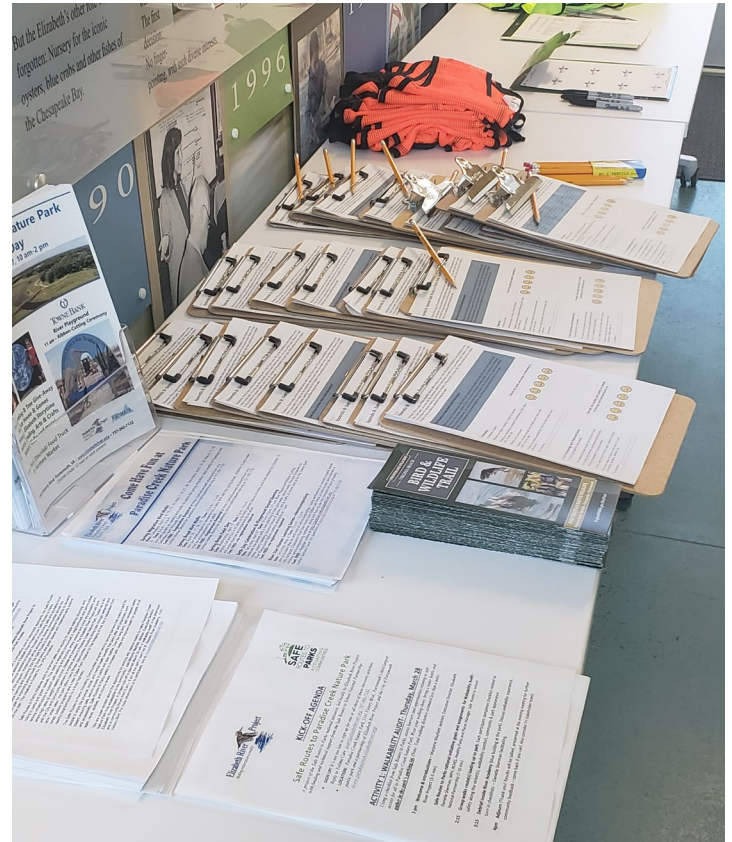
Evaluation Phases

Different phases of your work to improve safe, convenient, and equitable access to parks, schools, and other community destinations require different evaluation tools. The table below summarizes a simplified timeline and potential evaluation objectives for the beginning of a Safe Routes effort, throughout planning and implementation, and following an intervention or infrastructure improvement. As you plan and implement your project(s), use this table as a reference to consider how evaluation can be most helpful for you during each phase.

TIMELINE	EVALUATION TYPE	INTENDED OUTCOMES
During the early stages of project planning, as part of initial community outreach	Baseline Evaluation ●○○	• Improve understanding of existing problems that the project(s) will address • Refine project designs and approaches based on community input • Provide a basis for comparison against outcome evaluation
Throughout project planning and implementation	Process Evaluation ○●○	• Identify gaps and opportunities for improvement in project planning and implementation processes • Ensure community engagement is reaching the people you want to reach, or, if not, identify opportunities to adjust your engagement approach
Immediately following project implementation	Outcome Evaluation ○○●	• Demonstrate outcomes of projects compared to baseline • Generate support and make the case for future improvements

Evaluation Methods

Every method of data collection has advantages and disadvantages, so the ideal approach is to use a mix of complementary tactics to collect both quantitative (numeric) and qualitative (open-ended, explanatory) data. The table below summarizes some methods, when they can be used, along with their strengths and weaknesses. Use this list as a reference to select approaches that could work for your goals; you don't necessarily need to employ every one of these tactics. More detail on each evaluation method is included below the table.

TYPE	METHOD	PHASE	WHAT IS IT?	PROS AND CONS
SURVEYS	Online surveys	●○●	Use an online platform to easily distribute quantitative and qualitative questions via links or QR codes	+/- Broad community reach, but also less targeted +/- Convenient platform for some, but can be a barrier for some
	Paper surveys	●○●	Physically print and distribute questions at events or through other means like meal distribution	+ Targeted data collection; Low-tech option - People have to return surveys; Time consuming data entry
	Intercept surveys	●○●	Go to the project site and politely engage with people to ask questions	+ Targeted data collection - May be inconvenient for participants; More time consuming
PERSON-TO-PERSON	Direct observation	●○●	Observe, count, and record users of park space, bike lanes, sidewalks, etc.	+ More objective measures of park use - Time-consuming; Less specific demographic data; Opportunity to introduce bias on behalf of observer
	Semi-structured interviews	●●○	Conduct short interviews with people based on a set of pre-determined questions	+ Creates opportunities for open-ended feedback and detail - Data cannot be compiled as easily
	Focus groups	●○●	Gather a group of people to discuss a specific topic with the guidance of a trained facilitator	+ Can elicit more nuanced responses - Requires an experienced facilitator
	Feedback Audit	●●○	Analyze the demographic breakdown of survey respondents compared to the community as a whole to identify gaps and trends in the feedback	+ May illuminate differences or disparities in park use, barriers, and engagement - Adds an additional step to analyzing survey results
ANALYSIS	Asset Mapping	●●●	Create a diagram of leaders and organizations that are working on complementary efforts	+ Can highlight opportunities for partnerships - Limited by pre-existing knowledge of community assets
	Process Mapping	●●○	Document the steps you had to take for your project (i.e., engagement, collaboration with partners, and navigating government processes)	+ Identifies opportunities for process improvements; Creates a road map for future projects - Requires continual updates
OTHER	Record Keeping	●●●	Create a process (such as a shared spreadsheet) to routinely track certain information, such as investments, events, and funding opportunities	+ Can help demonstrate success as well as help identify opportunities or gaps for future projects and partnerships - May be tedious or time-consuming to maintain

