

Cycling for Diverse Communities

A Guide for Setting up a Cycle Group



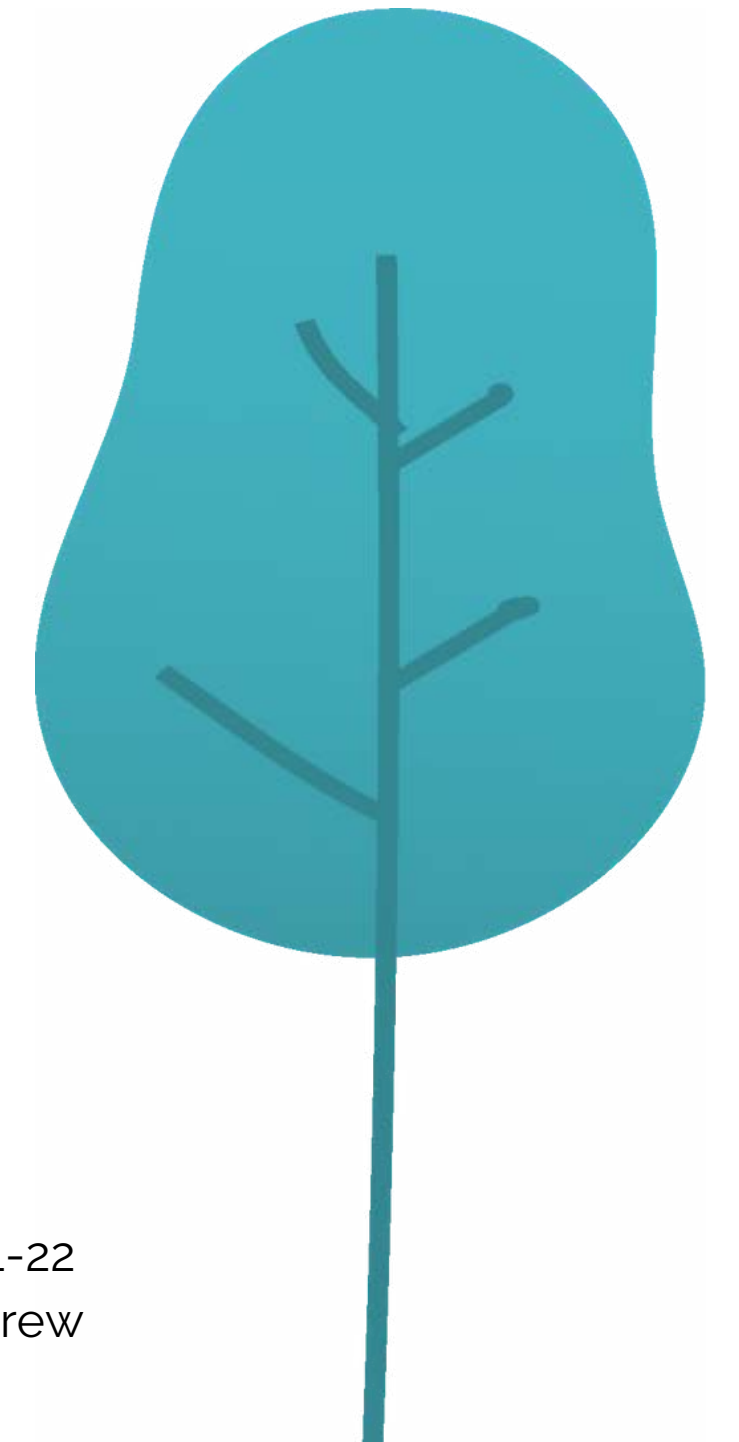
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Contents

Introduction	page 3
Step 1: Build a team and get prepared	page 6
Step 2: Get started informally	page 8
Step 3: Get connected	page 10
Step 4: Plan your rides	page 13
Step 5: Secure funding for your group	page 15
Step 6: Recruit and train your Ride Leaders	page 18
Step 7: Get organised	page 22
Step 8: Promote your group	page 23
Step 9: Look after your volunteers	page 26
Step 10: Take it to the next level	page 27
The Cycle Sisters Model	page 32
Barriers to cycling	page 33
Resources	page 36

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Salam, peace be with you!

