



Safety

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Project Title:
Traffic Safety Culture – Phase 2

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Traffic Safety Culture: Driver Behavior

The National Towards Zero Deaths (TZD) Safety Initiative is a cooperative and coordinated effort amongst state highway safety agencies and stakeholders. The transformation of the traffic safety culture is a primary element of the TZD strategy.

WHAT IS THE NEED?

Growing safety culture has been identified as a core strategy by US. Department of Transportation (USDOT) Safety Council, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Joint Safety Strategic Plan, The National Towards Zero Deaths (TZD) Safety Initiative, and the Road to Zero Coalition. Growing a positive traffic safety culture would not only support traffic safety goals by reducing risky behaviors and increasing protective behaviors, it would also increase public acceptance of other effective traffic safety programs.

Traffic safety culture can be defined as the values and beliefs shared amongst road users that determine their choice of behavior which affects traffic safety. Traffic safety culture also includes the values and beliefs of stakeholders across the social environment whose actions can affect those behaviors and traffic safety. Critical stakeholders may include state departments of transportation, state offices of public safety, public health officials, law enforcement leaders, elected officials, business leaders, etc.

In 2015, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) initiated a 5-year transportation pooled fund program on traffic safety culture partnering with the Center for Health and Safety Culture (CHSC) at Montana State University as the principal research entity. This program began as a cooperative effort amongst participating state DOTs and other (traditional and non-traditional) stakeholder organizations sharing a vested interest in the role of traffic safety culture to achieve the Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) vision.



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WHAT ARE WE DOING?

This program will support integrated and multiyear research to guide the transformation of local, state, and national traffic safety culture. Funding partners determine the priority issues each year, and work plans are developed for the selected issues.

Three types of effort are expected in this pooled-fund program: First, the program could propose culture-based research directed to specific traffic safety problems. For example, there are common behavioral risk factors amongst most state Strategic Highway Safety Plans (SHSP) such as impaired or distracted driving that can be influenced by culture.

Second, the program may generate ideas for general "services and tools" to support the understanding and application of traffic safety culture in the safety plans of project partners. For example, online courses on traffic safety culture for workforce development or a repository of relevant literature and case studies of best practice relevant to addressing the cultural factors of a risky behavior could be created.

Third, the program can be used to implement a limited number of demonstration projects to evaluate specific strategies to transform traffic safety culture in select communities, which could then be applied elsewhere.

WHAT IS OUR GOAL?

This program is a cooperative effort of participating state DOTs and other (traditional and non-traditional) organizations with a vested interest in traffic safety. This long-term partnership will support an evolving and integrated project portfolio developed and revised each year by the partners, and complimentary to other related research activities, such as NCHRP 17-69: A Strategic Approach to transforming Traffic Safety Culture to reduce Deaths and Injuries.

Together, these projects will accelerate the development and delivery of tools and services to transform the national, state, and community level traffic safety culture. The goal of this transformation is to support the Toward Zero Deaths (TZD) vision with sustainable traffic safety solutions.

WHAT IS THE BENEFIT?

Only through the growth of a positive safety culture can significant and sustainable reductions in crash fatalities and serious injuries be achieved. Towards that end, this pooled fund program will: (1) conduct research to identify solutions to specific culture-based traffic safety problems, taking advantage of the implementation opportunities to improve traffic safety; (2) develop resources to enhance understanding and application of traffic safety culture strategies; and (3) provide technology transfer of best practices in traffic safety culture strategies.

WHAT IS THE PROGRESS TO DATE?

The CHSC was chosen by the board to implement and evaluate a culture-based intervention to address distracted driving in the workplace consistent with Washington State laws.

The CHSC conducted a narrative literature review to understand how belief change can result in changed behaviors. Based on the literature review, the research team will develop a resource to guide stakeholders in developing and implementing effective strategies to change beliefs that define traffic safety culture and influence road user behavior.

California Department of Transportation will stop being a contributing member after this year (starting on Oct. 1, 2022). Further decision making regarding the contribution for this project is still in making.