



# **NORTH AMERICAN TRAFFIC GARDENS: A 2023 FINDINGS SUMMARY REPORT**

Research conducted by Melissa Bopp, PhD in  
collaboration with Discover Traffic Gardens.



## Overview

During the 2023 summer, the Physical Activity and Public Health Laboratory, housed within the Kinesiology department at Penn State, conducted a survey with traffic garden managers to understand how traffic gardens are operated and used in different communities. The information from this survey will help future development of training programs for advocacy of bicycle education. Each traffic garden is different in its own way, so this survey's goal was to understand the various aspects of each traffic garden and how they promote their facility's use.

### ***What is a traffic garden?***

*A traffic garden is a network of scaled-down streets featuring traffic elements and pavement markings, providing a motor vehicle-free place to learn biking skills, receive roadway safety lessons and to play. These installations, known by various other names also such as Safety Town, Safety Village, and Traffic Playgrounds, are located in many communities around in the U.S., and Canada.*



Source: Discover Traffic Gardens

## Methods

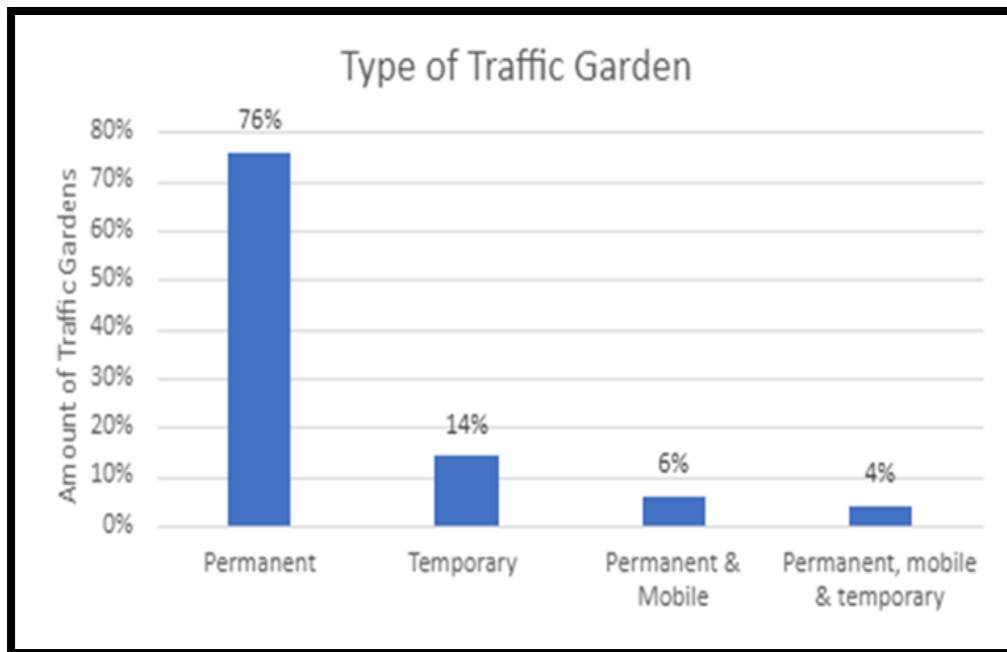
Traffic garden representatives were invited to take an online survey which asked questions such as:

- The type of traffic garden each representative was responding for
- Where their traffic garden is based
- What kind of equipment is based in each traffic garden
- Who is overseeing the facility
- Who is staffed in the facility and how often they work
- What year the planning of the traffic garden started and when it actually opened
- The types of programs offered
- If the facility has a written curriculum and what kind
- Accessibility to the facility & who primarily uses the facility
- The type of devices used in the facility

Data from 50 traffic gardens, out of 110 invited facilities across North America, are represented in this dataset. Some respondents represented single facilities, while others represented multiple facilities. These completed responses were used for analysis. Frequencies and percentages describe the data.

## Results

- 28% of respondents represented 1 Traffic Garden.
- 38% of respondents represented 2-4 Traffic Gardens.
- 34% of respondents represented 7-10 Traffic Gardens.



