



# Idaho's 2016 Strategic Highway Safety Plan Update: *Planning into Action*

## Introduction

In 2015, Idaho embarked on an update of its Strategic Highway Safety Plan (SHSP), initially developed in 2005. The SHSP is a data-driven, collaborative plan that helps Idaho identify and prioritize its most pressing road safety needs. The SHSP integrates the “4 E’s” of safety – engineering, education, enforcement, and emergency medical services. It establishes statewide goals, emphasis areas, and performance measures and describes strategies to reduce or eliminate fatalities and serious injuries.

The Office of Highway Safety (OHS), Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) led the update. From the beginning, the agency was committed to robust collaboration with federal, other state and local and private partners.

## Meeting the Challenge

OHS understood that stakeholder engagement was crucial to a comprehensive plan and to shared, committed implementation of the SHSP’s strategies and goals. To meet that challenge, OHS envisioned a new structure that incorporated more active and frequent engagement from key leaders in the safety community – a structure that entailed time and energy to create and maintain. But OHS also recognized that participants, many of them dedicated volunteers, already juggled multiple assignments and priorities, with little room for yet another planning process.

In addition, a key piece – the strategy development process – was targeted for completion within six months. To help tackle this challenge, OHS contracted Christiansen Communications, LLC of Boise to help design and carry out an efficient process for strategy development, and to help manage this critical phase of the SHSP update.

A core team worked to meet this challenge: OHS SHSP Coordinator Lisa Losness; OHS Highway Safety Manager John Tomlinson; and the three-member Christiansen Communications team, Darla Christiansen, Rebecca Coulter, and Cydney Weiland.



*Meridian Police Officer Will Stoy, Motorcycle Focus Area Group chair, documents key ideas to include in motorcycle safety strategies during the kickoff workshop.*



## Building a Collaborative Structure

The SHSP process began by building an organizational core, which includes three Emphasis Areas and 11 Focus Areas. Emphasis and Focus Areas are established based on crash data analysis, the economic cost of crashes, and priorities established by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and Federal Highways Administration (FHWA).

The three Emphasis Areas and associated Focus Areas are:

High Risk Behavior Emphasis Area	Severe Crash Types Emphasis Area	Vulnerable Roadway User Emphasis Area
Aggressive Driving Distracted Driving Impaired Driving Occupant Protection	Commercial Motor Vehicles Intersections Lane Departure	Bicycle & Pedestrian Mature Drivers Motorcycle Youthful Drivers

**Emphasis Area Groups** are chaired by a recognized leader in the safety community, and include leaders from the respective Focus Area Groups. Emphasis Area leaders help facilitate information sharing and "cross pollination" between Focus Area Groups, and help guide Focus Area Groups.

**Focus Area Groups** are stakeholder groups that formulated strategies for each of the 11 Focus Areas, using updated crash and safety data, existing strategies, and other information. Focus Area Groups range in size from four to 20 participants. Each group typically has a leader, with facilitation and notetaking support as needed. OHS program managers help provide subject matter expertise. Each Focus Area Group met two to four times between December 2015 and May 2016 to develop and prioritize strategies, and the groups are expected to meet periodically to help carry out and coordinate strategies.



*Many participants were particularly excited about the ability to leverage resources and "cross pollinate" ideas.*



## Communicating from Beginning to End

Because the Focus Area and Emphasis Area Groups included participants from 37 agencies and organizations across Idaho, shared understanding and ongoing communication was critical. Key elements included:

- A December 2015 kickoff workshop, which outlined the update process and allowed participants to begin developing Focus Area strategies in breakout sessions. Participants responded to questions such as, *“What’s working from the existing plan that we should carry forward?”* and *“Where are the gaps?”*;
- A widely-shared introductory document referred to as “SHSP 101,” which provided consistent and clear articulation of the project’s key aspects and processes;
- Periodic e-mail updates to more than 150 participants and other stakeholders, which helped keep partners in the communication loop and fostered ongoing awareness of the SHSP;
- Monthly Focus Area Group presentations to the Executive Safety Committee, which includes safety leaders from the ITD and the FWHA and which sets overall direction for SHSP activities;
- Consistent formatting (including font and color) of SHSP-related documents to help establish a recognizable SHSP brand.

## Developing Strategies

The heart of the SHSP update is the Focus Area strategies: incremental steps that safety partners will take to achieve a goal established for the Focus Area. Recognizing that busy stakeholders could get bogged down if the strategy development process were too complex, the SHSP team instead developed a straightforward method for the groups’ work, including the following elements:

- **6-10 Strategies:** OHS recognized that asking each Focus Area Group to develop a short list of strategies acknowledged the realities of limited funding and a desire to see tangible accomplishments.
- **Matrix:** A standardized framework formulated by Christiansen Communications included space for documenting strategies and capturing group notes, tracking “cross-pollination” of similar ideas between groups, and articulating performance measures for monitoring future progress.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> “Cross-pollination” of like strategies, and development of performance measures, will be undertaken later in 2016.



