



Source: City of Detroit

Quick-Build Projects Support Safe, Active Travel for Youth and Families

SafeRoutes
National Center for Safe Routes to School



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Introduction

Communities across the country are strategically using quick-build projects to improve conditions for walking and biking. Quick-build projects use durable, low-cost materials and accelerated implementation methods to address immediate safety and mobility needs. These projects can be installed quickly and provide opportunities to test design concepts, collect community feedback, and build local support before investing in permanent infrastructure. Based on project results and community input, improvements may be considered permanent, modified, or used to inform future capital investments. Materials such as paint, delineator posts, concrete wheel stops, and other modular treatments offer flexible, cost-effective ways to improve safety for active transportation in a variety of settings.^{1, 2}

Building on this trend, the National Center for Safe Routes to School (National Center) and General Motors (GM) partnered to offer mini-grants to local governments and organizations implementing quick-build projects that benefit children and families walking and biking in their communities. Between 2022 and 2026, the National Center awarded \$10,000 mini-grants to 11 communities:

- Akron, Ohio
- Atlanta, Georgia, which completed two projects during separate funding cycles
- Cincinnati, Ohio
- Detroit, Michigan
- El Paso, Texas
- Macon-Bibb County, Georgia
- Milwaukee, Wisconsin
- Pueblo of Jemez, New Mexico
- Red Bank, New Jersey
- Wallace County, Kansas
- Winterville, North Carolina

The projects aimed to create dedicated space for walking and biking separated from motor vehicles, slow traffic speeds, or both. The grants supported 12 quick-build projects that improved safety for children walking and biking near schools, parks, libraries, and community recreation centers in rural, suburban, and urban settings.



Artist and student fist bump during the mural painting session in Detroit. Source: Elonte Davis

Common themes

The National Center identified eight themes across the first 12 projects. Community partners were invited to review and edit the themes to fit their experiences. The finalized set of themes can be used to inform decision-making and process when considering a quick-build project. The eight themes are:

- 1 Developing needed safety improvements in areas with elevated crash risk
- 2 Supporting community mobility for children and families
- 3 Collaborating with partners
- 4 Testing new materials
- 5 Using art to build community support and reflect community pride
- 6 Stimulating public dialogue about roadwaysafety
- 7 Engaging youth as partners in project design and installation
- 8 Leveraging quick-build projects to catalyze additional improvements



Key connection point between school and other destinations received quick-build treatments in Winterville. *Source: Katherine Dale*

This brief provides information and examples to help local communities and organizations draw inspiration, determine whether a quick-build projects is a good fit, and identify ways to strengthen project planning and implementation. The following sections summarize each theme and provide examples from nine of the quick-build projects. Projects in El Paso, Texas; Wallace County, Kansas; and Atlanta, Georgia's second funding cycle are not included because those communities were still summarizing their results during the writing of this resource.

Pueblo of Jemez Planning Development and Transportation Department (PDTD) secured a grant for solar-powered speed radars and feedback displays after their quick-build project. *Source: PDTD*





Curb extensions and removal of a parking place support students on their route between school and after-school care in Cincinnati. *Source: City of Cincinnati*

Developing needed safety improvements in areas with elevated crash risk

Project teams used multiple factors to identify locations where a quick-build project had the potential to reduce crash and injury risk, especially for children walking and biking and their families. These factors included the number of children walking in the area, motor vehicle speeds and traffic volumes, the absence of pedestrian crossing supports, household income, and proximity to the community's high injury network the subset of streets where a disproportionate share of serious and fatal crashes occurs.

Cincinnati, Ohio

Most students at Hays-Porter Elementary school walk to Lincoln Recreation Center for its afterschool program. The walking route required students to cross a street identified as part of Cincinnati's high injury network.

The city had planned a full street redesign, but largescale projects take time complete, and the city wanted to start taking steps to improve safety right away. The urgent safety need, neighborhood poverty levels, and the school's designation as one of the city's highest priorities in its Safe Routes to School Vision Zero Action Plan led the project team to select this location for quick-build improvements. The quick-build improvements were chosen to help improve visibility and slow vehicles at the crossing between the school and recreation center.³

Macon-Bibb County, Georgia

Macon-Bibb County's quick-build plan focused on transforming conditions along Anthony Road near Ingram-Pye Elementary School by simplifying two crossings, slowing speeds, and improving visibility. The project team used a risk-based approach to identify the location with assistance from geospatial artificial intelligence software, which incorporates vehicle counts and speeds, land use patterns, and a collision index.