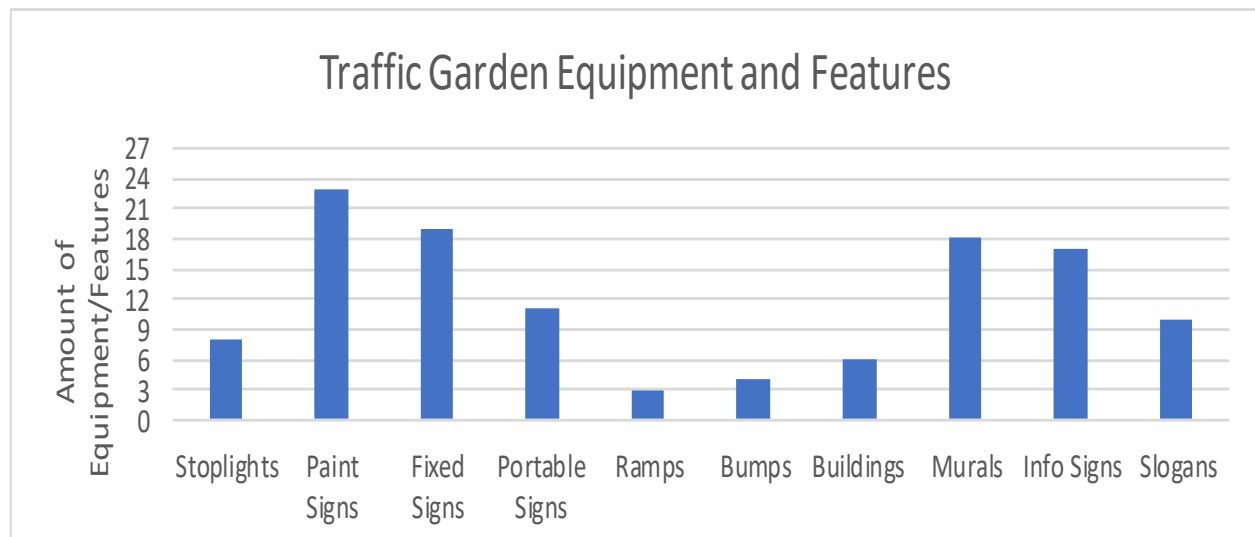
### Types of Traffic Gardens

Permanent: A fixed space that has a constant location

Mobile: A garden assembled into a portable kit to take around the community

Temporary: A short-life garden that lives on a surface for a brief duration (e.g. a few hours to a few months)

- 76% of the facilities were permanent installations while 14% of the facilities were temporary in nature.
- The most common equipment at these facilities were painted traffic signs and fixed traffic signs while the least common equipment were bumps and ramps.



## Traffic Garden Oversight and Staffing

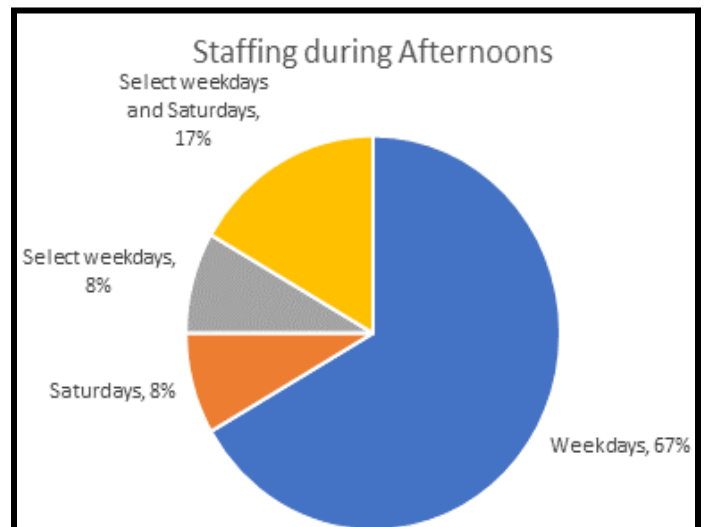
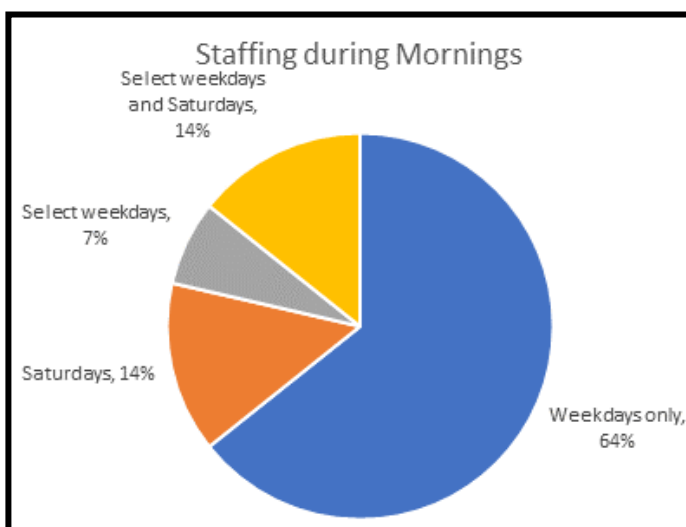
Participants reported a variety of partners that participated in several aspects of the planning, installation and daily operation of the traffic gardens. Staffing at traffic gardens was comprised of volunteers, dedicated full- and part-time as well as other staff that had traffic garden duties as a part of their job responsibilities.

