

Cycles for Change

Reflections on the organization's achievements and impacts (2013-17)

Cycles for Change is a nonprofit organization in the Twin Cities whose mission is to build a diverse and empowered community of cyclists. In its recent work, Cycles for Change has focused on increasing leadership opportunities within a variety of programs that support people from under-represented community groups get access to a free bicycle, bike repair, and bike-related education for cyclists who are typically under-served by biking organizations, and building a network of individual and organizational leaders from communities underrepresented in cycling to influence policy and shape the built environment related to biking. Beginning in 2013, Cycles for Change received a 5-year contract from the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota to implement policy, systems, and environmental changes to improve the health of residents in the Twin Cities metropolitan area. This summary describes the changes that have occurred, both directly and indirectly, through these efforts.

According to people involved with Cycles for Change's work, the organization's efforts have resulted in a number of positive changes and wide-ranging impacts, which include:

- People feeling connected to and working together with others
- Stronger connections with other organizations
- Changes that demonstrate Cycles for Change's commitment to race, class, and gender equity
- Shifts in community members' perceptions of bicycling
- Youth developing new skills and growing as leaders
- Community members becoming more involved in understanding and influencing bike infrastructure decisions

The impacts described in this summary were identified during a Ripple Effect Mapping discussion with 14 project stakeholders in December 2017. Cycles for Change staff, volunteers, program recipients, and community members all participated in the discussion and had opportunities to describe Cycles for Change's achievements and to discuss the direct and indirect impacts of the organization's work.

The discussion focused on all aspects of Cycles for Change's work: **Slow Roll** (an organized ride at a slower pace intended to allow for inclusivity); **youth development activities**, including an apprentice program to develop bike mechanic skills; **Learn to Ride** (a program to educate people about riding bicycles); **Grease Rag** (a weekly event to provide a shop reserved for people who identify as femme, trans or women), and **Open Shop** (a program focused on giving people access to a place to repair their bicycles with support from trained mechanics). Participants at this session represented people who had had contact with some or all of these programs in a variety of capacities.

What is Ripple Effect Mapping?

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is an evaluation tool used to better understand the intended and unintended impacts of a project. It is particularly helpful when evaluating complex initiatives that both influence, and are impacted by, the community. REM is a facilitated discussion with project staff and local stakeholders that creates a visual "mind map" during the discussion, showing the linkages between program activities and resulting changes in the community.

This approach is intended to help demonstrate the project's impacts more holistically and to describe the degree to which different types of impacts are observed by project staff and community stakeholders.

Ripple Effects Mapping: Cycles for Change



BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Through a variety of capacities, Cycles for Change builds partnerships with other organizations who are doing similar work to create greater change, among and outside of bicycling organizations.

Building relationships across organizations and supporting other organizations and leaders and collectives who are not doing just bicycle and transportation justice work.



INCORPORATING RACE, CLASS AND GENDER EQUITY INTO WORK

Key to several other changes is the explicit and intentional incorporation of race, class and gender in the work that Cycles for Change does. This includes having challenging conversations, setting ground rules, and letting community members influence how this is done.

Cycles for Change has helped elevate racial equity in the bike world, helped push other organizations to deepen their commitment to equity.



EXAMINING THE DEFINITION OF HEALTH IN BICYCLING

Through discussions at Cycles for Change activities and events, participants are expanding their definition of health to include other types of wellness and mental health, incorporate intersectionality between race class and gender, and have equity in the mindset as well.

Marginalized communities are already doing physical labor/activity. Just not always for health reasons.



DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS

Through its work on youth development and its commitment to creating safe spaces, Cycles for Change gives opportunities for youth to learn about bicycling, develop relationships with bicycling organizations, and find a program that offers a potential to learn skills and a trade.

We see kids in the shop with their older siblings, working on bikes. The youth who have become apprentices work generally three years with us. When another youth comes in, there is youth on youth mentorship.

Creating safer spaces, pronoun use, etc. has an impact on youth. Youth expressed a wish that this was happening at other spaces. They are expecting that this should be the norm.



DEEPENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Cycles for Change is allowing people to connect with others in their communities, build community, and find community.

Connections made during Slow Roll are carrying over to form new friendships and opportunities with organizations.

Our shops are our homes. The infrastructure of our shops, our space is fostering community connections.