The county also considered neighborhood poverty levels and the capacity of U Create Macon, a local youth-focused organization, to engage students and promote bicycle safety skills in the area.

A comparison of crash risk before and after the project revealed substantial reductions within the treatment area. "Those wins indicate to us that the approach was correct and that we were able to make substantial change with a little bit of funding," said Weston Stroud, Macon-Bibb County Traffic Safety Manager.⁴

Preparing delineators for installation at the project site in Macon-Bibb County. *Source: Charise Stephens*





The City of Akron included vertical delineators, detectible warnings, and directional bar tiles in its project. *Source: City of Akron*

Supporting community mobility for children and families

Quick-build projects offer communities a valuable way to identify improvements that support mobility for children and families. Community mobility refers to how safely and easily residents can travel between destinations. Quick-build projects that support walking and biking can strengthen connections to schools, workplaces, healthcare, local businesses, social opportunities, and other important community resources.

Akron, Ohio

Akron used its mini-grant to improve safety at a school crossing near Mason Community Learning Center. The project also provided an opportunity to address the needs of community members with vision disabilities. As part of the project, the city installed vertical delineators, detectible warnings, and directional bar tiles at the crossing and planned to evaluate the treatments to gain further insights into creating a connected community for all residents and road users.⁵

Winterville, North Carolina

The Town of Winterville aimed to strengthen connections among A.G. Cox Middle School, W.H. Robinson Elementary School, downtown businesses, and other community spaces. Town and North Carolina Department of Transportation staff collaborated to select three intersections for the installation of high visibility crossings and curb extensions to support safer walking and biking throughout the community.⁶

Collaborating with partners

Communities had ambitious goals for their quick-build project. Every project team aimed to improve safety for children and families walking and biking to and from specific destinations. Many teams also wanted to demonstrate progress, strengthen route connections, engage community members, and build neighborhood pride. Achieving these goals required coordination across local government departments, community-based organizations, and individual community members.

Project teams worked with public works and planning departments, law enforcement agencies, municipal art programs emergency services, parks and recreation, schools, local elected officials, regional planning organizations, state departments of transportation, and community-based youth development, advocacy, injury prevention, and active transportation.

Red Bank, New Jersey

The Borough of Red Bank installed low-cost curb extensions at the intersection of River Street and Leighton Avenue using thermoplastic paint and knockdown bollards. James Gant, Borough Manager for Red Bank, knew that “the success of this project hinged on interdepartmental collaboration and agile project management.” In addition to Gant, the collaboration involved the deputy mayor, Borough council members, public utilities, parks and recreation, emergency services, and community members. Gant credited the project’s success to broad community engagement and coordination across departments (J. Gant, personal communication, August 7, 2025).

Students paint while Red Bank Borough staff and other adults offer encouragement. *Source: RedBankGreen.com*





Ribbon cutting ceremony hosted by Town of Winterville staff, council members, and project partners. Mayor Ricky Hines cut the ribbon. *Source: Town of Winterville*

Winterville, North Carolina

Winterville engaged a range of community partners throughout the project. Because most of the town's streets are state-owned, town staff worked closely with the North Carolina Department of Transportation to select project locations. Staff also engaged community members representing local schools, emergency services, news media outlets, residents, and town agencies to promote, contribute to, and install the project.⁶

Testing new materials

Quick-build projects lend themselves to testing and innovation opportunities due to their low cost. Many communities used these projects to try new paint or other surface products and consider whether the materials could be applied more widely. As a result, lessons from these projects could help improve walking and biking conditions beyond the specific project locations.



