

Building a Working Group

What is a working group?

STARS initiatives work best when they bring together the whole of the school's community: students, teachers, parents, school governors and the school's neighbours, as well as other groups who work to support your school such as the local authority, police and other agencies. Altogether, these groups tend to be referred to as the school's 'stakeholders'. A stakeholder is anyone who is affected by, or who has influence over, the STARS initiatives in your school.

A STARS working group draws together all of the school's stakeholders and gives them the opportunity to have their say on school travel issues.

How can a working group help?

There are lots of benefits to having an active working group:

- Consultation- a working group will help your school to **see the whole picture** of travel issues which affect your school
- Collaboration- an effective working group will help to **share the load** of the STARS initiatives in your school
- Momentum- by getting together regularly to discuss the school's STARS programme, a working group will help to **keep things moving**

Getting started

Setting up a Working Group doesn't have to be a big job: some of the most successful working groups start very simply. One of the easiest ways to establish a working group is to add the STARS programme to the agenda for existing meetings. Most schools will meet with many or all of their stakeholders at various times, for example:

- Staff meetings
- School council
- Governors' meetings
- Parent/Teacher evenings
- Open days

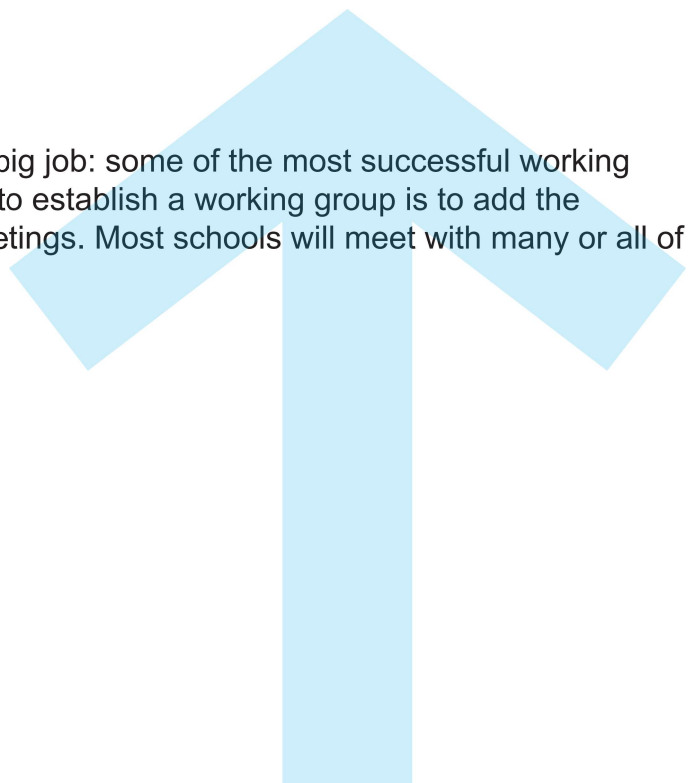
Working groups at a glance

A working group will help you to:

- See the whole picture
- Share the load
- Keep things moving

3 simple steps to start a working group

1. Add STARS to your next stakeholder meeting
2. Listen: let everyone have their say
3. Be prepared to make a change, however small; small changes make a big difference



Make STARS a standing item on your agenda at your next stakeholder meeting:

1. Give 10 minutes of the agenda over to STARS at your next stakeholder meeting. If you have a written agenda, make sure to include STARS on it, so everyone knows what to expect
2. Make sure everyone understands the objectives of the STARS programme, you may want to give some examples of STARS initiatives
3. Invite your stakeholders to voice any concerns or ideas for initiatives or activities. Many of your stakeholders will likely have views on school travel issues. Make a note of any issues, concerns or ideas
4. Ask for volunteers to join your STARS working group- you may find that some stakeholders have a particular interest in travel issues

Try to include STARS in all your stakeholder meetings in future. Even if it's only for 5 minutes, it's worth making it a standing item on the agenda as this will keep the programme fresh in people's minds. For some schools this might be enough to get your STARS programme off the ground.

Case Study: Benhurst School, London Borough of Havering

Benhurst School is an LEA Primary School in the London Borough of Havering. The school had been engaged in STARS for a number of years and had received STARS accreditation from Transport for London. The school's governors discussed the School Travel Plan as part of the annual general meeting and decided that establishing a formal STARS working group would allow them to achieve Gold standard accreditation:

Over the years we have achieved Accreditation for our work, and currently have the Higher Standards (Silver) award. It has been acknowledged that we have achieved most of the elements required for the "Gold" level. We are currently looking to set up a working party, consisting of parents, staff, and other interested supporters, who could assist us in achieving this standard in the next year. – Minutes of the AGM meeting

The school established a working group in 2014 and has subsequently achieved 'Gold Standard' accreditation.