- **Criteria:** The SHSP team outlined four simple criteria for developing strategies. This helped with quick evaluation of potential strategies, and was a benchmark for participants to use as rationale for adopting a given strategy. The four criteria included (in no particular order):
  1. Have we been doing it, and would like to continue because it has been proven effective?
  2. Is it considered a best practice from another state, or does it align with Idaho-specific recommendations (for example, Standardized Field Sobriety Testing [SFST], Traffic Injury Research Foundation [TIRF] or safety assessments)?
  3. Is it represented in an existing safety plan (for example, the Idaho Impaired Driving Strategic Plan, or the Highway Safety Plan)?
  4. Is it one of the “Countermeasures that Work” or a research-proven project? Strategies cited in NHTSA’s “Countermeasures That Work” are based on a star rating; the more stars noted, the higher the demonstrated effectiveness.
- **Pre-work:** The team compiled important material for each Focus Area Group’s review, thereby making efficient use of stakeholder time and facilitating their evaluation and strategy development. This included pre-populating the matrix for each Focus Area with possible strategies, using source material suggested by the criteria, ideas generated at the December workshop breakout sessions, and OHS-identified areas of emphasis.

With the pre-populated matrices in hand, Focus Area Group participants typically came together in a two-hour meeting facilitated by Christiansen Communications to review preliminary strategies; revise, add and/or delete them as appropriate; and adopt as a draft set. The draft set of strategies were then e-mailed to the Focus Area Group (including participants not attending the meeting) for final reflection and comment.

After inclusion of any final revisions, the SHSP team led each group through strategy prioritization, using a simple dot-vote process. Some groups chose to prioritize via an in-person meeting; other groups, via an online Survey Monkey poll. The final prioritized strategies were then e-mailed to the groups, with a follow-up thank-you message.

The SHSP strategy development process was complete by May 2016: on time and under budget. With this critical piece accomplished, the updated SHSP document is expected to be released later in 2016.

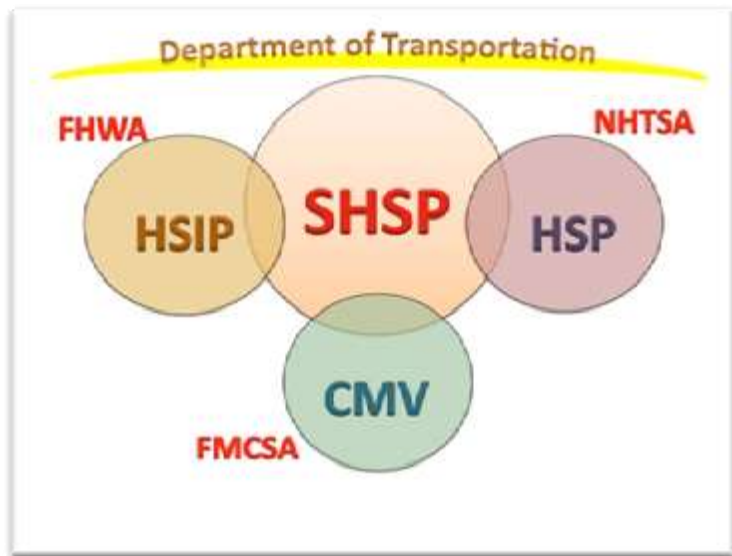
By all accounts, the process was an unqualified success. SHSP coordinator Lisa Losness perhaps said it best, ***"I could not have been more pleased with the process, team and outcome."***

## Bringing It All Together: Elements for Success

A number of key aspects were essential to project success:

- **Diversity among partners:** The SHSP update process is managed by the OHS, which oversees behavioral safety programs. The diversity of partners involved in these programs provided a natural conduit for SHSP participants, assuring a robust and varied set of stakeholders. Contributors included representatives from local television stations, law enforcement, and engineering agencies, as well as court officers, nonprofit organizations and private businesses.
- **Strategy focused:** The SHSP process focused on development of strategies, which are designed to be broad enough to encompass multiple future action plans or project. By concentrating on umbrella strategies, the Focus Area Groups could think and plan strategically, rather than getting mired in implementation details (a step that will come later).

