



# Bicycle Libraries

## Frequently Asked Questions



### What are bicycle libraries?

Bicycle libraries are programs that allow people to borrow bicycles and related equipment (e.g., locks and helmets), usually for free or for a small cost. People can go to a specific site, check out a bicycle, and return it after use. These programs are a flexible tool that can be operated by public agencies, private organizations, community non-profits, or partnerships with some combination of the three. Many existing bicycle libraries in the Midwest operate out of public libraries with support from bicycle-related community organizations. Most programs are free to anyone with a library card.

Bicycle libraries provide an affordable active transportation amenity that benefits all residents, particularly those who have limited or unsafe access to transportation. These programs can help communities increase multimodal transportation access, encourage mode shift, increase economic activity, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve health outcomes. For communities developing a bicycle library program, it is important to consider the program's purpose, intended audience, and goals early in the development process.

### Who might operate a bicycle library?

Bicycle libraries are commonly operated by public libraries or bicycle-related community organizations. However, there are numerous other options including:

- » **Nonprofit Organizations** (e.g. bicycle-related, trail, faith-based, or age-related community organizations).
- » **Public Agencies** (e.g. public library, health department, parks and recreation department, transit authority, public university, veterans administration, housing authority).
- » **Private Organizations** (e.g. bike shop, tourism-related businesses, bike-share or e-scooter companies, workplaces).

Bicycle library programs are often operated by two or more organizations in partnership. The arrangement should consider partners that have similar goals and complementary skills and resources.

## What are important considerations when setting up a bicycle library?

### Leadership

Building an inclusive and accessible bicycle library starts with inclusive leadership. Put together a diverse project team and seek input from the community to guide the process from planning to implementation.

### Various Body Types and Abilities

Bicycle libraries should include equipment that meets the needs of people of all ages, heights, sizes, and abilities. Provide adaptive bicycle options like adult tricycles, hand tricycles, and tandem bicycles for people with mobility or vision-related disabilities.

### Various Types of Trips

People may check out bicycles for recreational or transportation reasons; they may be riding alone or with children. Consider the types of trips that people might be making and provide equipment to support those purposes; for example, cargo racks, trailers, baskets, electric bicycles, etc.

### Maintenance

All of the bicycles in the library will require maintenance and tune-ups. Identify community partners such as bicycle co-ops or youth programs to assist with basic maintenance and repair. Develop a process that includes how to communicate basic maintenance information to customers. Consider refurbishing donated bikes when building your fleet.

### Location and Access

Bicycle libraries should be conveniently located near transit options and could be particularly effective in under-resourced neighborhoods or areas with limited access to transportation options. Keep visibility, weather exposure, competing curbside uses, and street maintenance in mind when considering a location and space for the bike library. Consider whether the host location is open at times when people are most likely to need a bike.



The Chillicothe & Ross County Library Book-a-Bike program provides options such as adaptive bikes and bike trailers.

### Liability and Insurance

Before developing a bicycle library program, consult with legal counsel for advice. Below are some actions that bicycle library operators can discuss with their legal counsel:

- » Check state laws to ensure compliance with all requirements based on the type of organization that is operating the bicycle library (e.g., public agency, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, or private company).
- » Require a liability waiver to check out bicycles and equipment.
- » Document routine safety checks.
- » Post legal requirements somewhere clearly (e.g., helmet requirements, etc.).
- » Post “use at your own risk” stickers clearly on all bicycles and equipment.
- » Talk to your insurance provider about whether the bicycle library will increase your organization’s liability, or reach out to a general/business liability insurance provider.
- » Incorporate membership terms that preclude members from taking legal action against the organization.
- » Conduct background checks on any staff or volunteers that may be interacting with children as part of the program.
- » Develop a Memorandum of Understanding with host site and partners to lay out responsibilities and agreed-upon terms.



## Fee Structure

The fee structure of a bicycle library will depend on the type of organization operating the program and the level of subsidization available. Bicycle libraries are often free but may be associated with a registration process or membership (e.g., library card). In instances where private companies or non-profit organizations are operating the program, they may charge a fee to access the library. In this case, consider working with partners to provide subsidies or special pricing for customers with low incomes.

## Marketing and Branding

Develop program branding and use online and print marketing campaigns to maximize exposure to your target audience. Provide accessible and easy to understand information in all appropriate languages. Look for community leaders to champion the program and opportunities to incentivize their participation. Consider offering programming and events to help people learn how to safely use active transportation.



Marketing materials from the Go Lorain Bike Share

## Theft and Security

Creating accountability chains can reduce theft of bikes and equipment. Look for partners who will allow bicycle library access to be associated with their membership (e.g., library card or bicycle co-op membership) or create a new membership process. Having customers register with personal information when signing out a bike can also discourage theft.

Consider safety and personal security when selecting a location for the library; for example, select a location with good lighting and in a well-traveled area.

## How can bicycle libraries advance equity?

To center equity in bicycle library program development, consider the following questions:

- » **Diverse leadership** – How will your leadership team reflect the diversity of your community (e.g., races, ethnicities, genders, ages, physical abilities, sexual orientations, income levels, etc.)?
- » **Community input** – What opportunities will community members have to provide feedback in establishing the program? How will the program be changed based on community input?
- » **Multimodal access** – Where will bicycles be located so that community members can walk or take transit to access them?
- » **Hours of operation** – What hours of operation will best support community residents? How can you make the bicycle library accessible for people who want to rent a bike to get to a second or third shift job?
- » **Cost** – How will you ensure that multiple payment options (e.g., cash, credit card) will be offered for any costs to rent equipment?
- » **Fees** – Will customers be subject to overage fees or damage fees? How will this information be clearly communicated during the rental process?