CREATING SAFE SPACES

In its programming, Cycles for Change strives to create safe spaces, where people of all identities are welcomed and affirmed. This is and has been an evolving process and has been seen as an integral part of the success and impacts in other dimensions of Cycles for Change's work.

A lot of support and coming to agreement about the spaces we want to see and practicing difficult conversations that come up.

Safer spaces are vital to encouraging mental wellness and lowering isolation.



CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF BICYCLISTS

Cycles for Change empowers many people who are left out of the cycling community to participate. Through its programs, it also increases visibility of bicycling as a part of daily life and viability of bicycling as a transportation option.

When people approach me about biking to work or the grocery store, I'm not seen as a health nut or doing it to save the world, I'm just doing it to get my groceries, I'm just a normal person. That can make a big difference in terms of how approachable people see you and see bikes.



INFLUENCING INFRASTRUCTURE

Through its programs, participants in Cycles for Change become aware of the importance for infrastructure in cycling, and discuss ways to influence bike improvements.

Slow roll allowed people to connect and talk about bike improvements in St. Paul.

Cycles
for Change

DISCUSSION THEMES

Deepening community connections

During the discussion, participants described a number of ways that Cycles for Change's work deepens community connections. Some of this related to how participants and others have built community within Cycles for Change; one participant mentioned that the shops "become like a home." Others mentioned that several programs are ways that people become more involved with Cycles for Change, develop friendships, and build connections. The diversity of people participating in programs from Cycles for Change was mentioned as a strength of the organization's efforts. Multiple participants pointed out that Cycles for Change is an inclusive space where people meet others from a variety of communities and interact with people with different backgrounds from their own. Participants saw this as one of the reasons that Cycles for Change has succeeded in building community connections.

Youth are gathering, learning together and working together across race, age, gender, sexual orientation, neighborhood and city lines.

Connections made during Slow Roll are carrying over to form new friendships and opportunities with organizations.

Making connections with other organizations

Some participants described ways that Cycles for Change is building connection with other organizations. Cycles for Change has collaborated with other organizations focused on active living in a variety of ways, such as sharing resources with other organizations doing work to make bicycling more accessible to youth. Others observed that through their work, Cycles for Change sets an example for other organizations to be more inclusive and explicitly address inequities related to race, class, and gender through their work.

Building relationships across organizations and supporting other organizations and leaders and collectives who are not doing just bicycle and transportation justice.

Cycles for Change has helped elevate racial equity/justice in the bike world, helped push other organizations to deepen their commitment to equity.

Influencing infrastructure

Participants noted that improving bicycle infrastructure is important for the other work that Cycles for Change does. They also described ways that Cycles for Change had increased awareness around ways infrastructure can be improved to support bicycling. For example, the Slow Roll program offered people a chance to talk about biking improvements in Saint Paul. While participants did not describe a direct connection between Cycles for Change's work and a change in bicycle infrastructure, participants saw the connection between the community-oriented work that Cycles for Change does and their ability to influence larger systems-level improvements and environmental changes.

Developing young leaders

Many participants described the positive impact that Cycles for Change has had on youth development. Across many programs, including the apprentice program, the Open Shop, the Slow Rolls, and Learn to Ride, youth development was mentioned. A commonly observed impact of this youth development work was the opportunity for youth to find employment, learn a trade, and develop skills they can use. Some participants noted that youth development was supported because of Cycles for Change's ability to create safe and inclusive spaces. One participant mentioned that youth appreciate having their identities recognized (e.g., asking participants their gender pronouns), and another participant mentioned that youth have a space to speak up and share their opinions and experiences at Cycles for Change.

The whole staff team is on board and strive to get youth opinions on decisions, apprentices are part of the team, they are closer to staff. They have real mentorship relationships, both professional and personal.

We see kids in the shop with their older siblings, working on bikes. The youth who have become apprentices work generally three years with us. When another youth comes in, there is youth on youth mentorship.

Creating safer spaces, pronoun use, etc. has an impact on youth. Youth expressed a wish that this was happening at other spaces. They are expecting that this should be the norm.