Akron city workers test new paint. *Source: City of Akron*

Akron, Ohio

Akron used its project to test materials during the five-year period before that area was scheduled for large-scale resurfacing. These materials included textured paint and treatments designed to support pedestrians with low vision. The quick-build allowed the city to install and evaluate the materials and apply what it learned for future safety projects.⁵

Cincinnati, Ohio

For Cincinnati's quick-build project, city staff wanted to determine whether thermoplastic striping could require less maintenance than traditional exterior house paint. House paint had been used in a previous installation and staff found that "the house paint faded quickly and was completely worn off within approximately 12 to 18 months." The project team selected thermoplastic pavement markings because of its ability to withstand temperature fluctuations and provide greater retroreflectivity.³



Purple thermoplastic fills curb extensions in Cincinnati.
Source: Christian Hauser

Pueblo of Jemez, New Mexico

When considering how to improve walking and biking conditions around Jemez Day School, Pueblo of Jemez Planning Development and Transportation Department team sought to design a quick-build project that reflected the community's cultural legacy and natural landscapes. The team needed to develop and test treatments that could calm traffic and create dedicated spaces for people walking and biking on the earthen surfaces near the school. Pueblo staff designed a project using movable materials, including cinder blocks, reflective delineators, tires, planter pots, concrete barriers, surface paint, and traffic cones.⁷

A banner showcases the different parts of the Pueblo of Jemez project. Source: Alessandro Figueroa





Students ride past a freshly painted traffic circle in Milwaukee. *Source: Michael Anderson*

Using art to build community support and reflect community pride

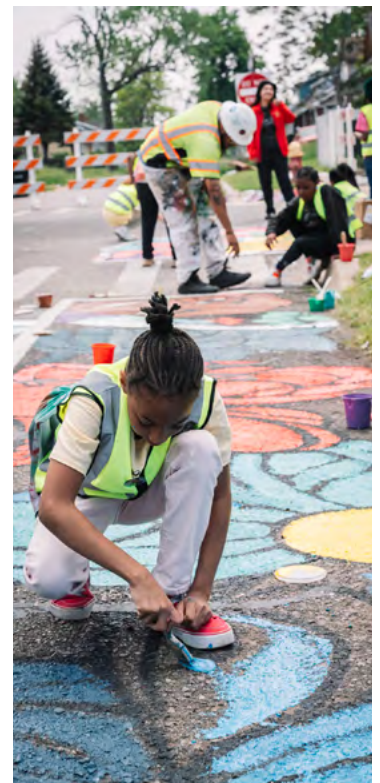
Quick-build projects often provide opportunities to integrate aesthetic appeal and reflect neighborhood identities. Most of the mini-grant projects included art in some form. Artistic elements can help build public interest in a project while creating an opportunity to engage community members and local artists.

Detroit, Michigan

Detroit's project in the Littlefield neighborhood used flexible posts to reduce the turning radius at a school crossing near a park. The project also incorporated new murals into the space. "Community members really liked the murals," said former Detroit City Complete Streets Planner Erin McCargar. McCargar added: "People don't always understand the purpose behind flex posts and other changes to the roadway, but they appreciate the artwork." Throughout the process, community members had opportunities to express themselves artistically and participate in beautifying their neighborhood.⁸

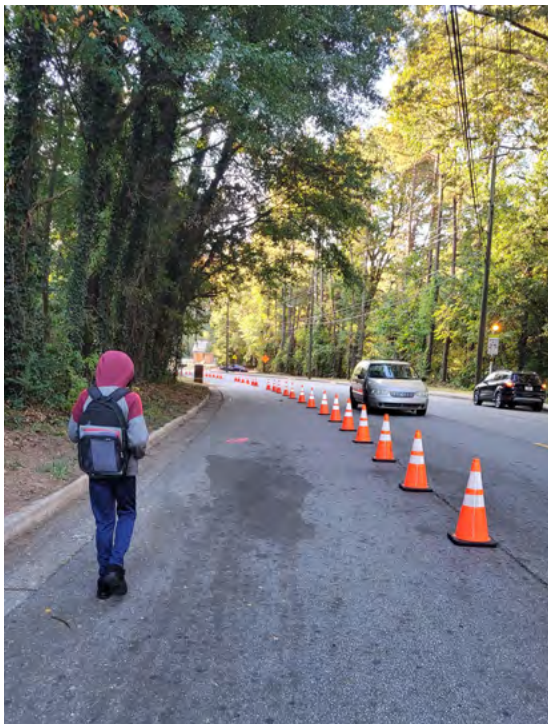
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The Milwaukee project team, a partnership of the City of Milwaukee and Wisconsin Bike Fed, recognized the value of incorporating art into their quick-build project, which involved painting a series of existing concrete bump outs and traffic circles along a route between Bethune Academy and Washington Park. The city brought its own experience in combining community art with street changes through their Paint the Pavement program. This project created a way to extend some of that expertise in collaboration with Wisconsin Bike Fed's Safe Routes to School activities.⁹



