



peopleforbikes

Growing Youth Bicycle Participation

Thoughts from the outdoor industry on encouraging young people to be active outside.

Last month, PeopleForBikes hosted a DRAFT event — our industry meetup series — during the Bicycle Leadership Conference in Monterey, California. Speakers focused on discussing strategies for increasing youth participation in outdoor and physical activities, sharing their experience and knowledge with members of the bike industry — and inspiring ideas for new programs and initiatives.

SPEAKERS

- » **Stephanie Vatalaro** — Recreational Boating + Fishing Foundation
- » **John David** — USA BMX
- » **Lise Aangeenbrug** — Outdoor Foundation
- » **Jason Cooper** — Anaheim Ducks
- » **Pio Tsai** — Youth Bike Summit/Bike New York

THE NUMBERS

- < **50%** of adults get outside once a year
- < **18%** of adults get outside once or more per week
- < **21%** of children get outside once or more per week

Source: 2017 Outdoor Participation Report

1. Focus on family

Parents facilitate decision-making and planning, so when they're involved, the chances of long-term participation increase. Involving family also encourages adopting a lifestyle than includes outdoor activity, rather than incentivizing the purchase of gear or equipment that may or may not be used.

2. Encourage collective action

Collaboration is a powerful tool when it comes to getting kids outdoors and forming lifelong habits. Seek partners that share your vested interest in encouraging young people to get outside. For the Recreational Boating + Fishing Foundation (RBFF), one of these partners was the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, another was the Disney Corporation, which offered excellent media exposure. The Outdoor Foundation found valuable partners in Patagonia, Recreational Equipment, Inc., the VF Corporation and Wolverine Worldwide. USA BMX is active with the National Parks and Recreation Association, involved in the National Association for Sports Tourism and supports bikes shops in becoming operators of BMX tracks.

3. Provide value to schools and communities

Not surprisingly, youth programs that offer value to schools through education plans and equipment are well received by school districts. By designing programs that incorporate outdoor activity into school curriculum, organizations like the Anaheim Ducks have been able to reach hundreds of

thousands of students and foster new interest in hockey. The Ducks asked schools to commit to teaching street hockey for a month in exchange for \$2,000 of equipment.

USA BMX fosters interest in BMX racing through school programs that teach kids STEM based curriculum with bicycles as the principle learning tool. They also promote STEAM education through their BMX Track Modeling program that challenges kids to model their own BMX track using field trips, journaling and modeling.

4. Make it a habit

Adults are three times more likely to go outside if they did as kids. Millennials go outside less than their parents did — if they don't encourage different habits in their own children, we could see a similar decrease in the next generation. To start making an outdoor habit, the Outdoor Foundation recommends planning fun, joyful activities that are easy to repeat. They should be close to home, foster social connection and offer opportunities for a wide range of age groups.

5. Make it easy

When activities are close to home and easy to repeatedly access, habits are more likely to form. One way to do this is by creating stations that offer direct access to gear and equipment, and provide an opportunity for youth to try an activity right away. The Take Me Fishing program is piloting this approach, creating dedicated First Catch Centers near water recreation areas where fishing is permitted, enabling kids and their families to try fishing on site and return multiple times to learn skills.

For the Anaheim Ducks, it was clear that access to ice rinks was a major barrier to hockey participation. So, they developed a street hockey program to build cement rinks or utilize existing blacktop in areas of the community with the most limited access to ice rinks.

6. Activate youth partners

The Youth Bike Summit/Bike New York offers paid internships for youth, recognizing that young people can speak to their peers and reach their community in a way that adults and programs simply can't. Empowering youth to assist in planning, community outreach and day-to-day management of the programs also engenders a sense of ownership and pride, and develops the bicycle industry leaders of tomorrow by showing the breadth of opportunities and career choices associated with bikes.

MORE IDEAS FOR ENGAGEMENT

- » Leverage social media channels and influencers.
- » Seek financial support through government grants (the RBBF advances their youth engagement work through a grant administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service).
- » Use data to make your case to prospective partners. Consider trackable metrics that can show how a program influences participation, or helps kids succeed in other areas of their lives.