Changing perceptions of bicyclists

One of the changes mentioned most frequently was the impact of Cycles for Change in changing perceptions of bicyclists and bringing attention to concerns that may be barriers to biking. The participants described changing perceptions of bicyclists through activities done in partnership with community members and organizations to improve biking accessibility. This conversation was discussed in the context that representation of cyclists in the media typically portrays cyclists as male, white, and economically advantaged, which excludes many cyclists from being visible and included in the larger community of cyclists. One participant mentioned that changing perceptions of what many consider a cyclist to look like encourages non-cyclists to approach them with questions; another mentioned that Cycles for Change's work normalizes bicycles as a mode of transportation. The Learn to Ride program was specifically mentioned as a way that Cycles for Change changes public perceptions of bicyclists. Participants also described Cycles for Change considering the potential of negative perceptions, such as thinking about the perceptions that police may have of youth on bikes in the context of concerns about police brutality and how that may make some participants uncomfortable or impact safety.

When people approach me about biking to work or the grocery store, I'm not seen as a health nut or doing it to save the world, I'm just doing it to get my groceries, I'm just a normal person. That can make a big difference in terms of how approachable people see you and see bikes.

Not everybody is going to become a cyclist so you meet people where they are at. So it is thinking about multimodal transportation. People are coming to their transportation needs in many different ways.

Examining the definition of health in bicycling

Throughout the discussion, participants described health broadly, including mental health and overall wellness. Participants stressed the importance of Cycles for Change expanding their definition of health to go beyond physical health, especially when it pertains to the benefits of bicycling. One participant noted that not all people ride a bicycle for health reasons, and that the narrative that health is the primary motivation for cycling excludes some people. In addition, participants described that health equity, a central value of the work that Cycles for Change has done, requires asking the question, "What is health?"

Marginalized communities are already doing physical labor [or being active]. Just not always for health reasons.



Incorporating race, class, and gender into all aspects of the work

Throughout the entire discussion, participants spoke about ways that Cycles for Change thoughtfully considers the intersectionality between race, class, and gender. Participants observed that Cycles for Change's commitment to equity and explicit incorporation of intersectionality has pushed other organizations to reflect on their own practices and deepen their own commitments to equity. One participant noted that this is an expansion from their previous focus, which considered equity primarily through the lens of socioeconomic disparities. Another participant mentioned a goal for Cycles for Change is to be more inclusive to people from marginalized communities who already ride bikes but are excluded from the larger bike community. Multiple participants appreciated the intentionality that Cycles for Change brings to this work, and participants said this commitment and focus was necessary for the other changes to occur.

Intentionality in the work means being explicit about everything. You have to be conscious of everything. It is hard work. It's a teaching moment for everybody.

How do we make things inclusive and accessible for marginalized communities who are already biking but experience other barriers? How can Cycles for Change bring more people in?



Creating safe spaces

Several participants mentioned the importance of safe spaces created by Cycles for Change. When participants spoke of safe spaces, they described them as places where people with marginalized identities within the cycling community (e.g., LGBTQ identities, immigrants, people of color, Indigenous people) are respected and included, and where intolerance and discrimination are not allowed. Participants described multiple positive impacts of Cycles for Change creating safe spaces across multiple programs, including the Slow Roll, Grease Rag and Open Shop programs. Participants saw the intentionality on the part of Cycles for Change being part of what made safe spaces more accessible, and the impact of safe spaces on improving mental health. Safe spaces were also mentioned in connection to deepening community connections, as the definition and type of safe spaces are seen as part of the community, and not exclusively for Cycles for Change to define.

Being explicit about it, announcing that microaggressions aren't welcome at Slow Rolls.... A lot of support and coming to agreement about the spaces we want to see and practicing difficult conversations that come up.

Safer spaces are vital to encouraging mental wellness and lowering isolation.

CHALLENGES

Participants spoke to tensions in choosing whether to focus time and resources in doing more community-engaged work or engagement and advocacy work that more directly influences policy. There is an inherent challenge in making necessary choices in scope and focus when resources are too constrained to have a robust multi-pronged focus. Some participants who had a longer history with the organization pointed out that Cycles for Change had made a deliberate decision to focus on its programs that work directly with community members.

The organization has changed and maybe retracing the history of how we got here would help. Cycles for Change was started by members of Project Yellow Bike in order to do on-the-ground advocacy versus policy stuff. We know these things work, and these people are doing this, how do we bring them together?

Participants consistently highlighted that the changes mentioned were interdependent and that success in one area affected success in another. For example, Cycles for Change's explicit attention to race, class, and gender influences the success of the Slow Roll program, youth work, and other aspects of the their work. Participants were challenged to identify a temporal *order* of changes, but rather focused on the way that changes affect one of another.

