Traffic Safety Culture:

A primer for traffic safety practitioners

MONTANA
MDT
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

Vision

"A zero deaths vision requires a change—a shift in culture both within transportation agencies and other organizations as well as within communities. Everyone must accept that fatalities are unacceptable and preventable."

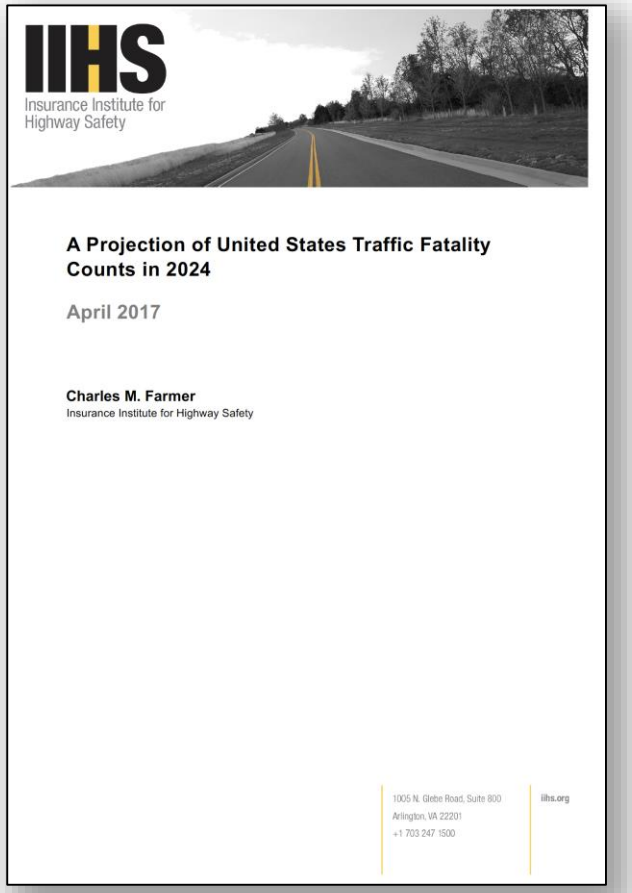
https://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/zerodeaths

Background

- Traffic safety is important to us all.
- We must set a target of zero traffic fatalities.
- We will not achieve a target of zero using only traditional strategies.
- We must also create a “Traffic Safety Culture” that encourages safe road user behavior and effective partnerships among stakeholders.

Traffic Safety

- The number of traffic fatalities **increased** from 2014 to 2016.
- Current predictions estimate **33,000 fatalities in 2045**.
- Greater reductions are needed to reach a target of **zero**.
- This will require exploration of new and **innovative** strategies.



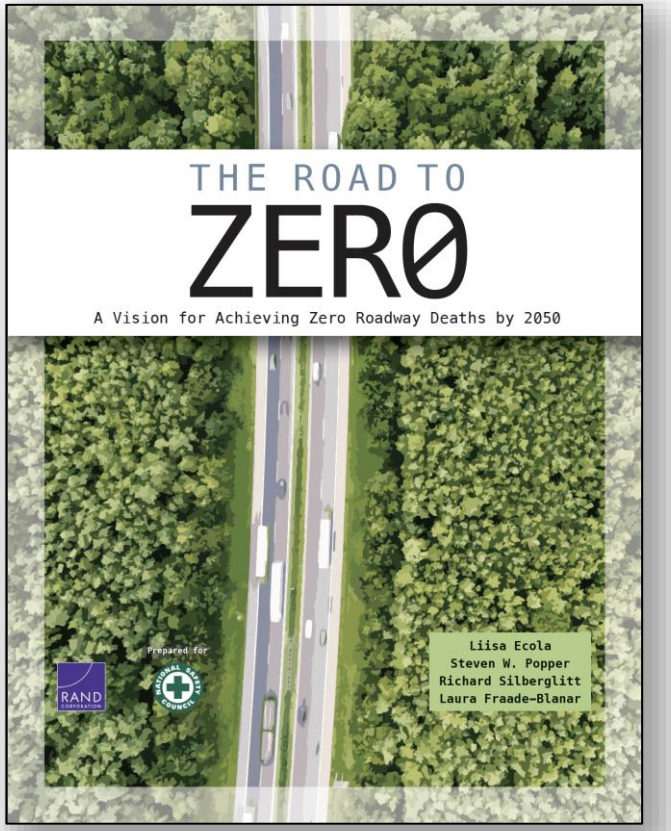
www.iihs.org/api/datastoredocument/bibliography/2137