About Cycle Sisters

Cycle Sisters is a charity which aims to inspire and enable Muslim women to cycle. In 2016 we set up our first community cycle group. By 2023 we've grown to a network of **10 groups across London** as well as building a **grassroots movement of 1500+ women** to diversify cycling which has rapidly gained momentum.



About this guide

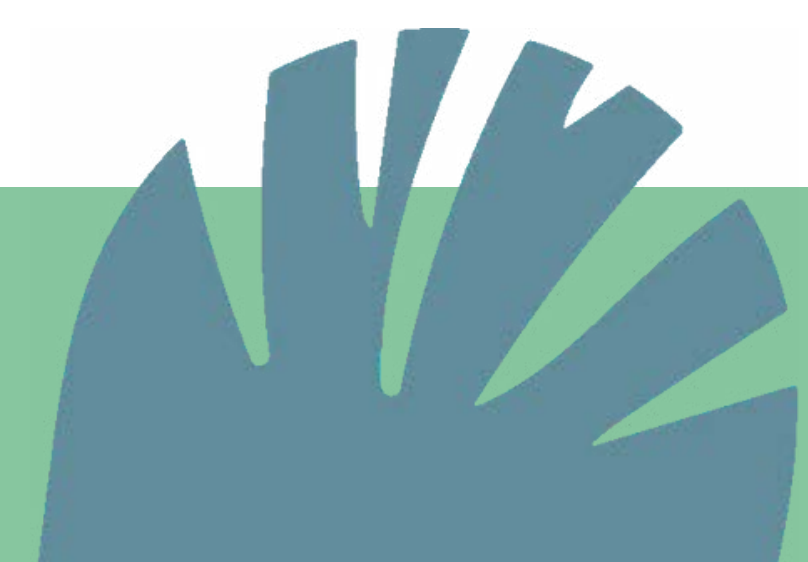
In this step-by-step guide, we've shared our **key learning about how to set up and run a successful inclusive cycle group for diverse communities**. We have included case studies and examples throughout to share our story with you.

The culture of a group really matters - what people wear, the timings of rides, the bikes typically ridden and what happens at the social stops are all factors which can exclude people.

We've seen how creating a safe, empowering and supportive space makes it possible for people to feel comfortable to try cycling and change their lives for the better!

Cycle Sisters' experience has been supporting one particular under-represented group, Muslim women, to discover cycling. Championing religious, race and gender equality within cycling is one part of the much broader area of diversity and inclusion in cycling. We are not claiming to be experts - just sharing our experience and hoping it is useful to others.

There are many other inspirational groups doing important work to increase diversity in cycling and we've included a resource list at the end of this guide where you can find out more.



Further training

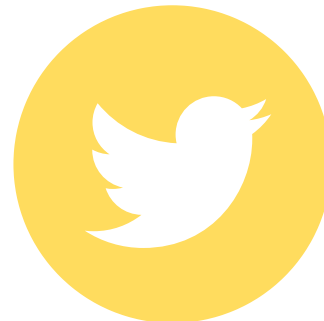
We can provide further 1-to-1 training in any of the areas of this guide. Please get in touch to find out more.

Feedback

We'd like this to be an evolving document which changes and grows with new ideas and perspectives. If you have any feedback or questions, please contact us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

More info:

www.cyclesisters.org.uk





Step 1

Build a team & get prepared

- **Identify the goals and vision for your cycle group.** Look at what cycle groups already exist in your local area and think about who is not currently being reached. Talk to people to get a better understanding of what challenges they experience in starting to cycle and don't forget to reflect on your own experiences.
- We've found it is generally most successful if you target the community that you are part of as you understand their needs and people can identify with you. An example of catering to specific needs is providing women-only group rides for Muslim women who may feel uncomfortable joining a mixed-gender cycling group.

Visible and relatable role models can help people from diverse communities see cycling as something for them.



- **Find a few people who live locally who buy into your vision and are committed to setting up the cycle group with you;** even if there are just two of you, it will make a big difference as it can be a lot to take on by yourself. Think about what kind of qualities you need from your team - people who are good organisers and well-networked within the local community will be a great help!
- **Consider doing a few cycle lessons to help build your team's cycling skills, particularly when cycling on the roads, even if you are already experienced cyclists.** This is important to prepare for training as a Ride Leader (see step 6). You don't need to be an expert cyclist to run a group - lots of our Cycle Sisters Ride Leaders started as nervous beginners and built their skills over time. Check your local council website as many offer free cycle lessons.