Bringing together your working group

Once you have met with some of the stakeholder groups you'll probably find that some issues and ideas have emerged. You will also likely have some stakeholders who have expressed an interest in the STARS programme and in travel issues in general. You might decide you want to bring all your stakeholders together into a single working group.

Try to arrange your Working Group meeting so that as many stakeholder groups as possible are represented. Invite representatives from your local authority, police, local residents and any other stakeholders which you don't normally get a chance to meet. Also don't forget those in your school who carry out linked activities or who can support your work on travel – Eco-schools lead, PE staff, site manager etc. Finding a time when everyone is free can be tricky. It might be easier to tag on to the end of an existing meeting. If some groups can't make it, you can always update them on what you discuss.

Case Study: Oakwood Primary School, Southampton

Oakwood's school travel plan coordinator sent an invitation to all school governors asking who would like to volunteer to be the schools 'Travel Governor'. A suitable candidate put themselves forward and plays an invaluable role on the working group, championing active travel and raising the profile of the schools STARS and Bikelt programmes across the school community.

You will probably want to cover the following points in your working group meeting:

- 1. Objectives and targets-** Objectives are the broad aims of your STARS programme. It's really valuable to state these aims at the start of your meeting. What are you trying to achieve? As your school progresses with STARS initiatives, you will want to establish some specific targets. Your working group can help to agree your targets.
- 2. Minutes and actions-** You will probably have some items which were raised at your other stakeholder meetings. Each of your stakeholder groups are likely to have quite different perspectives on school travel issues. Make sure everyone gets the chance to reflect on each others' views. If this is not your first working group meeting you will have minutes and points for action which were discussed last time. Give an update on these.
- 3. Initiatives and activities-** as you progress further with the STARS programme, you will find that you have initiatives and activities which your school has undertaken. Give an update on how these are progressing.
- 4. Any other business-** give everyone a chance to raise any other issues which they want to discuss
- 5. Next steps-** During the course of your meeting, you will probably have come up with ideas for actions and activities which will need to be followed up: recap these and make a list of 'Actions'- make sure you agree who is going to be responsible for each action and specify when they will be completed.

One person, usually the schools STARS champion (school travel plan coordinator), needs to take on the role of STARS system administrator – being responsible for updating STARS, gathering evidence from other working group members and uploading this to the system. Other working group members should be reminded of the importance of keeping evidence – taking photos is the easiest way to do this!

When should you meet?

It is important to consider the timing of working group meetings. Once your working group is well established, you may find that 'little and often' is the most effective way to deal with meetings. However, you will want to balance this against the need to make sure as many people as possible are available to attend. Typically, you may find that it is most convenient to hold meetings immediately after school as pupils and staff are on hand. Many parents will also likely find it easier to attend after school meetings especially if they normally collect their children from school. Some schools have found inventive ways of organising their working group, for instance, including the school's working group into enrichment activities.

Making a difference

It is really important that your working group can see the impact they are having. If your stakeholders feel that it's just a talking shop they will lose interest. When you first establish your working group, it can be really effective to agree some simple actions which you can implement straight away. If your working group can see a 'quick-win' it will be encouraging and make sure that your stakeholders feel valued. Many of the most effective STARS initiatives will involve simple, quick-win solutions.

Eventually, you may find that your school wants to get involved in more ambitious projects. A working group can really help with these kinds of initiatives. You will often find that tasks can be shared between working group members, making larger-scale activities more achievable.

Quick-wins

A 'quick-win' is typically inexpensive and can be achieved very quickly. Typically these will involve making small changes to the school's policies and practice.

Here are some examples of quick-win initiatives which could support your school's STARS programme:

- Make a small adjustment to the school's uniform policy to encourage walking and cycling (For example, allowing girls to wear shorts while they are cycling to school)
- Sending a letter to parents or local residents (for example, asking parents to respect the school keep clear 'zig-zag' markings)
- Deploying staff as parking monitors
- Deploying students as bike monitors
- Booking cycle training or a road safety assembly with the local authority
- Distributing reflective items for students to attach to their bags or coats in order to improve road safety during the winter months

Larger projects and initiatives

Some of the most exciting STARS initiatives can bring together multiple stakeholder groups. These kinds of projects can really grab people's attention. For example:

- Pupil engagement projects such as Junior Travel Ambassadors, Youth Travel Ambassadors, Junior Road Safety Officers, School travel ambassadors or a Green travel group can be a great way to raise young people's interest in STARS
- Competitions (For example, the annual Living Streets WoW badge design competition or designing a road safety poster can really engage younger pupils and offer an opportunity for other stakeholders to get involved as 'judges')
- Walking or cycling events (for example, Walk to School Weeks) can be a great opportunity to include pupils, parents and staff

Where your school plans to undertake a larger activity, your working group can be a real asset. You will be surprised who is willing to help.