Something that sticks out to me is the intentionality of all of these things and intentionality of it being all interconnected so making sure safe spaces are created so we can provide space for youth to create narrative to inform infrastructure.

The participants described some challenges in community engagement and in addressing barriers to getting communities of color to participate in programs like Slow Roll in greater numbers. Some of these barriers were institutional and structural racism, but also knowing that members of communities of color already do ride bicycles, finding ways to be inclusive is a continuing area of focus for Cycles for Change. The new location for the Minneapolis shop presented challenges in being more accessible to the White Earth community in Minneapolis, who had greater access at their previous location.

COMMENTS FROM THE ORGANIZATION

Cycles for Change staff, after reviewing comments from the map, felt it was important to provide additional context about some of the changes highlighted on the map. With regard to creating safer spaces, Cycles for Change staff expressed that their organization has grown in understanding and advancing equity. At the same time, they acknowledged that Cycles for Change has room to grow in its own journey toward equity toward race, class and gender; though they have supported other organizations along their journey.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The following questions may be helpful for Cycles for Change and its partners to consider as they work to address these challenges and plan their future work:

- Discussion participants had consistent views that the focus on race, class, and gender are important parts of the impact that Cycles for Change has had. As the organization transitions into new activities, how can it maintain this focus as it expands its work?
- How can Cycles for Change reach potential participants who may be hesitant to participate in bicycling organizations, or who may not have heard of them?
- A goal mentioned for Cycles for Change is to be more inclusive for people from marginalized communities (i.e., cyclists of color, LGBTQ cyclists, femme, trans or woman cyclists) who already ride bikes but are excluded from the larger bike community. Are there already existing spaces for cyclists where strategic partnerships may be beneficial, or is there a need to create space within its programs for people from marginalized communities who are experienced cyclists?
- As Cycles for Change moves forward, how can considerations about addressing infrastructure and policy be incorporated into its future work? What do expanded programs or strategic partnerships with organizations who have similar visions but do work in those sectors look like?
- What would expansion of advocacy for health equity in biking look like in the future?

APPENDIX: Project impacts identified by discussion participants

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF BICYCLISTS

Community members who are not participants at events in the "bike world" show up for Slow Roll. The community is changing.

Cycles for Change inviting other people who aren't typically seen as "bike community."

The bike equity scorecard is now out. It was developed by the community, for the community. Specifically, it holds space for women, the LGBT community, and others.

Making connections from bicycling to other issues like police brutality. Thinking about kids on bikes and how they are perceived by police. Those things are really connected to everything we do and are part of our community. So it is important we talk and support those other issues.

Sometimes people just want to talk about biking, but it doesn't always work that way. They don't want to talk about how some neighborhoods don't have good infrastructure for a reason; they don't want to talk about gentrification. They just want to talk about how bikes are fun and cool. A lot of times those people are the gatekeepers and have a lot of money and power.

Learn to Ride

It's incredible to watch and support people in overcoming the barrier of not knowing how to ride.

Learn to Ride is making more of an effort in partnering with communities. Some of these include the Seward and Cedar Riverside areas, as well as reaching out to women.

A Bike-a-thon was held on the West Side, a community of people not typically seen as bikers. It was a great partnership. We did a ride and came back and celebrated in the community.

I think a lot of nonprofits are feeling the pressure to be inclusive and hiring marginalized folks who don't necessarily get jobs. In spaces we were not previously a part of. So narrative is changing. Invited to the table.

Increase in access and opportunity both to bikes and advocacy-empowering individuals to advocate for bikes and/or their community.

We are creating a new narrative about bicycling.

Not everybody is going to become a cyclist, so you meet people where they are at. So it is thinking about multimodal transportation. People are coming to their transportation needs in many different ways.

Normalizing bicycles as a legitimate mode of transportation.

When people approach me about biking to work or the grocery store, I'm not seen as a health nut or doing it to save the world, I'm just doing it to get my groceries. I'm just a normal person. That can make a big difference in terms of how approachable people see you and see bikes.

Building community connections changes the narrative. In some circles, bicycling is seen as a "hippie dippy millennial" activity, but in immigrant communities or homeless communities, biking is seen very differently. So these community connections are changing that narrative.

The changing narrative is the reality that the youth will grow up with.