“I didn't see any women cycling in an abaya (long Islamic dress) and I thought I would stick out from the crowd. I was also worried it would be really hard to cycle in. When I joined the group, I realised that you can cycle in all types of everyday clothes and there was no stopping me!”

Nailla

Read more of Nailla's story [here](#).





Step 2

Get started informally

- **Ride with a few people that you know well** to test out some routes around your area. It doesn't have to be a route that you spend a lot of time planning, but it will give you a chance to see what it's like to ride in a group and think about what kind of places might be fun to cycle to. Cafes with outdoor seating and local attractions like galleries and parks are all great options!

Our WhatsApp groups have been an essential part of building a wonderful community of women who support and motivate each other.

- **Decide how you're going to communicate with people who are interested in joining you.** You might want to set up a WhatsApp group where you can share all your information. It can help participants to feel confident enough to join the rides if they have got a feel for the group and the chance to ask questions in advance. These groups are a safe space for people to ask questions about cycling, share tips, and inspire each other with photos and stories about rides.



“I love the Cycle Sisters community I'm a part of. Even when you can't attend rides you are still connected to each other through WhatsApp. I've got so much inspiration from the WhatsApp groups - from cafe recommendations to ideas of what bike to buy.”

Jen



Step 2

Get started informally

- **Decide how you are going to get people to book onto your rides.** You'll need to potentially limit the numbers on rides due to safety ratios and number of bikes available to lend (see step 3 for ways to access bikes). This would be covered in any Ride Leader training but the recommended ratios are no more than 8 riders to every Ride Leader.
- You could initially start by posting the details on your WhatsApp group for people to indicate they want to attend a ride but as your group grows, you may want to look into options like Eventbrite, Google Forms or Spond. These are also useful to keep a record of how many people are coming on your rides so that you can communicate your impact to your local council and potential funders.





Step 3

Get connected

- **Map what is happening in your local area.** There may be other cycle groups or the council might run cycling schemes for residents such as Dr Bike events, free cycle lessons and bike hire. Look on the council website to find the section on cycling or active travel. If you need more support to lead rides, you may find volunteers from your local cycling campaign group to help as you get started by either co-leading rides or recommending routes. We've found that experienced cyclists are often happy to see more people take up cycling and keen to support where they can!

- **Organise a meeting with the local council** to explain that you're setting up a new community cycling group and ask what support they can offer. Depending on your area, the relevant department might be sport & leisure, highways and roads or active travel. Local councillors may have a personal interest in cycling or it may be part of their role remit and can be helpful to reach out to. It would be worth checking if your council has a strategy for increasing cycling and active travel to help you build your case.





Step 3

Get connected

- **Here's a list of things that are useful to ask your council for help with:**

- **Funding or in-kind support:** the council may be able to support you with some funding to get your group up and running (see step 5 for what you might need funding for), free training (e.g. first aid) or free venues to use for training.
- **Promoting your rides** on council platforms including social media and newsletters (this may be more relevant a bit further down the line).

Offering free bikes for group rides is vital in breaking down barriers.

- **Bikes:** see if the council could give you access to bikes to use for your rides and be responsible for insuring and maintaining these bikes. Some councils have a pool of bikes which are used for council staff or cycle lessons. Around 2-3 bikes would be a great place to start; you can always request more in the future once your group grows.
- You could also start rides initially for those who already own a bike. This could demonstrate demand and interest and lead to the council supporting you in the future.



“I always used to borrow one of the council bikes for the rides, which was a great way to get started without having to commit to buying a bike, but I needed to buy a bike with a child seat after having my daughter. I got some great advice from Cycle Sisters and finally, two years after starting cycling, I bought my first bike. I loved that bike so much!”

Maryam

Read more of Maryam's story [here](#).





Step 4

Plan your rides

- **Think about a good start point for rides.**

This may be dependent on where bikes are kept if you will be lending bikes for your rides, but here are some things to think about to make your start point accessible:

- Does the community you are targeting live near the start point? Is it a well known place and easy to find?
- Is it easily accessible by public transport and is there free parking available?
- Are there toilets?
- Is there an off-road space where people can try a bike before the ride starts so that you can check their riding skills?
- Is there enough space for a group to gather safely and without inconveniencing members of the public?