Case Study- Coopers Company and Coborn School, London Borough of Havering

Coopers Company and Coborn school have had a STARS working group in place for a number of years. In 2012, the school's working group invited their borough's School Travel Advisor to attend their working group meeting.

The school travel advisor suggested that the school get involved in a number of new initiatives, in particular the pilot of TfL's Youth Travel Ambassador (YTA) programme. YTA challenges pupils to take an active roll in creating new STARS initiatives within the school. Through its involvement with the YTA project, the school was able to spearhead a new, pupil-led cycling incentive scheme. Over the course of the academic year, up to 60 students took up cycling to school. In 2013, the school was recognised as Platinum School of the region (east) for its work. The school's YTA pupils now form an integral part of the STARS working group.

How often should you meet?

If you have included STARS on the agenda at all your stakeholder meetings, your working group might not need to meet very often: Once per term is probably ideal for larger meetings but even if it's only once a year, it is still worth doing! You can always bring your working group together for ad-hoc meetings when you have specific activities on the horizon.

Roles within the working group

To help your working group to meet effectively, it is important that somebody adopts the following roles. These roles do not need to be fixed but could be rotated around the group:

Chair person- A chair person is tasked with keeping the meeting to the agenda and ensuring that everyone has a chance to be heard. If you are the school's STARS Champion, you might be tempted to take on the role of chair person but this doesn't necessarily have to be the case. Try taking turns to 'chair' different sections of the meeting, or alternate who acts as the 'chair' at each meeting. The most effective STARS programmes will spread the load across the school's community.

Scribe or minute taker- This role is extremely important to ensure that all of the issues, concerns and next-steps are recorded. The 'scribe' should ensure that they recap any 'next steps' at the end of the meeting and pass their notes to the Chair or STARS Champion. The minutes of your working group meeting can also serve as a useful piece of evidence when applying for STARS accreditation.

STARS system administrator- This role is crucial and is usually the job of the STARS champion or it could be the minute taker. Each meeting should involve the system administrator reminding working group members to take photos of things that they and pupils do related to travel and requesting that these are forwarded to them, The minutes of the meeting can then be used to update the STARS system with recent activities and achievements, and planned actions. Easy!



Tips for an effective working group

1. Involve the whole school- it is vital that you involve as many stakeholders as possible. This will help build support for STARS in your school.
2. Keep it simple- Not all of your stakeholders will be as closely involved as others. Make sure you keep everyone up to speed and try to avoid jargon.
3. Make it count- Be ready to find some quick-win initiatives. This will help your stakeholders to see the impact they are having.
4. Keep it going- Get your working group together regularly, or keep your stakeholders up to date through other meetings. Momentum is really important to make STARS effective!

Tools for an effective meeting

Here are a few techniques to help you chair an effective meeting. These techniques may be familiar to you but can be surprisingly effective for giving meetings a sense of focus and ensuring that everybody has a chance to be heard. You could try using them individually at different times, or use them in conjunction with each other:

'Post-it' blitz

This technique is a useful way to ensure that everybody's opinions are heard. You will need:

- Plenty of 'post-it' notes
- A whiteboard or flipchart paper
- Marker pens

Write the topic for discussion in the centre of a whiteboard or flip-chart. Ask everyone to write down their views on post it notes- one point per post-it. Give a fixed time to write down as many points as possible, two minutes should be fine. Collect in all of the post-it notes. The chair person then reads out each post-it and invites the whole group to comment on the points raised. It can be useful to group together post-its with similar themes. There are several advantages to this technique:

- Everyone's opinions are heard and given equal weight
- Post-its can feel more anonymous which encourages people to provide more honest opinions
- Grouping post-its can help to illustrate where there is consensus



Break-out groups

This technique is useful when there is a lot to cover or the group is constrained for time. You will need:

- Flip charts or whiteboards
- Marker pens

Split the group into smaller sub-groups and ask them to discuss a specific issue. Give the sub-groups a fixed amount of time to discuss. Ask each group to appoint a scribe and to select three key points from their discussion to feedback to the rest of the working group. Allow the other sub-groups to comment on each other's points. Try to ensure that a range of stakeholder groups are represented in each sub-group.

Talking stick

This technique is well known but can be surprisingly useful, especially if there is an emotive or controversial topic which needs to be discussed. The chair person selects an object as the 'talking stick' - it doesn't have to be an actual stick: a pen, soft toy or item of clothing is fine. The rules are simple: nobody can speak apart from the chairperson and the person holding the 'stick'.

There are a couple of variations of how to use this: If people want to speak, they raise their hand and the chair decides where the 'stick' passes. Alternatively, the 'stick' can be passed around the whole group, so that everyone gets a turn to speak.