Strategies

The Road to Zero Coalition has concluded that three interdependent strategies are needed to reach zero:

1) Double down on what works.
2) Accelerate advanced technology.
3) **Prioritize safety**.

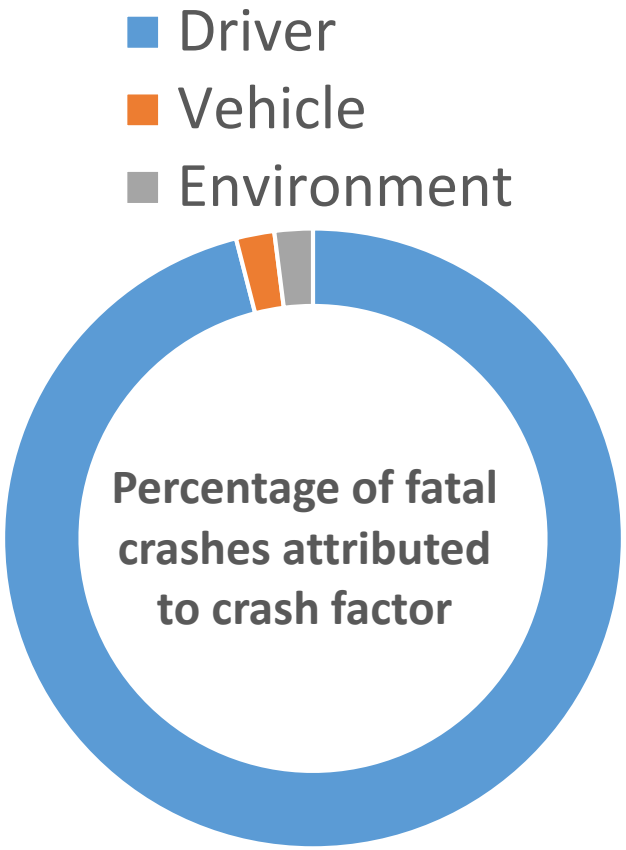
"A pervasive safety culture is an **essential ingredient** for reaching zero roadway deaths."



www.nsc.org/road-safety/get-involved/road-to-zero

Driver Behavior

- Driver behavior is the most frequent "**critical reason**" for fatal crashes.
- Driver behavior is often a **deliberate** choice.
- Driver behavior can be **changed** to support safer choices.