- **Plan a few routes for your group rides.**

Route planning can be daunting when you're doing it for the first time. Here's a few things to remember to keep it simple and make your rides as inclusive as possible:

- Choose a nice destination to cycle to such as a park with a cafe. Look for cafes with bike parking or an outside seating area where you can keep an eye on the bikes. Outside seating also means that people can feel more comfortable to eat their own food/drink without feeling the pressure to buy anything from the cafe.

Having a social stop on your rides can be a great way of creating a welcoming and fun experience.

"I'm an introvert and sometimes find socialising quite challenging so I've been surprised how comfortable I've felt on the Cycle Sisters rides. I feel different when I come home after the rides - lighter and brighter."

Shabnam





Step 4

Plan your rides

- We've found that rides of around 5-10 miles are an ideal entry point for people who are new or less confident at cycling. At a relaxed pace, most people who can ride a bike can manage this distance. In the future you might want to consider longer and shorter routes to accommodate a wider range of abilities but this is a good place to start.
- Use a cycle route planner like [Cycle Streets](#) or [Komoot](#) (these are both free) to plan the route between the start point and the destination.
- Try out the suggested route from the route planner and see whether you think it will work for a group. You want to try to avoid busy junctions and big hills for these entry-level rides.
- Consider other factors that may make a route inaccessible e.g. steps or narrow paths may not be possible to navigate with a non-standard cycle like a cargo bike or adapted cycle used by a disabled person. You may need to use your local knowledge of the area to adjust the route.





Step 5

Secure funding for your group

- **Get the paperwork in place** to be eligible for funding. The main things you will need are:
 - A simple constitution that sets out the basics of how your group will run. [British Cycling](#) and [Cycling UK](#) have templates that you can use.
 - A bank account for your group. You may be able to set this up later if you can find a local charity or community organisation that is happy to accept funding on your behalf.
- **Write down a cost breakdown of what you need for the group.** While you can run your group informally and for free (see steps 2-4), you may reach a point where you'd like to formalise things by training some Ride Leaders (see step 6) and making sure that your rides are covered by insurance. The following page outlines the main costs involved based on our experience.



Item	Approximate cost
Equipment pack for Ride Leaders (including rucksack, first aid kit, puncture repair kit, handpump, cable lock, multitool, disposable gloves & masks)	£100
Hi viz vests for Ride Leaders	£5-8 each
<p>Group insurance - affiliating your group with one of the providers below will give you insurance to cover ride organisers as well as access to other membership benefits:</p> <p>British Cycling Cycling UK</p>	<p>£73 £85</p>
<p>Ride Leader training:</p> <p>British Cycling Cycling UK</p>	<p>£135 per person or £1000 for up to 10 people £877 for 5-7 people</p>
First aid training	£100 per person or you may be able to book a course for around £300-500 for a small group
Bike maintenance training	£300-500 for a small group



Step 5

Secure funding for your group

- **Look for funding** to cover these costs. There's various options of how you might do this:
 - Your local council may have grant schemes available that you can apply to or could direct you to other relevant funding opportunities.
 - Approach large cycling organisations such as [British Cycling](#), [Cycling UK](#) and [Sustrans](#), all of which have diversity & inclusion strategies and targets and may be interested to hear how you can help them reach more diverse communities. They often have specific grant schemes that community groups can apply to such as Cycling UK's Big Bike Revival.
 - Apply to cycling grant schemes such as Transport for London's annual [Walking & Cycling Grants](#).
- Run your own fundraising campaign using a platform like Justgiving or Enthuse.
- Approach local businesses if you have any contacts to ask for their support.
- Set up a membership scheme where you charge an annual fee for being part of your group. Consider how to make your membership scheme inclusive e.g. could you offer a certain number of rides for free before having to commit to membership, or have different membership bands for those on lower incomes, or even a free option?



Step 6

Recruit & train your Ride Leaders

- **What is a Ride Leader?** Ride Leaders are volunteers who take on the responsibility of planning and leading rides.. They make our riders feel comfortable and confident to participate. Here are some of the things that Ride Leaders do:

- Create a welcoming ride experience where riders feel motivated and supported.
- Support riders to develop their skills by offering tips, advice and signposting.
- Facilitate the ride by navigating, managing junctions, communicating with other road users, and keeping the group together.
- Most importantly, act as a role model! It is particularly important for diverse communities to see themselves represented in cycling. Ride Leaders can be visible examples that all sorts of people can cycle!