Partners Involved in Planning, Installation and Route Operations (number reporting of 50)			
	Planning	Installation	Routine Operations
Local Government	17	12	10
County Government	12	9	5
School	3	14	18
Non-Profit Organization	25	17	10
Service Organization	1		1
Business	2	1	
Volunteers	10	8	1

Staffing for Supervision, Programming and Routine Operations (number reporting of 50)			
	Supervision	Programming	Routine Operations
Volunteers Only	3	7	
Dedicated Part Time Staff	1	4	1
Other Part Time Staff	2	3	1
Dedicated Full Time Staff	5	5	3
Other Full Time Staff	7	7	5
Other	4	13	5

- 31% of respondents report that prior to establishing the facility they installed a temporary traffic garden.
- 44% report that their facility is staffed in some capacity.

### Typical Staffing Schedules at Traffic Gardens



## Programming and Activities at Traffic Gardens

- Programming was extensive and varied at traffic gardens, including many options to reach different populations
- Among traffic garden programs, representatives reported overwhelmingly offering 'free play' most often, and celebrations the least



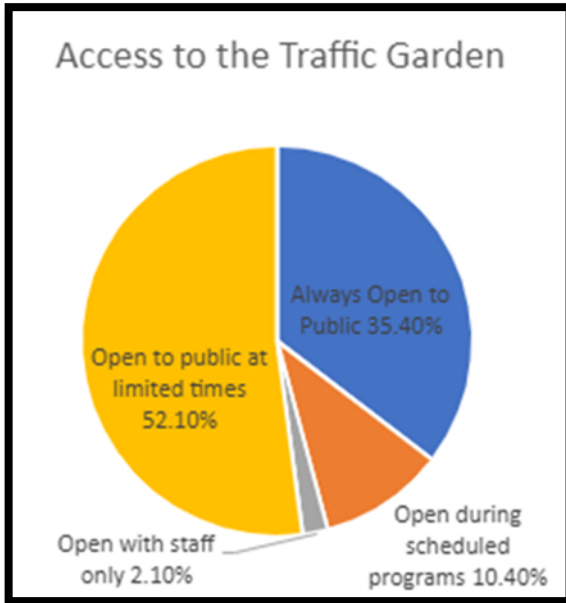
56% of respondents started planning for traffic garden within the last 5 years.

84% of respondents opened their traffic garden in the last 4 years.