Students painting in Detroit. *Source: Elonte Davis*

Stimulating public dialogue about roadway safety



Atlanta Department of Transportation used traffic cones for a one-day demonstration of the planned walk/bike lane to inspire feedback from the community. *Source: Atlanta DOT*



Local media interviews a student about their involvement in the Macon-Bibb County quick-build project. *Source: Macon-Bibb County*

Quick-build projects can spark local conversations about road safety. Several project teams used community surveys to gather feedback on the projects. Communities also used yard signs with QR codes and departmental communications to invite feedback on projects and broader road safety concerns. Teams invited news media to ribbon-cutting events to increase awareness of the projects, the people involved, and the reasons behind the improvements.

Community members offered mostly positive feedback, including requests for similar projects in other locations. Some people also raised concerns about project locations or goals. Project teams used this feedback to consider further actions and how they communicated about their work.

Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta's first quick-build project involved installing a needed walking and biking lane near Crawford Long Middle School. The process also provided an opportunity to build trust with community members. Before beginning the project, team members hosted planning meetings and reached out to nearby residents. On National Bike & Roll to School Day, the team created a temporary demonstration of the proposed walking and biking lane using traffic cones and invited community members to provide feedback. The feedback informed the final installation.¹⁰

Macon-Bibb County, Georgia

The county communications department, sheriff's office, school district, and community partner U Create Macon were all members of the county's Pedestrian Safety Review Board and provided important networks for sharing information about the quick-build project. On National Bike & Roll to School Day, students coordinated by U Create Macon spoke with local news media. The participation of the school superintendent and sheriff's office also helped draw attention to the project. Weston Stroud said the communications efforts were key to framing the benefits of the project. "People can forget the bigger picture and focus on the immediate displeasure or discomfort with change," he said. "Keeping the focus on the human aspect of the work that we do helps always ground the conversation."⁴

Engaging youth as partners in project design and installation

Many project teams intentionally included young people as part of community engagement efforts. Some invited students to paint or plant flowers, helping beautify the installations and build a sense of ownership. Others asked students to work with local artists to conceptualize designs or give feedback before installation.

Detroit, Michigan

Detroit's project team recognized the value of involving students from Noble Elementary-Middle School in developing murals for the planned curb extensions near the school. City staff met with students to brainstorm design ideas and identify key words that could inspire final designs by Trae Isaac, a local professional artist. Students then voted on the design options and participated in the painting process. The Joe Louis Greenway Partnership also provided music and other activities, adding energy to the painting day.⁸

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Students at Bethune Academy helped design and paint the concrete bump-outs and traffic circles along the project corridor. Local artist CK Ledesma and Wisconsin Bike Federation Education Director Michael Anderson led workshops explaining the effects of the traffic calming features and invited the students to conceptualize potential designs. Students then helped select the final designs and worked with the City of Milwaukee and Wisconsin Bike Federation staff on the painting. Afterward, they rode bicycles along the route to celebrate their work.⁹

Students, the artist, and city staff worked together to paint in Milwaukee. *Source: Michael Anderson*





City of Atlanta officials including Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens, District 12 Council Member Antonio Lewis, Department of Transportation Commissioner, and members of the Crawford Long Middle School gather for the quick-build ribbon cutting.
Source: City of Atlanta

Leveraging quick-build projects to catalyze additional improvements

Communities used lessons from their quick-build projects to secure support for additional projects and to shape future programs. These relatively small projects helped demonstrate what was possible and contributed to much broader changes.