We've found that the presence of trained Ride Leaders on group rides is one of the key factors in making our rides accessible and inclusive.



Watch our Ride Leaders in action [here](#).



“I wanted to become a Ride Leader to help other women like me to have the confidence to cycle wearing a niqab (face veil) and a hijab (head scarf). I didn’t have a role model like that when I was starting out so I hope I can be that person for other women to inspire and motivate them.”

Rabia

Watch more of Rabia's story [here](#).





Step 6

Recruit & train your Ride Leaders

- **Decide who to train.** You can start with just a few people who are committed and then look to train others in the future. Here are some of the qualities we've found are useful in a Ride Leader:

- Available, reliable and committed.
- Passion for cycling and sharing this with other people.
- Confident and competent cyclist with their own bike (remember these skills can be developed over time and with the support of cycle lessons).
- Friendly and warm with great communication skills.
- Ideally from the community that you are trying to target with your group so they can act as role models and help with promotion (or if you do not initially have enough people with the right skills consider asking

experienced cyclists from the local cycling community to help out - it's important they understand your vision and the barriers experienced by diverse communities).

In our experience it often works best to develop riders from within the group to train as Ride Leaders. They often bring a sense of commitment to the group and desire to give back.





Step 6

Recruit & train your Ride Leaders

- **The training process:** We've found that there are 3 key elements that are important to equip a Ride Leader with the skills and confidence they need to successfully run rides:
 - **Ride Leadership training:** This is a one day course that covers things like: route planning, risk assessments, what to bring on a ride, how to manage junctions, and dealing with incidents (see table in step 5 for examples of providers).
 - **First aid:** The emergency first aid at work certificate can be completed in one day and is valid for 3 years. Check whether your team members already hold this certificate through work or other volunteering activities as then they won't need to do it again.
 - **Basic bike maintenance:** This is optional as it depends on the existing confidence and knowledge of your team. Common issues that come up on rides are punctures and adjusting brakes. A course helps Ride Leaders to feel confident to deal with these minor mechanicals.





Step 7

Get organised

- **Delegate tasks to your team.** There's a few ongoing tasks that are needed to run a cycle group and it can be useful to decide who is going to be responsible for what. From our experience the main things are:
 - Responding to enquiries about the group (by email, social media, WhatsApp etc).
 - Moderator/admin role on Facebook group, WhatsApp etc.
 - Organising a rota of Ride Leaders - if you have a good number of Ride Leaders trained, you may like to take turns to run the rides so that everyone has a chance for a break.
 - Ride booking administration.
 - Organising socials for the riders and/or the Ride Leader team.

- **Compile all the useful info into one place.** You will probably be asked the same questions many times over such as where can I buy a bike or how can I learn how to ride a bike. To save time it could be useful to make a FAQs document to share. Including information about local cycling opportunities and making sure your Ride Leaders are aware of the information is really important to be able to signpost and keep developing your riders' skills.



"I've personally benefited a lot from my Coordinator role - the satisfaction of seeing the group evolve from a small group of riders into something amazing and the chance to work with other wonderful volunteers has been joyful!"

Samra



Step 8

Promote your group

- **Use diverse imagery.** You can't be what you can't see! For example, an image of a Muslim woman riding a bike wearing a jilbaab (full-length Islamic dress) shows that people can wear all sorts of things to ride a bike and lycra is by no means essential. Make sure that you have consent to share photos.

It's really important to use imagery which reflects the communities that you are trying to reach and challenges stereotypes around cycling.



"As a Muslim woman wearing a long loose dress and hijab, I didn't think I could cycle. Then I came across Cycle Sisters' Facebook page and saw pictures of Muslim women wearing hijabs (headscarves) and jilbabs (full-length dress) and thought if they could do it, so could I! Only a few years later, I've trained as a Cycle Instructor so I can help other women and girls."

Seema

Read more of Seema's story [here](#).





Step 8

Promote your group

- **Be clear and inclusive in your language.** Try to avoid using technical jargon which can be intimidating and off-putting and instead talk about cycling as an everyday activity. When you promote your rides, include key information which makes it clear that your ride is accessible and inclusive e.g. mention about supportive Ride Leaders being on the ride, ride distance and pace, and that no-one will be left behind.
- **Reach out (when you are ready!)** We would definitely recommend starting small and not doing too much promotion straight away - this helps to keep numbers manageable on rides and gives your Ride Leaders a chance to settle into their role. But you may reach a point where you want to promote your rides more widely so think about local community groups on social media and in-person who can help you reach the communities you are targeting. We've found the most effective way of doing promotion is to go through existing contacts that you, your fellow Ride Leaders and group members have.