https://crashstats.nhtsa.dot.gov/Api/Public/ViewPublication/812115

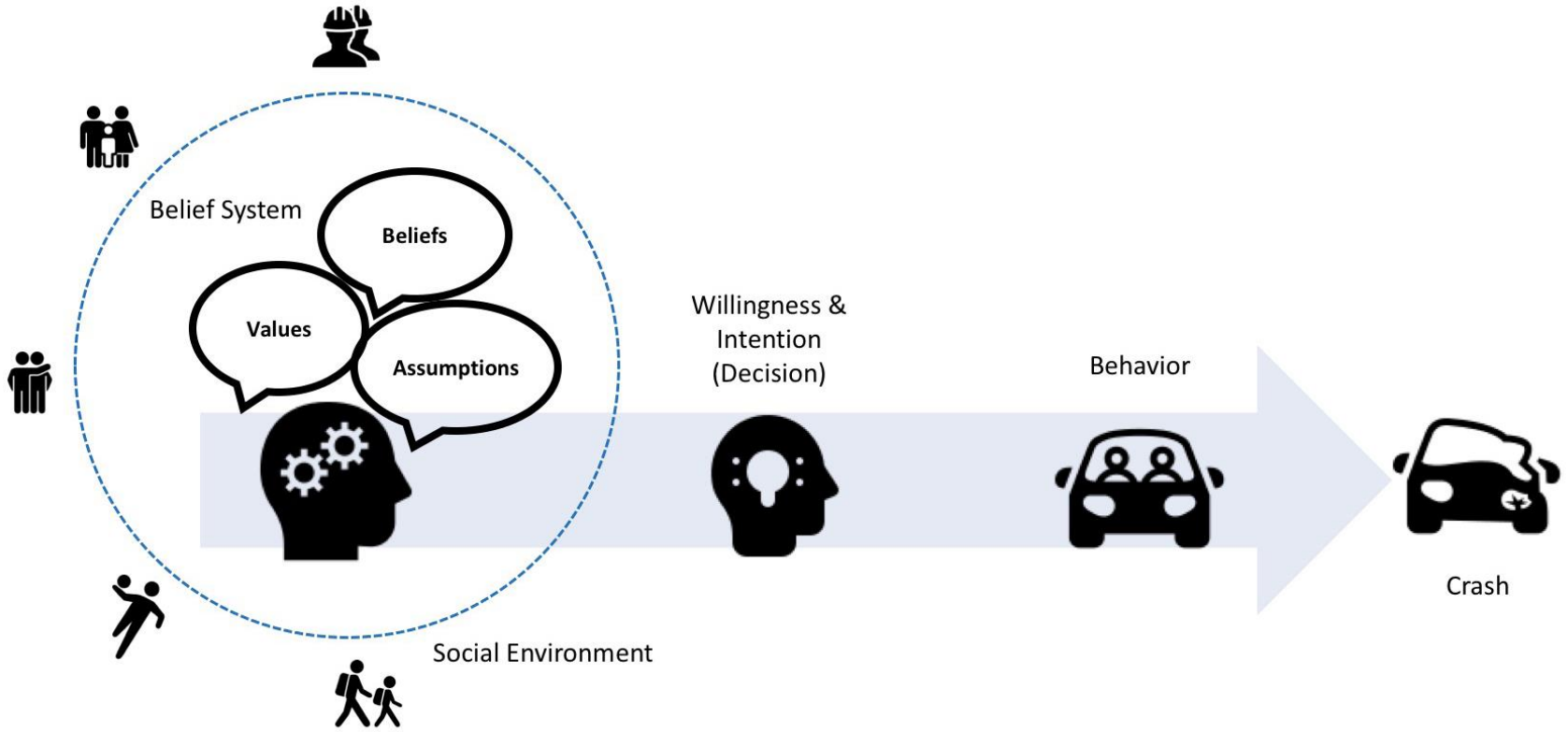
Beliefs

- Our minds form “beliefs” from our **experiences**.
- Beliefs determine our **understanding** of the world.
- Beliefs influence our **choices** about behavior.
- To change behavior, we must **change** beliefs.

Relationship

- Humans rely on **social** relationships.
- We identify with many **groups** in our social environment.
- To identify with a group, we share the belief system that defines the group "**culture**."