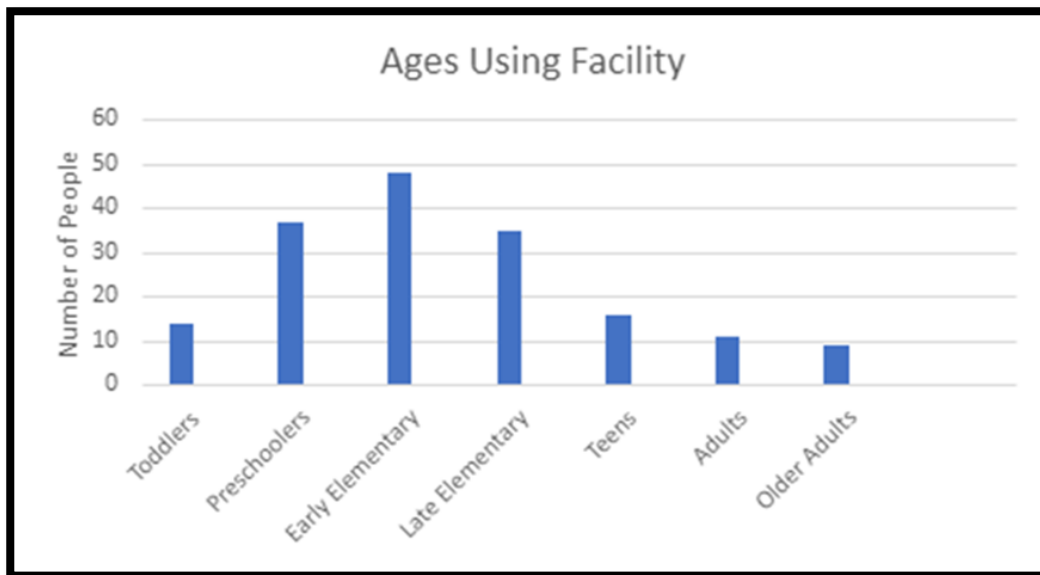
## Curriculum

- 59.2% of respondents reported having set written curriculum teaching bicycle safety at their facility.
- 62.1% of respondents report there is a self-created curriculum to teach bicycle safety at their facility.
- 37.9% of respondents report they got their curriculum from another source to teach bicycle safety at their facility.

# Access

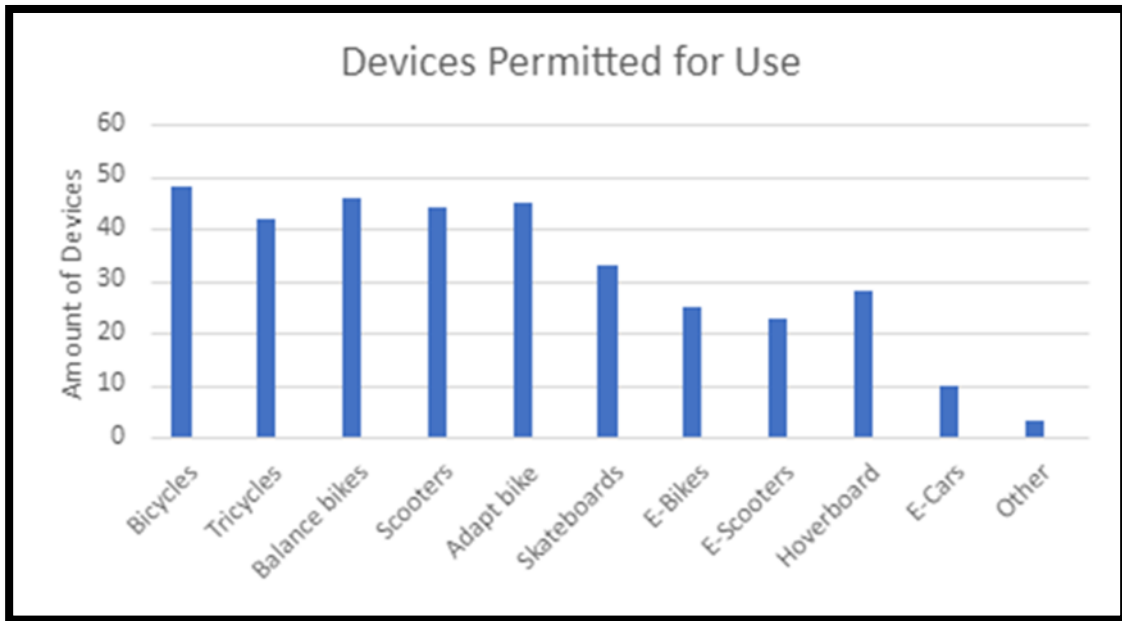


A little more than half of the facilities were open to the public at limited times while some facilities were always open to the public.