Step 9

Look after your volunteers

- **Value your volunteers.** The volunteers who organise and lead the rides are your most important asset! Without them, many community cycle groups could not exist. It's important to think of ways to value and recognise your volunteers and, where possible, give them opportunities to keep developing their skills.
- **Here's some things we've found have worked well:**
 - Organise regular socials such as Ride Leader-only rides followed by a cafe stop or an annual get together.
 - Ask local bike shops or other companies to donate small items which you can give to your volunteers e.g. bike oil samples or lights.

- Celebrate their contribution on your social media e.g. 'Volunteer of the Month.'
- Look out for local award schemes to recognise volunteers.
- Keep your volunteers in the loop - make sure that they're the first to hear about any news or updates about the group.



“Volunteering with Cycle Sisters has helped develop my own skills and confidence and given me the chance to make a difference to my community. The training and support is excellent and I really enjoy the volunteer celebration event which makes me feel really valued.”

Nahida

Watch more of Nahida's story [here](#).

Step 10

Take it to the next level!

- **Ask for feedback.** When thinking about next steps and how to grow and expand, it's always useful to understand what your members would like to see. You can do a short survey using something like Google Forms to get feedback about their experiences and any suggestions for the future.
- **Monitor and evaluate.** Keeping a simple record of how many rides you run and the numbers that have attended can help demonstrate your impact and build a case for further funding and support. As you grow you may want to collect other data and conduct more in depth surveys to better understand your impact.
- **Connect with other groups.** You could do joint rides with other cycle groups. This is a great chance to bring different communities together to get to know each other while doing a shared activity and it can create progression opportunities for your riders to keep developing their skills. You can learn from each other about how to be more inclusive and accessible for different communities.
- **Do more rides!** Once you've got one regular ride established you might want to think about offering more variety to accommodate people with different time commitments and abilities. For example you could do additional rides on different days of the week, shorter or longer rides and even training rides to help riders prepare for a sportive or challenge event such as RideLondon.



Smiles & Miles

Cycle Sisters runs an annual virtual cycling event challenging our riders to cycle as many miles as possible during the month of February and record all their rides on Strava.

With weekly themes such as 'Cake Week' and 'Landmark Scavenger Hunt', Smiles & Miles aims to encourage more independent cycling as well as cycling through the winter.

In 2023, over 170 women took part and cycled more than 28,000 miles in just 4 weeks!



“Smiles and Miles has been a huge milestone in my cycling journey. The confidence I built on the rides made me believe in my abilities and I’ve broken my personal mental barriers.”

Imsal





Step 10

Take it to the next level!

- **Look for ways to tell your story.** There will be lots of inspiring stories of how cycling has changed your riders' lives! Reach out to your local media outlets or take to social media to share photos and quotes which show how you're making a difference. It could lead to new partnerships and opportunities for your group as well as inspiring many others to start cycling.

- **Get a kit!** Developing some merchandise and cycle clothing for your group is a fun way to promote your group and potentially raise some money. It can also help people to feel a sense of belonging to the group (although be clear that you don't have to wear the kit to join the rides).



“By sharing my cycling journey, I hope to ignite a spark in others to embrace the incredible benefits that cycling can bring to their lives. I discovered newfound strength, endurance, and resilience; cycling has become my therapy, a way to clear my mind, find peace, and rejuvenate my spirit.”

Fatima

Watch an interview with Fatima [here](#).





Step 10

Take it to the next level!

- **Train instructors to deliver Bikeability lessons.** Bikeability is the national cycle training programme. Most local authorities offer cycle training delivered by instructors for their residents. Having more instructors from diverse backgrounds is a really effective way of increasing the take up of lessons among different communities. There may be bursaries available to subsidise the training cost so check with your local council or Bikeability Trust.

Offering cycle lessons alongside group rides is vital to develop riders to become Ride Leaders, and support more people to cycle independently.



“I had wanted to learn for years but had given up. I heard about Cycle Sisters and discovered there were so many other Muslim women who had not learnt to ride a bike and suddenly I didn't feel alone. I learnt to balance in my first lesson with such simple guidance from my instructor. I am so proud of my achievement!”