Traffic Safety Culture

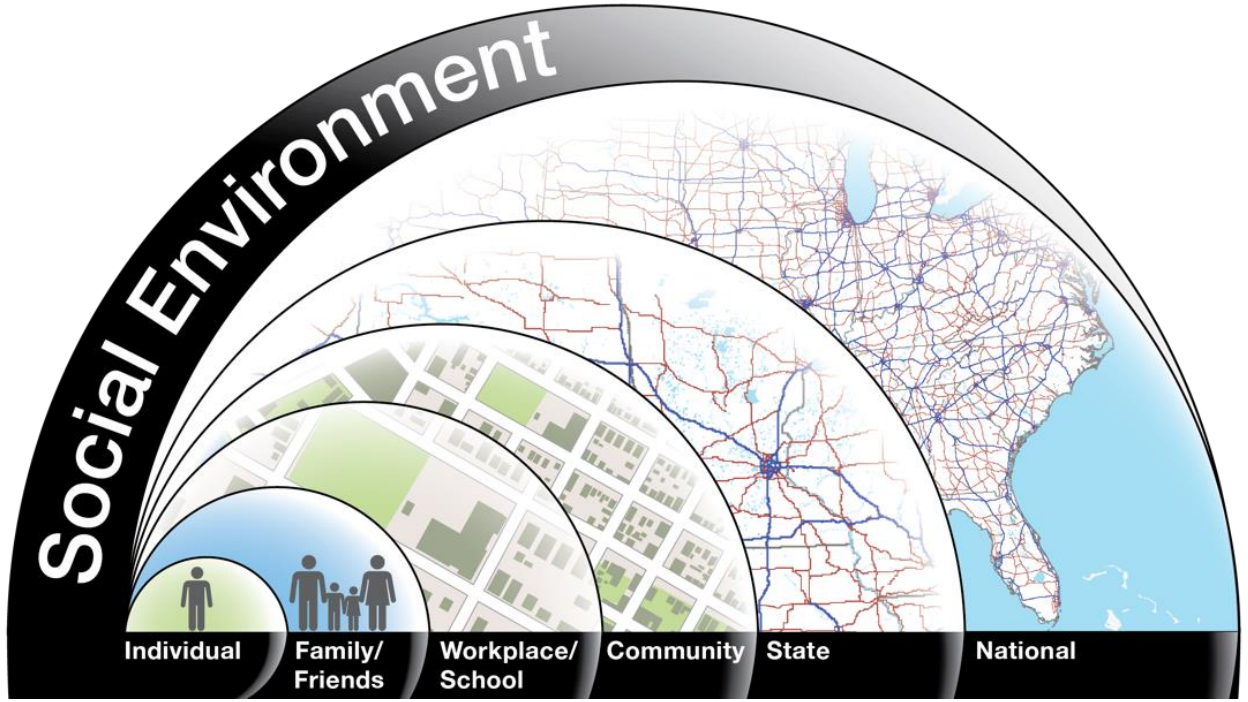


“Traffic Safety Culture” is the **shared belief system** of a group of people that influences road user behaviors and stakeholder actions that impact traffic safety.

Road Users

- Road users include all **participants** within the roadway system.
- Road user behaviors can either increase **crash risk** (risky) or reduce crash risk (protective).
- **Our goal** is to reduce road user risky behaviors and increase protective behaviors.

Stakeholders



- There are many traffic safety **stakeholders** within our social environment.
- Traffic Safety Culture also applies to **actions** taken by traffic safety stakeholders.
- These stakeholders can take actions **together** to change road users beliefs.

Stakeholder Actions

Traditional

- Create effective traffic laws.
- Allocate resources to traffic safety programs.
- Improving EMS response times.
- Engaging new partners in promoting traffic safety.

Non-Traditional

- Create family rules about always wearing a seat belt.
- Schools promoting best-practices in driver education.
- Workplaces developing training to achieve zero motor vehicle incidents.

Cultural “Lens”

