

Create A Commuter

Portland, Oregon

Grantee: TriMet

Subrecipient: Community Cycling Center

Job-access challenge – How to fill a gap in the local transit system for individuals without cars.

Located in Portland, Oregon, the Community Cycling Center operates multiple programs designed to support and promote bicycle use among children and adults. The Create A Commuter project uses Job Access and Reverse Commute (JARC) funds to make bicycles available to low-income individuals for their work trips.

Meeting the challenge

The Create A Commuter program gives bicycles to individuals who are referred by partner social services agencies. The sturdy bicycles are designed to take wear and tear and are equipped with alloy wheels, fenders, and a cargo rack to facilitate commuting. Bicycles are made available at no charge to recipients. In addition to the bicycle, program participants receive safety equipment, including a helmet, lock, air pump, and patch kit. Individuals with children are eligible to receive a trailer, along with related training. Each bicycle comes with a three-month warranty.

CAC provides a five-hour training session to bicycle recipients. The training session teaches new bicycle users the basics of safe riding, including

- How to fix a flat
- How to plan a safe route (using bicycle route maps)
- Safe riding
- Safety checks
- Basic diagnostics

In addition, the training session shows participants how to use the bicycle on TriMet, Portland's transit system, thus allowing them to expand the geographic range for their work trip. TriMet's buses and light rail vehicles can accommodate bicycles, and the Create a Commuter program has a sample bus bicycle rack that participants can practice using.

Planning and coordination

The Community Cycling Center works with partner human service agencies that recruit, screen, and refer candidates to the program. Bicycle recipients have to be at least 18 years old, not own a car, demonstrate financial need, and show a need for transportation.

The center did not have established relationships with its current partner organizations before the program started. Instead, the center initially identified its

working partners by “cold-calling” agencies. Over time, these contacts have evolved into strong relationships between the center and the human service agencies.

As a 501(c)(3) organization, the Community Cycling Center has a board of directors whose members bring a range of skills to the table. The board’s president runs a retail bicycle shop; other members include an attorney, an accountant, and citizens with public sector experience. The involvement of individuals with these skills and connections has helped the program succeed.

Performance and evaluation

Program costs are \$400 per bicycle. The cost breakdown is \$365 for equipment and labor and \$35 for program administration. Costs include 3–5 hours of mechanic labor to make each bicycle roadworthy.

The Community Cycling Center receives JARC funding as a subrecipient to TriMet and received its fifth year of JARC funding through TriMet’s FY 2006 budget. Annual funding for the program is approximately \$160,000. In Year 4 of the program, CAC distributed 370 bicycles and 24 trailers. About 800 people are currently on the program’s waiting list.

CCC conducts a follow-up survey with participants three months after they receive the bicycles. Based on the surveys, CAC estimates that about 46% of recipients make 10 or more bicycle trips per week and 35% make six trips or more per week. All participants are verified as having a low level of income.

Sustainability

Community Cycling Center managers continue to pursue strategies to make the Create A Commuter program sustainable. They are working to develop enthusiasm for their programs throughout the greater Portland area and specifically within the funding community. As a nonprofit, the center expects to continue its ongoing fund-raising activities and seek out other grant opportunities.

In addition, the Create A Commuter program is structured to minimize costs and maximize nontraditional revenue opportunities. The cycling center receives its bicycles through donations and allocates them throughout its various programs. Volunteers clean the bicycles and perform some basic maintenance before turning them over to the paid mechanics for more extensive repairs. In addition, the center recycles as much as possible and sells off the parts of bicycles it cannot use as scrap metal or for “bike art.” Finally, the center includes a retail store that generates sales to help subsidize all the organization’s programs.

Elements of success

The Create A Commuter program is one of the few JARC-supported services that focuses on bicycle transportation. Some of the program’s success can be attributed to its location in Portland, which is considered to be one of the most bicycle-friendly cities in the United States. In Portland, bicycling is a choice; it does not mean that the rider is poor or has lost his or her license.

Bicycles help fill in the gaps in the TriMet system for individuals without cars. The Create A Commuter program makes participants more autonomous and empowers them to get where they need to go. The program also lets the bicycle recipients take responsibility for getting to their destinations on time (and even provides training on practical elements such as the importance of bringing a change of clothing after biking to a job interview). Although the focus is on commuting, the program acknowledges the need to make discretionary trips and assumes that people will use the bicycles for commuting and for personal travel.

Program planners recognize the importance of good communication throughout the process. They work closely with the referring organizations and stay in touch with individuals once they have been referred. At the same time, the Community Cycling Center recognizes that its expertise is in bicycles and community education, and not in human services, and allows its partner agencies to do their job.

CCC also takes a programmatic approach to its services. All elements of the organization work together and support one another. To help ensure good internal communication, the organization added a bicycle repair team facilitator to serve as a liaison between the mechanics and all other CCC programs.



“The bike has given me the ability to get to and from work every day reliably. The city is more accessible.”

– Andrea C.