- **Tie in with other plans:** Early in the process, SHSP Coordinator Lisa Losness developed a graphic that clearly and simply illustrated the SHSP's tie-in with other required plans, including the Highway Safety Plan, Highway Safety Improvement Plan, and Commercial Vehicle Safety Plan. This graphic helped key partners answer the “why is this important?” question, and alerted stakeholders to many collaboration opportunities.



*A graphic developed by SHSP Coordinator Lisa Losness illustrated the SHSP tie-in with other required safety plans, and helped key partners understand why the SHSP is important.*

- **Front-line perspective:** Stakeholder participants included ITD highway maintenance and safety technicians not typically included in the planning process. They shed new light on small-group discussions and brought front-line perspectives and ideas about distracted drivers, tracking near-misses, roadway improvements and signage.
- **Face of the SHSP:** SHSP Coordinator Lisa Losness participated in nearly every Focus Area Group meeting, which allowed her to provide consistent information, to facilitate information sharing between groups, and to serve as the identified “face” of the SHSP.
- **Validating stakeholder input:** Flipcharts documenting the preliminary ideas and strategies generated at the December workshop were retained and presented at the subsequent Focus Area Group meetings, as suggested by Highway Safety Manager John Tomlinson. Incorporating

these ideas into the preliminary strategies, and including the flipcharts again at the Focus Area Group meetings, helped demonstrate and reinforce the connection between the various process steps, and helped validate the importance of all stakeholder input.

- **Matrix:** Some team members call the matrix the project's "secret sauce." Initially developed by the Christiansen Communications team and refined in partnership with OHS, the tool allowed participants to break down a potentially overwhelming process into distinct and achievable steps. This created an inclusive process that was easily understood during the process and upon review. The matrix also facilitated communication between groups, as participants could refer to a collectively used format and tool. Moreover, the matrix now serves as a “one stop shop” repository that summarizes the various elements associated with each Focus Area’s strategies.
- **Transparency of process:** During Focus Area Group meetings, Christiansen Communications helped the group edit strategies in “live” mode, using a laptop, projector and screen. This facilitated group revision in real time, and tangibly ratified the group’s work.
- **Cross-pollination:** Stakeholders quickly embraced the idea of cross-pollination, recognizing that many Focus Area Groups share similar ideas and potential resources. Going forward, the SHSP provides many opportunities for Focus Area Groups to combine efforts, leveraging existing and often limited resources, such as funding, personnel, and leadership, to carry out projects.
- **Priorities:** The SHSP articulates priorities that have been established by a diversity of safety stakeholders, thereby helping to assure these priorities represent the shared interests of multiple partners, enhancing their likelihood of successful funding and ultimately, reaping the largest benefit to Idaho.
- **Team check-ins:** Regularly scheduled meetings of the SHSP core team meant close team coordination. The check-ins between Christiansen Communications and OHS staff were critical touch points for communication, especially given that team members had many other responsibilities and commitments. The Christiansen team maintained a simple action item tracker, which proved to be key for accountability on assigned action items and due dates.



*Once strategies were identified, participants voted on which would be most important to carry out – something that will help OHS Program Managers in future decision-making.*

*The prioritization process occurred online or using dot-voting methodology during meetings.*



## Bringing It All Together: Lessons Learned

Throughout the strategy development process, the SHSP team identified items for future improvement:

- To keep OHS staff and SHSP participants informed, the SHSP team posted a large wall calendar populated with critical SHSP dates in a conference room used for Focus Area Group meetings. The calendar proved superfluous, as most partners relied on e-mails and online calendars to keep apprised of project activity.
- While the December workshop provided a good kickoff to the SHSP update, a final “wrap-up” event might be more beneficial. This celebration could foster active cross-pollination and stakeholder interactions, set the stage for shared activities, and celebrate key accomplishments and achievements.
- To provide clarity and consistent understanding, the role of the Emphasis Group Leaders could be better articulated.
- Before the first set of Focus Area Group meetings, the SHSP team reviewed preliminary strategies with the appropriate Focus Area Group leader and the OHS program manager in a “pre-meeting,” designed to prepare them for the Group meeting. Subsequent feedback indicated these pre-meetings were helpful but not essential, especially in light of busy schedules.
- The SHSP team presented an interactive poster session at the March 2016 Idaho Highway Safety Summit, an annual two-day workshop that featured innovative, results-oriented highway safety solutions. While the session was designed to increase awareness of the SHSP, the team found that most attendees were already informed about the safety plan and associated process. A handful of attendees signed up to participate in SHSP groups, which was beneficial but fewer than anticipated.



*At the Idaho Highway Safety Summit, Christiansen Communications Principal Darla Christiansen explains how ideas generated at the December 2015 kickoff workshop were turned into draft strategies.*