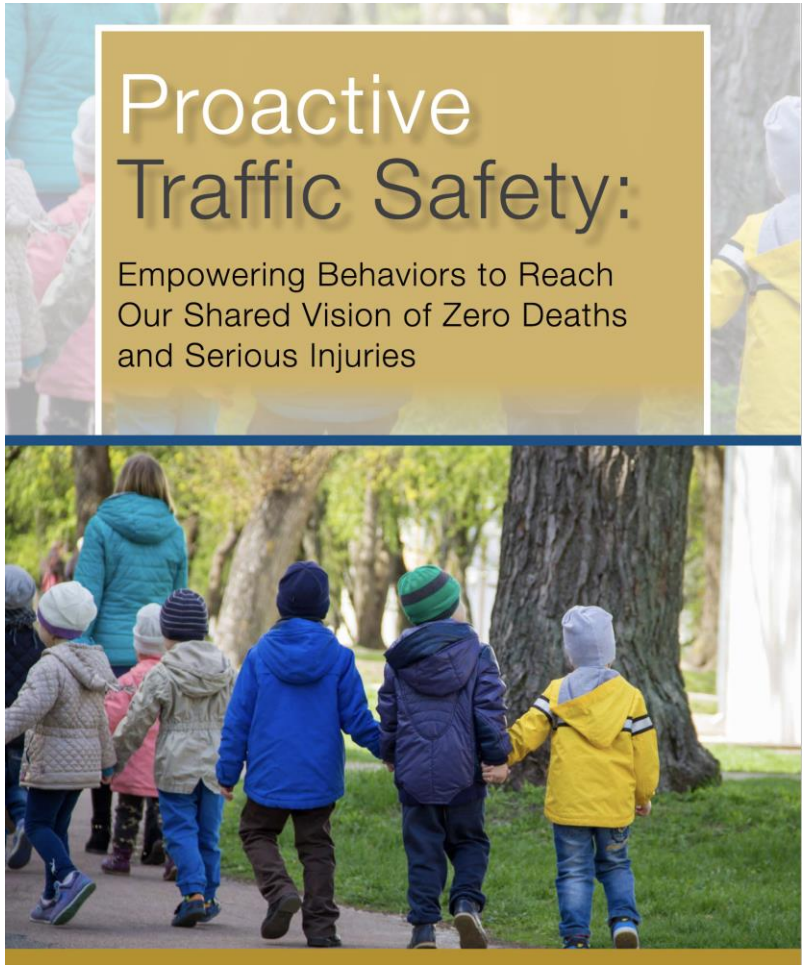
Approaching traffic safety through the lens of traffic safety culture is different than traditional approaches in a number of important ways, making us **more effective** in achieving our vision zero target:

A. Protective Behavior
B. Proactive Behavior
C. Effective Partnerships

A. Protective Behaviors

We recognize that traffic safety can be improved by growing beliefs that increase **protective behaviors**, rather than only focusing on beliefs to reduce risky behaviors.

B. Proactive Behavior



A positive traffic safety culture not only encourages road users to choose safe behaviors, it also encourages them to be **proactive** by encouraging other road users to behave safely.