Rafia

The Cycle Sisters Model



This infographic shows a summary of the key features of Cycle Sisters' community cycle groups model which could be replicated for other communities.

Barriers to cycling

In the following pages, we've shared some of the key barriers to cycling faced by Muslim women based on the experiences of our riders. When thinking about barriers, it's important to remember that everyone's individual experience is different and not to generalise or make assumptions. Many of these barriers are also shared with other communities.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Fear of cycling safely on the roads	Group rides with trained Ride Leaders give people confidence to cycle on the roads. Bikeability cycle lessons can further develop skills in road confidence. Connect with local cycling campaign groups, speak to local council and ensure that the voices of under-represented communities are heard by those planning cycling infrastructure.
Concerns around social safety, racism and Islamophobia	Ride Leaders and other group members act as role models and demonstrate that people from all backgrounds can cycle. Riding in a group can feel safer especially when starting out. Encourage riders to report any racist or Islamophobic incidents they experience.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Lack of equipment or storage facilities	Offer free bikes to borrow for group rides and signpost people to local initiatives such as bike hire and storage schemes, second hand bike shops and Dr Bike events. Make helmets optional on rides and be clear that no specialist clothing is required.
Lack of skills and confidence to cycle	Group rides provide a safe and supportive space for people to try cycling and build skills. Train and support Muslim women to become Cycle Instructors and signpost riders to Bikeability cycle lessons to learn to ride a bike or cycle on the roads.
Not seeing yourself represented in cycling	Muslim women in leadership roles such as Ride Leaders and Cycle Instructors as well as other group members act as visible role models who people can relate to. Share photos, videos and stories on social media to reach a wider audience and reinforce the message that anyone can cycle.

Barrier	How Cycle Sisters helps
Concerns around what to wear to cycle and perception that you have to wear lycra and tight-fitting clothing	Groups provide a space where wearing Islamic and looser/modest clothing is the norm. Ride Leaders and other group members demonstrate that you can wear all sorts of clothing to cycle and share tips and advice.
Negative cultural attitudes towards cycling	Muslim identity of groups helps individuals and their families to feel comfortable. Work in partnership with community leaders and institutions such as mosques to promote and normalise cycling.
Don't feel comfortable to join existing cycle groups or have had negative experiences of being excluded	Logistics of rides meet needs e.g. women-only spaces, timed around prayers, cafe stops rather than pubs, shorter rides or break during Ramadan. Group provides a safe and supportive space where people don't have to compromise or justify values or lifestyle choices and women know they won't feel like an outsider.



This is not an exhaustive list - it is inspiring to see more and more diverse cycle groups starting up all the time. If there are other groups that would be useful to include on this list, please email us on salam@cyclesisters.org.uk.

Muslim cycling initiatives

[Brothers on Bikes](#)

[Cycling Sisters Bristol](#)

[Evolve](#)

[Fasted500](#)

[Gapped Podcast](#)

[Muslim Women Cyclists Facebook group](#)

[Nuhiha](#)

[Saheli Hub](#)

Community Cycling Groups

[Black Cyclists Network](#)

[Black Women on Wheels](#)

[Black Unity Bike Ride](#)

[Colour Collective](#)

[CycleOut London](#)

[Cycle Together](#)

[Freedom50](#)

[Hop On](#)

[JoyRiders](#)

[Londra Bisiklet Kulubu](#)

[Pride Out](#)

[Ride on Sistas](#)

[Sikh Cycling Network](#)

[The Bike Project](#)

[Together We Ride](#)

[Velociposse](#)

[Wheels for All](#)

[Wheels For Wellbeing](#)

[Women of Colour Cycling Collective](#)

[Women on Wheels](#)

Reports & Research

[A Guide for Inclusive Cycling](#), Wheels for Wellbeing, 2021

[Active Travel Podcast](#) - various episodes on different diversity topics

[Cycling for everyone: A guide for inclusive cities and towns](#), Sustrans, 2020

[Cycling Potential in London's Diverse Communities](#), TfL, 2021

[Diversity in Cycling 2nd edition](#), Andy Edwards, 2022

[Diversity in the Cycling Industry](#), Bicycle Association, 2023

[Does more cycling mean more diversity in cycling?](#) Dr Rachel Aldred, James Woodcock & Anna Goodman, 2015





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