

A Safe System Guide for Transportation: Successful Examples from Communities in the U.S.

INTRODUCTION

The collaborative research project between the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety and Johns Hopkins University aimed to develop guides to assist safety advocates and practitioners seeking resources to implement the Safe System approach in their communities. The purpose of the first phase of the project was to identify key messages for increasing public understanding and acceptance of Safe System improvements ([Phase I](#)). This second phase offers guidance on developing consensus among stakeholders on tangible steps for Safe System deployment.

The first part of this report provides information about the roles of key stakeholders and their responsibilities. The second part outlines the collaborative steps of a change management framework essential for the successful development, implementation, and sustainability of Safe System. The last part presents six case studies to illustrate diverse and creative ways to influence, inspire, and build relationships to tailor strategies to address community-specific needs and embrace a safety culture:

- (1) [Menlo Park, CA](#)
- (2) [McKenzie County, ND](#)
- (3) [West Hartford, CT](#)
- (4) [Madison, WI](#)
- (5) [Philadelphia, PA](#)
- (6) [Massachusetts](#)

METHODOLOGY

The research team conducted five group interviews with organizations at different phases of implementation of the Safe System approach, which provided a platform for a well-rounded understanding of diverse perspectives across the nation. Through these focus group discussions, the team captured how agencies raised awareness of traffic deaths, gained community support, and acquired the knowledge and tools to transform current efforts into well-established Vision Zero programs. Stakeholders in the five focus groups exhibited varying levels of authority, influence, and interest in the Safe System approach. These stakeholders were part of self-organized teams working actively on safety programs and had unique priorities, policies, and access to communication strategies and technical tools.

TECHNICAL REPORT:

Michael, J. P., Chirles, T. J., Frattaroli, S., Broshears, L., Paniati, J., Lindley, A. J., Kuciamba, S., Romo, A., McDonough, J., & Yang, C. Y. D. (2024). *A Safe System Guide for Transportation: Successful Examples from Communities in the U.S.* (Technical Report). Washington, D.C.: AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

 **DOWNLOAD REPORT**

ABOUT THE AAA FOUNDATION FOR TRAFFIC SAFETY

Founded in 1947, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety in Washington, D.C., is a nonprofit, publicly supported charitable research and educational organization dedicated to saving lives by preventing traffic crashes and reducing injuries when crashes occur. Funding for this research was provided by voluntary contributions from AAA/CAA and their affiliated motor clubs, individual members, AAA-affiliated insurance companies, and other organizations or sources.

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In addition, the team identified six jurisdictions with examples of successful community collaboration and with experience contributing to local and state planning activities. The six case study reports describe how each local, county, or state agency initiated their Safe System programs, the extent of collaboration required for successful implementation, and the strategies employed to overcome obstacles. The team also gathered supplementary materials, such as photos, videos, and toolkits from each community to create a webpage with additional resources.

KEY FINDINGS

The key roles identified as necessary for successful Safe System implementation are the following:

1. *Champions*—often lead the adoption of safety initiatives, manage resources, and drive engagement to foster a culture of safety within organizations
2. *Influencers*—shape public opinion and attitudes towards safety practices by leveraging their credibility and networks to create a more engaged environment for champions
3. *Supporters*—help bolster Safe System implementation by raising awareness and mobilizing communities
4. *Implementers*—responsible for the practical adoption of Safe System approaches into daily operations

Successful implementation frameworks hinge on four key phases:

1. Phase I: Getting Started
 - Leading proactively
 - Fostering an environment for ready implementors
 - Taking action to prioritize safety
2. Phase II: Building Support
 - Starting simply by focusing on practical messaging
 - Making manageable and realistic collaboration requests
 - Listening to community members to develop tailored approaches
 - Collectively celebrating successful outcomes
3. Phase III: Institutionalizing the Approach
 - Building a sustainable coalition
 - Securing resources to sustain momentum
4. Phase IV: Sustaining the Safe System Approach
 - Adopting an evidence-based approach for decision making
 - Preparing for the long haul with strategic planning and resource allocation
 - Committing to a shared Safe System approach vision
 - Overcoming resistance to new safety initiatives