



OVERVIEW

Adequate, ongoing funding is at or near the top of the list of necessary resources for bike share equity programs. Funding may be needed to subsidize riders or memberships, purchase equipment, hire staff, support community partner organizations, fund marketing campaigns, and more. Many bike share systems are struggling to find revenue sources to cover both their capital and operating costs. Further, permits and contracts can be for short periods of a year or less, making it challenging to seek funding and implement initiatives. Equity programs are rarely, if ever, viewed as driving revenue. Cities and systems are more often looking to municipal funding allocations or grant-based funding, both of which are often time-limited. As bike share programs mature, systems will need to grapple with how to secure ongoing funding streams for equity work.

CURRENT APPROACHES

In our survey of cities and operators running bike share systems, funding challenges were identified as a top concern and barrier for bike share equity programming. Knowing how to fund equity work, having a consistent stream of funding, and having funded equity-dedicated staff were all challenges that we heard.

Grants and foundations were the most common sources of funding, especially for small and mid-sized systems, but these sources were also generally less than \$100,000 and limited in duration (mostly one to two years). This limited and insecure nature of equity funding leaves systems with a few challenging options: either figure out how to incorporate equity programming into their operating budgets, seek new sources of external funding, or scale back programming.

Grant and foundation funding were primary funding source for 51% of education programs, 48% of marketing and information programs, 43% of mixed fleet (electric or adaptive) programs, 41% of station siting programming, 40% of transit integration programming, and 34% of payment and fees programming. Cities were frequent funders of mixed fleet option programs (43%). Other primary funding sources for these program types were generally combinations of funding sources.

Since 2015, the Better Bike Share Partnership has provided over 30 grants to fund equity work, ranging from several thousand to \$75,000 per grant. Other foundations, system sponsors, cities, MPOs, transit agencies and system operators are also funding equity programs.

FUNDING SOURCE FOR BIKE SHARE EQUITY PROGRAMS	0-149 bikes	150-349 bikes	350-749 bikes	750+ bikes	# of Programs
City or municipality			29%	25%	12
Operator		27%		4%	5
Community partner				7%	2
Sponsor	33%	7%		11%	6
Grant/foundation	17%	40%	53%	32%	25
Combination	50%	27%	18%	21%	16
# of Programs	6	15	17	28	66

Funding sources for bike share equity work, by system size

EXAMPLES OF CURRENT APPROACHES TO FUNDING EQUITY WORK

Identify new funding sources: In Ithaca, the bike advocacy organization Bike Walk Tompkins applied for a grant through the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA), and infused equity work (discounts, outreach, education and more) into the overall grant that brought bike share to Ithaca. Other systems have used funds from the Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP), Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality (CMAQ) funding, the National Aging and Disability Transportation Center (NADTC), as well as grants from foundations, sponsors, private donors, along with donated time from operators and transportation agencies.

Get innovative: BIKETOWN in Portland, Oregon initiated a program to allow and encourage members to donate credits collected through returned bikes to select stations (or from outside station areas), and have that credit go toward “BIKETOWN for All” participants’ first month in the system. In the first year of the program, over 300 members had their first month paid for. In New York City, Citi Bike partnered with a sponsor, Healthfirst, to scale up their equity efforts and offer discounted memberships citywide.

Plan for the long term: Red Bike in Cincinnati received a two-year grant from Interact for Health, a regional health-focused foundation, to cover half the salary of an education and outreach manager, along with a program budget for printing, events, and ambassador support. Red Bike intends on absorbing the equity program into the operating budget going forward, while continuing to seek sponsor funding to support the equity activities.

CONSIDERATIONS



While we identified a broad spectrum of potential sources for funding equity programming in our survey of systems and operators, we also found that many systems had to explore multiple options, combine sources, and think creatively. Even then, most had trouble identifying ongoing funding.

Weigh cost-savings from reducing spending on ambassadors and community partners against the potential value of having consistent knowledgeable ambassadors on-staff (compared to seasonal ambassadors paid a small stipend, possibly with high turnover year to year) and having community partners dedicating staff time to promoting bike share (even enthusiastic community partners may not have the capacity to be effective bike share supporters without a budget for staff time).

RESOURCES

- Systems should transition from grants or single time cost allocations to ongoing expenditures for equity programming.
- Cities should require private operators to support equity programming as part of their contracts, incorporating it into the operating costs of the system. Cities could consider matching those funds to further expand equity programming.
- **Additional Reading:** [FHWA’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Funding Opportunities](#) details U.S. DOT funding streams that can be used for various purposes, including for bike share.

MEASURING AND EVALUATING

Efforts to measure the effectiveness of equity programming and funding should consider the system’s equity goals and metrics, along with considering the long term effects of equity work. Both quantitative and qualitative measures can be important to show the effectiveness of the additional funding, such as outreach or a discount program.

“When we asked system operators how they would spend a hypothetical \$100,000 on equity work, smaller systems allocated more to subsidize memberships costs, while larger systems were more likely to focus on education and helping people sign up.”



Adapted from the “National Scan of Bike Share Equity Programs” report, this is part of the “Breaking Barriers to Bike Share” resource series. Comprised of ten topics, this series looks at bike share through an equity lens and provides successful approaches and recommendations for stakeholders to implement.