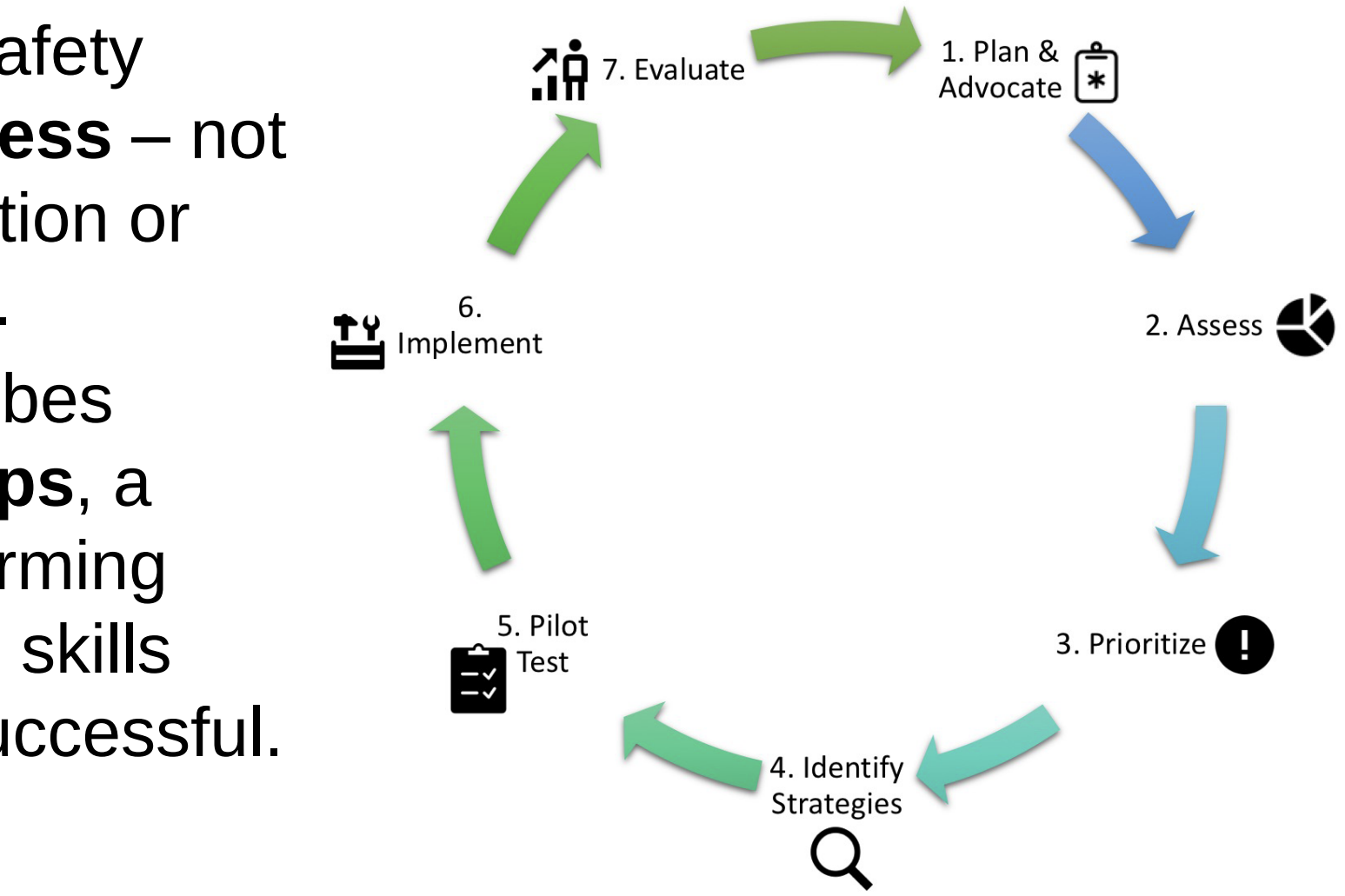
C. Effective Partnerships

A positive traffic safety culture also increases the capability of traffic safety stakeholders to form **effective partnerships**, resulting in the integration of strategies to form a safe system.

Stakeholder	**Example Action (Increase Seat Belt Use)**
Families	Establish family rules about always wearing a seat belt
Schools	Include seat belt education in health class; promote asking friends to wear a seat belt
Workplaces	Establish and train on workplace seat belt policies
Law Enforcement	Model seat belt use by always wearing a seat belt Consistently enforce seat belt laws (not just during campaigns) Advocate for seat belt use in the community

Process

- Growing traffic safety culture is a **process** – not a single intervention or countermeasure.
- A process describes **generalized steps**, a context for performing those steps, and skills required to be successful.



Next Steps

1. Creating a **shared understanding** about traffic safety culture.

Shared understanding comes from discussing questions that address important topics, challenge beliefs, and motivate learning.

✎ Here are some example questions.

Topic Importance

- How do traffic crashes and their consequences impact our community?
- What is our responsibility in reducing crashes?

Challenge Beliefs

- Are we being effective?
- What might be some new ways to positively influence road user behavior?

Motivate Learning

- How do you define traffic safety culture?
- How do you know you are accurately perceiving your community's traffic safety culture?

Next Steps

2. We must examine our **own culture** before trying to change the culture of others.

We will be neither effective nor authentic in our efforts to grow traffic safety culture in a community if our own agency's culture is not safe.

✎ Here are some example questions.

Internal Safety Procedures

- How is safety of employees a top priority with management?
- How do employees and management work together to ensure the safest possible working conditions?