An event offers free helmets to promote a bicycle library.

- » **Rental period** – For how long will people be able to rent bicycles and equipment? Will it be hourly, daily, weekly, monthly, or for longer periods?
- » **Inclusive marketing materials** – How will diverse populations be represented in your marketing materials? How will program materials be made accessible to speakers of other languages and people with disabilities?
- » **Liability** – How will the program make it clear to customers what their liability is if something happens to the equipment?

## How can we measure impact?

Measure success according to the program's goals and context. A free public program serving families with low incomes will have different goals than a private program intended for tourists. Identify metrics that can be feasibly collected on an annual basis. Use opportunities like registration or rental return to collect data. To get quick input from customers, distribute short surveys (five questions or less) online or in person. For in-depth qualitative feedback, consider tools like interviews and focus groups.

Below are some example evaluation metrics:

### Health

**Calories burned** – Install GPS units or odometers on each of the bicycles. Use the number of miles traveled and multiply by 51 to calculate the average number of calories burned by bike users.

### Transportation

**Number of trips** – Use rental forms to keep track of the number of bicycles checked out over the year.

### Economic Development

**Number of uses by non-residents** – Include a question about geography (e.g. address, city, county, ZIP code, etc.) in the registration process. Count the number of uses by people who live outside of the community over the year.

### Environment

**Carbon emissions avoided (pounds)** – Many bicycle library trips will replace a personal vehicle trip. Use GPS units or odometers to measure the number of miles traveled by bicycles in the fleet. During checkout, ask whether this trip replaces a vehicle trip. If yes, multiply the number of miles of the trip by 0.88 pounds to calculate avoided emissions.

### Equity

**Number of rental locations in focus neighborhood(s)** – Track the number of rental locations in focus areas like under-resourced neighborhoods, areas facing gentrification, [Opportunity Zones](#), or rural communities.

## Other metrics to consider:

- » Distance traveled.
- » Number of businesses visited.
- » Number of car trips replaced.
- » Number of adaptive bicycle uses.
- » Number of unique program users.



## Where are bicycle libraries currently being operated?

For more information and inspiration about how your community can develop a bicycle library, check out these programs in the Midwest:

- » Bicycle Rental Program – Lorain Public Library System and Lorain County Community Action Agency, Lorain, OH.
  - <https://www.lorainpubliclibrary.org/using-the-library/non-traditional-items-available>.
  - [https://www.lccaa.net/programs/youth-services/bike\\_shop](https://www.lccaa.net/programs/youth-services/bike_shop).
- » Book-a-Bike – Athens County Public Library, Athens, OH. <https://www.myacpl.org/bikes/>.
- » Book-a-Bike – Chillicothe & Ross County Public Library, Chillicothe, OH. <https://www.crcpl.org/beyondbooks/bikes/>.
- » Book-a-Bike - Meigs County District Public Library, Pomwery and Middleport, OH. <https://www.meigs.lib.oh.us/content/book-bike>.
- » Richwood Rides – Richwood and North Union Public Library, Richwood, OH. <https://richwoodlibrary.org/bikes>.
- » Summit Bike Share – Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition, Akron, OH and Barberton, OH
  - <http://summitshare.org/>.
  - [https://www.cleveland.com/akron/2018/05/summit\\_and\\_barberton\\_bike\\_shar.html](https://www.cleveland.com/akron/2018/05/summit_and_barberton_bike_shar.html).
- » Bicycle Rental – Royal Park Hotel, Rochester, MI. <https://www.royalparkhotel.net/rochester-bike-rental.htm>.
- » KDL Cruisers – Kent District Library, Comstock Park, MI. <https://kdl.org/services/kdl-cruisers/>.
- » Bicycle Library – Iowa City Bike Library, Iowa City, IO. <https://www.icbikelibrary.org/how-checkout-works.html>.
- » Bike Bethlehem – Bethlehem Area Public Library, Bethlehem, PA. <https://www.bapl.org/bike-bethlehem-is-back-at-bapl/>.

## Where can I find more information?

- » International Bicycle Fund Bicycle Libraries Page. <https://www.ibike.org/encouragement/community/details.htm>.
- » Lessons on Bike Share Equity – ITE. [https://ppms.trec.pdx.edu/media/project\\_files/ITE\\_Journal\\_February\\_2018\\_Breaking\\_Barriers\\_to\\_Bike\\_Share\\_Lessons\\_on\\_Bike\\_Share\\_Equity.pdf](https://ppms.trec.pdx.edu/media/project_files/ITE_Journal_February_2018_Breaking_Barriers_to_Bike_Share_Lessons_on_Bike_Share_Equity.pdf).
- » Shared Mobility Funding Strategies - Shared-Use Mobility Center. [https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/learning\\_module/shared-mobility-funding-strategies/](https://learn.sharedusemobilitycenter.org/learning_module/shared-mobility-funding-strategies/)
- » For questions, reach out to [activelivinghelp@tooledesign.com](mailto:activelivinghelp@tooledesign.com).