INCORPORATING RACE, CLASS AND GENDER EQUITY INTO WORK

Cycles for Change used to have more of a focus on socioeconomic disparities.

How do we make things inclusive and accessible for marginalized communities who are already biking, but experience other barriers? How can Cycles for Change bring more people in?

Intentionality in the work means being explicit about everything. You have to be conscious of everything. It is hard work. It's a teaching moment for everybody.



CREATING SAFE SPACES

Safe spaces promote better mental health.

Continually working to improve safe spaces and make them more inclusive.

Community ownership over what safe spaces are. It isn't just Cycles for Change staff.

Intentionality in the work and making sure it is all interconnected.

Intentionality has been very clear in the stuff I have done. Like the Slow Rolls and focus on getting to know the people around you and that being the focus.

Being explicit about it, announcing that microaggressions aren't welcome at Slow Rolls, etc. A lot of support and coming to agreement about the spaces we want to see and practicing difficult conversations that come up.

Safer spaces are vital to encouraging mental wellness and lowering isolation.

Creating safer spaces, pronoun use, etc. has an impact on youth. Youth expressed a wish that this was happening at other spaces. They are expecting that this should be the norm.

With our new shop's location, we are not quite as accessible to the community in Little Earth as our old shop and our shop was a resource for that community.

Cycles for Change has helped elevate racial equity/justice in the bike world, helped push other organizations to deepen their commitment to equity.



DEEPENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Connections made during Slow Roll are carrying over to form new friendships and opportunities with organizations.

Many different participants become involved in Cycles for Change through different avenues (Slow Roll, Open Shop, etc.) and become involved in other programs. A lot of participants return to help new participants.

Step Up and Right Track partnerships. Teens find out about Cycles for Change that way, also through Open Shop. They can hang out there in the summer and be loud. They find out about programming that way, also through siblings and friends who talk up the program.

Our shops are our homes. The infrastructure of our shops, our space is fostering community connections.

Youth were involved in the remodel of the St. Paul shop.



BUILDING CONNECTIONS WITH OTHER ORGANIZATIONS

Sharing resources with other youth bike organizations.

Building relationships across organizations and supporting other organizations and leaders and collectives who are not doing just bicycle and transportation justice.

Organizations sharing information and resources to increase access to biking.

Having better access to my community has deepened my connection to my space.

Being intentional about who we are connecting with. Thinking about race, class, and gender; creating real intentional partnerships.

An Equity Council addressing interconnected issues. Through the Equity Council, we were able to think about the scorecard that is currently being worked out.

Youth are gathering, learning together, and working together across race, age, gender, sexual orientation, and neighborhood and city lines.

Exposure to a variety of communities; interactions across ages, races, origins, and interests; and opening conversations.



INFLUENCING INFRASTRUCTURE

Being made aware of varied opportunities to change bicycling infrastructure.

Importance of infrastructure to the rest of the work that Cycles for Change does.

Slow Roll allowed people to connect and talk about bike improvements in St. Paul.



EXAMINING THE DEFINITION OF HEALTH IN BICYCLING

What is health?

Obtaining health equity is just one leg of a bigger beast related/overlapping with other interests/pushes.

Marginalized communities are already doing physical labor/activity. Just not always for health reasons.



DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS

We see kids in the shop with their older siblings, working on bikes. The youth who have become apprentices work generally three years with us. When another youth comes in, there is youth on youth mentorship.

Employment. We have two staff who were just hired this fall and were both apprentices. One of our apprentices is now studying to be a mechanic and working at an auto dealership.

A lot of youth development programs for high school students ask for time without compensation, but the apprentice program allows youth to develop job skills. This is youth development focused on a job, instead of keeping them separate.

Youth love what they do. They find a lot of gratification, taking pride in their skills and then teaching them to others in the shop.

Building connections with youth and supporting them in growing as leaders.

We have had youth attend a Youth Bike Summit for the past several years.

The whole staff team is on board and strives to get youth opinions on decisions. Apprentices are part of the team; they are closer to staff. They have real mentorship relationships, both professional and personal.

Youth (age 14-20) speaking up, sharing their experiences and opinions at Cycles for Change, at home and at school.

Youth got to meet apprentices during Slow Roll, learning about multiple opportunities to participate in Cycles for Change.

Introducing youth to bikes, group rides, the biking industry, racial equity, bike groups, and opportunities for planning.

Physicality and the active aspect of apprenticeship.