

USA Cycling's New Let's Ride Program

USA Cycling's new [Let's Ride](#) program is a nationwide bicycle safety and basic bike skills education curriculum, meant to be taught to elementary school children through a series of camps, and afterschool programs across the country.

Headed up by former Olympic and women's world time trial champion [Mari Holden](#), the program is geared toward developing a more diverse and inclusive base of young riders and hopes to reach 20,000 new kids this year. The program will teach kids, aged 7 to 11, basic bicycle skills and safety and promote the development of a healthy and active lifestyle at an early age. Let's Ride plans to partner with organizations that already offer key infrastructure and bike parks, and existing developmental non-profit and faith-based groups who work with under-served populations.

The campaign is also targeting various high-visibility and high-registration 2021 cycling events to leverage public visibility for Let's Ride enrollment and new programs. Holden told The Outer Line she has specific programs planned for the upcoming Tour of America's Dairyland in Wisconsin, and the national championships, coming up later in June in Knoxville, Tennessee.

In some of these mass participation events, there will be an option in the registration process to donate to Let's Ride, to help get the fund-raising process kick-started. The program will also reach out to donors that support general outreach programs, youth empowerment organizations, and other entities that promote diversity in cycling and sustainable management practices.

Holden is initiating a number of new marketing initiatives and partnering arrangements, with the program being promoted heavily on the USAC website, Strava, and on social media around a number of specific events. She is also working with a number of non-profit partners, including groups like Outride, People for Bikes, the American League of Bicyclists, and Free Bikes4Kids (FB4K).

Terry Esau, the founder and executive director of Free Bikes 4 Kidz, says, "My dream is that someday the winner of the Tour de France will stand on that podium and tell the story of how he or she got their first bike from Free Bikes 4 Kidz at a Let's Ride event. The Tour isn't really won on the streets of Paris, it's won on the driveway when a kid gets their first bike. Without that first bike, there is no podium."

Holden is also putting together groups to participate in Let's Ride "pelotons" in key 2021 events such as Bike the Bay, El Tour de Tucson. All of these events are ideal forums for Let's Ride, she says, and the format enables high participation and visibility.

During this month, Holden plans to hold major promotional and visibility-raising events at both the national championships in Knoxville, Tennessee, and during the 11-day Tour of America's Dairyland (TOAD) event later in the month. TOAD organizer Tom Schuler told The Outer Line that the event is doing a program in conjunction with the Milwaukee public schools and FB4K, and hopes to give away at least 200 bikes. At the affiliated Intelligentsia Cup event later in July (also co-managed by Schuler) they will be doing two Let's Ride events. "It's kind of a combination bike giveaway and bike rodeo," Schuler says, adding, "It's really smart for USAC to partner with local cycling advocacy organizations around the country to produce these Let's Ride camps. And by also bringing in FB4K, it really gives an added and valuable dimension to the event."

FB4K's Esau adds, "Mari Holden isn't just an Olympic champion, she brings her heart for kids to USAC. She realized that there would be kids who would want to attend her events but wouldn't have a bike. That's why Free Bikes 4 Kidz and the Let's Ride program make perfect partners."

Asked about her own long-range vision and goals for the program, Holden says, “we’d love to see our program spread to all neighborhoods across the country, and hope that it leads to a much more talented and diverse U.S. national team at the 2028 Los Angeles Olympics.”

Written by Steve Maxwell, June 9th, 2021