Atlanta, Georgia

Atlanta used findings from its quick-build project to advance Safe Routes to School efforts across the city. City staff credited the project with helping secure additional funding from city council members who wanted similar improvements in their districts.¹⁰

Pueblo of Jemez, New Mexico

Pueblo of Jemez staff used results from the quick-build project to support applications for Tribal Transportation Program safety funds and other funding sources for permanent infrastructure changes. Findings from the quick-build also helped justify the installation of solar-powered speed radars and feedback displays to address speeding in school zones.⁷

Conclusion

The mini-grant communities shared similar approaches to project implementation and reported many of the same benefits. However, the short timelines for installation and evaluation made it difficult to quantify results. Half of communities measured vehicle speeds. They found slight reductions during the weeks following installation, but the project periods did not allow teams to evaluate changes over several months. In addition, schools dismissed for summer within four weeks of installation, further complicating interpretation of results.

Some communities also received mixed feedback. Although positive comments outweighed negative responses, the projects did not receive universal support. Respondents raised questions about the materials, project locations, and rationale for quick-build treatments. Project teams used this feedback to inform future messaging and education efforts.

Teams also expressed concerns about the durability of some materials. Paint can fade and flexible delineator posts may be damaged or displaced when struck by motor vehicles. To address these concerns, several communities tested different materials and planned for future maintenance and replacement.

Across the program, project teams showed care for their communities and a strong commitment to improving safety. “One of the most wonderful things that can happen after a project like this is to have people feeling continued attention and investment in their neighborhood on behalf of the city and partners,” said Danya Littlefield, Senior Transportation Planner with the City of Milwaukee, “because ultimately we want people to know that we care about their neighborhoods and their lives and their safety.” For Red Bank, James Gant saw the project as “demonstrating to the public and stakeholders that meaningful change can occur rapidly and affordably.” And in Macon-Bibb County, Weston Stroud gave context to the importance of quick-build projects: “Sometimes the work that we do—painting a crosswalk and putting out bollards—is not groundbreaking by any means, but it means something to a lot of people.”

For communities considering quick-build projects or expanding their existing implementation, the eight themes identified across 11 communities offer practical lessons and inspiration for future projects.

Acknowledgments

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Materials used by communities

Participating communities used a wide range of materials to implement their quick-build projects. From tires and planter pots to thermoplastic paint and flexible delineators, project teams adapted familiar countermeasures to fit local settings and project goals. The following table summarizes the countermeasures, materials, and participating communities represented across the projects.

Countermeasure	Treatment/Materials	Participating Community
Curb Extension	Thermoplastic paint	Cincinnati (OH) Detroit (MI) Winterville (NC) Red Bank (NJ) El Paso (TX)
	Tennis court paint	
	Crosswalk striping	
	Plastic bollards	
	Artistic stencils	
	Mural art	
	Yard signs promoting project awareness	
Curb Extension with Detectable Warning	Thermoplastic paint	Akron (OH)
	Plastic bollards	
	Direction tiles and detectable warnings within curb extension	
	Textured enhancements to buffer between bike lane and travel lane	
Painted Pinned-On Quick-build Infrastructure	Previously installed concrete pin down bump outs and traffic circles	Milwaukee (WI)
	High visibility concrete paint	
	Yard signs promoting project awareness	
Daylighting	Parking spot removal at a crosswalk	Cincinnati (OH)
Protected or Painted Pedestrian/Bicyclist Pathway	Thermoplastic paint	Pueblo of Jemez (NM) Atlanta (GA) Wallace County (KS)
	Plastic bollards	
	Wheel stops	
	Cinder blocks	
	Reflective delineators	
	Planter pots	
	Student painted artwork	
Chicanes	Tires	Pueblo of Jemez (NM)
	Traffic cones	
	Planter pots	
Protected Bus Stop	Concrete barriers	Pueblo of Jemez (NM)
	Student painted artwork	
Lane Reduction	Plastic bollards	Macon-Bibb County (GA)
High Visibility Crossing	Thermoplastic crosswalk paint	Macon-Bibb County (GA) Atlanta (GA) Red Bank (NJ) El Paso (TX)
	Decorative crosswalk paint	



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