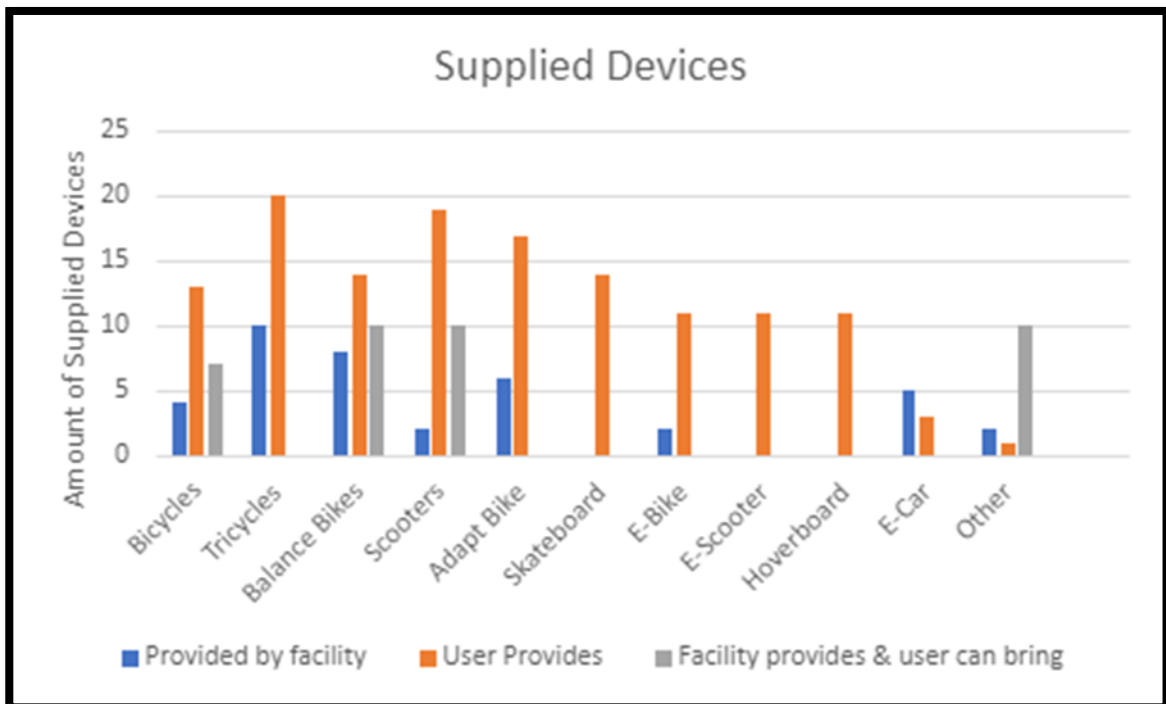


Traffic gardens primarily targeted early elementary children, with the least focus on older adults

## Devices Permitted in Traffic Gardens



Bicycles, balance bikes, and adaptive bikes were the most common devices permitted for use while electric cars were the least permitted. Balance bikes, tricycles, and bicycles were the most commonly supplied devices.



## **Key Takeaways**

- This report provides insight on how traffic gardens operate and are used across the country.
- The findings can inform community organizations, stakeholders, and policy makers on future development of bicycle education programs.
- The present understandings from this report can help promote targeted training programs to encourage and advocate for biking in communities.

Overall, traffic gardens are represented throughout North America. The majority of them offer a range of programs, have equipment and devices available for use, and have available staff required for efficient operation and management. Traffic gardens serve as a resource to the communities that they serve and can be an asset to encourage the development and practice of bicycling skills and enjoyment for all.

### **A Message from the Investigators**

We hope these results allow for the further development of these operations and the promotion of bicycle education. It is exciting to see more involvement of these facilities and the advocacy for biking among children and surrounding communities. We appreciate the partnership of Fionnuala Quinn at Discover Traffic Gardens and Dr. Ellen Rodgers at George Mason University in the development and administration of the survey and the interpretation of the findings.

### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to the participants who offered candid responses to the survey. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Melissa Bopp ([mjb73@psu.edu](mailto:mjb73@psu.edu)). This report can be [accessed on our lab website](#).