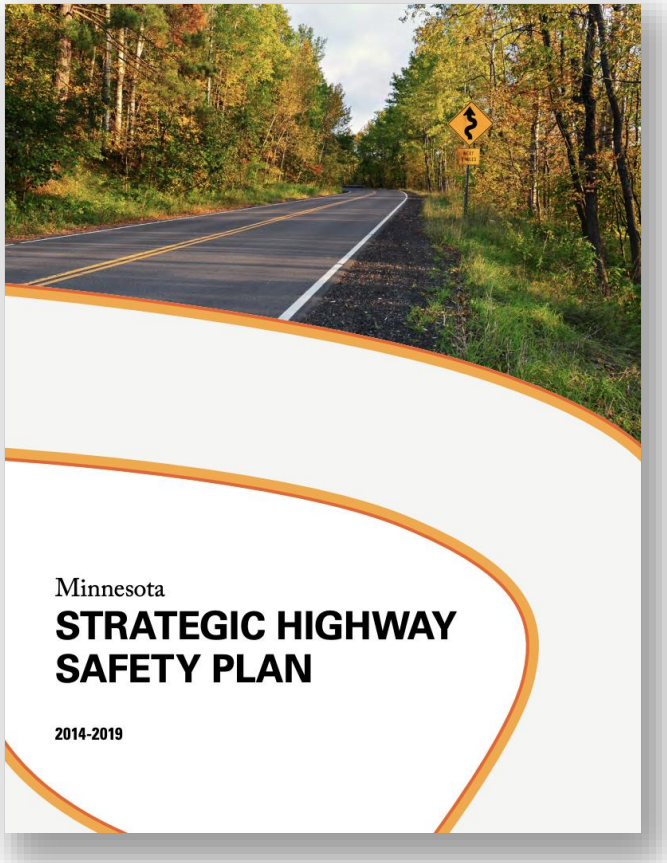
External Safety Programs

- Does everyone in our organization agree that no one should be killed or seriously injured while using our roadways?
- Does everyone in our organization recognizes that achieving the goal of zero traffic fatalities and serious injuries will require a change in Traffic Safety Culture?

Next Steps

3. Finding opportunities to formally adopt traffic safety culture as an approach to traffic safety goals.

For example, MnDOT included traffic safety culture at the core of their Strategic Highway Safety Plan. This motivates attention to traffic safety culture and justifies resources to develop strategies to change it.



http://www.dot.state.mn.us/trafficeng/safety/shsp/Minnesota_SHSP_2014.pdf

Find out more!

For more information, please access the Traffic Safety Culture Primer and its supporting tools:

https://www.mdt.mt.gov/research/projects/trafficsafety-primer.shtml

Developed by the **Center for Health and Safety Culture**

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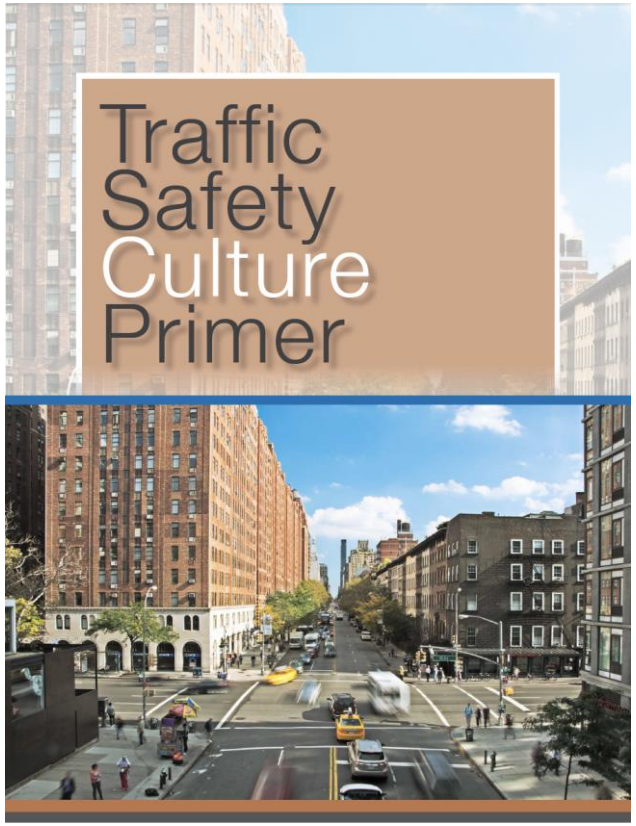

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