Appendix A. Assessment Descriptions

Asset mapping: Create a diagram of local leaders and organizations, focused on entities that can support ongoing partnership and engagement on Safe Routes to Parks.
- **Pros:** May identify opportunities for partnership with organizations that are already embedded in the community
- **Cons:** Limited by pre-existing knowledge of community assets
- **Phases:** Ongoing throughout the evaluation

Direct observation: Count the number of people using various parks and trails at specific times and document how they are using those spaces. Choose a fixed location and time (e.g. Saturday from 12-2 PM; weekday mornings; or at a specific off-peak time) and observe moving along safe or unsafe routes
For more detail, record how people are moving (e.g. walking, biking, roller skating, exercising, walking a pet, etc.)
- **Pros:** Provides more objective measures of park/trail utilization than self-reported surveys
- **Cons:** Time-consuming for data collectors; Does not allow data to be disaggregated by demographics such as income, race, and gender but may allow for some approximate disaggregation by age group
- **Phases:** Baseline evaluation, Outcome evaluation

Feedback audit: Analyze the demographic breakdown of survey respondents compared to the community as a whole, to identify gaps in whose perspectives you might be missing or to explore differences in the feedback you're receiving across multiple groups
- **Pros:** May illuminate differences or disparities in park/trail utilization and barriers experienced by various segments of the community; May identify gaps in outreach to specific demographics
- **Cons:** Adds an additional step to analyzing survey results
- **Phases:** Process evaluation

Focus groups: Hold a group discussion with youth, parents, or another group, using open-ended prompts and questions to engage participants
- **Pros:** Can help reach a shared understanding or consensus among participants, or explore nuances in competing priorities or experiences
- **Cons:** Requires an experienced facilitator

Intercept surveys: Conduct in-person surveys at relevant sites, such as in parks or at trail entrances, as a component of door-to-door/school-based outreach, or immediately following community engagement events
- **Pros:** Allows targeted data collection focused on specific groups, such as existing trail and park users, and community engagement participants
- **Cons:** Survey participation is bound by time and place which may be inconvenient for participants; Data collection is more time consuming compared to online surveys
- **Phases:** Baseline evaluation, Outcome evaluation

Online surveys: Use tools such as QR codes and social media to distribute online surveys that include quantitative and qualitative questions
- **Pros:** Data collection can reach a broader segment of the community, which may lend more voices with unique perspectives to inform the project approach; Survey participation is not bound by time and place, which may be more convenient for participants
- **Cons:** Data collection reaches a broader segment of the community, which may skew the project away from the target community's specific needs and goals; Can create barriers to participation for community members based on disability, comfort using technology, internet access, and/or smartphone ownership
- **Phases:** Baseline evaluation, Outcome evaluation

Appendix A. Assessment Descriptions (continued)

Paper surveys: Distribute surveys at specific locations, such as at parks or community engagement events to collect feedback from community members
- Pros: Allows targeted data collection focused on specific groups, such as existing trail and park users, and community engagement participants
- Cons: Completing paper surveys on-site or returning paper surveys later may be inconvenient for participants; Data entry is more time consuming compared to online surveys
- Phases: Baseline evaluation, Outcome evaluation

Process mapping: Document steps and methods taken to carry out a project, including steps needed to conduct outreach and engagement with community members, to communicate and collaborate with partner organizations, and to navigate bureaucratic government processes
- Pros: Identifies opportunities to navigate engagement, partnerships, and processes more efficiently; Creates a road map for future projects
- Cons: Bureaucratic processes and partner expectations may fluctuate over time, so the map will need to be updated continuously
- Phases: Process evaluation

Record keeping: Create a process (such as a shared spreadsheet) to routinely track certain information, such as investments or events
- Pros: Can be used as both an evaluation tool to demonstrate success as well as a guide to identify opportunities or gaps for future projects and partnerships
- Cons: May be tedious or time-consuming to maintain
- Phases: Ongoing throughout the evaluation

Semi-structured interviews: Guided, informal conversations with one to several community members that use a list of predefined questions as a starting point for discussion, which may then lead to custom follow-up questions based on responses
- Pros: Creates opportunities for open-ended feedback from community members, which can provide more detailed explanations for survey responses and illuminate surprising perspectives that may not be apparent from closed-ended survey questions
- Cons: Data cannot be compiled as easily as with closed-ended questions
- Phases: Baseline evaluation, Process evaluation

Take Action in Your Community!

Use this guide and template to create your own evaluation table to outline your project goals, objectives and metrics.