IMBA
TRAIL FRIENDLY COMMUNITY
SELF-ASSESSMENT COMPANION GUIDE

MORE TRAILS CLOSE TO HOME

IMBA INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAIN BICYCLING ASSOCIATION

PARTNERING WITH 250 COMMUNITIES BY 2025

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Welcome!

Thank you for your interest in the IMBA **Trail Friendly Community self-assessment.** This assessment outlines the key elements most communities share once they have made trail development and stewardship a community-wide priority. Within each section of the assessment, you'll find recommendations that offer guidance on next steps. Your community's assessment score and the resulting information can act as the catalyst for a variety of next steps, including:

- Inspiring involvement from your community
- Galvanizing diverse stakeholders around trails
- Gaining more support for trail development
- Solving issues around trail development
- Stimulating new fundraising efforts
- Emphasizing the need for trail maintenance

IMBA's Trail Friendly Community self-assessment is focused on natural surface, singletrack trails meant for recreational activities such as mountain biking, hiking, trail running, and horseback riding. Although paved and gravel paths are undeniably important to communities, they are not included within this assessment.

We suggest you read through the Frequently Asked Questions as well as the assessment questions, both outlined below, so you have the information you need before you start the **survey itself.**

What is a Trail Friendly Community?

A Trail Friendly Community is a great place to live and to visit, where a variety of trail experiences can be found in a reasonable distance from the community center. It is a community where officials, trail organizations, residents and businesses all recognize the importance of trail-based recreation and play a role in developing and maintaining those amenities.

These efforts are focused on growing the outdoor recreation opportunities for residents, which improve quality of life, increase public health, get kids outdoors, preserve open spaces, attract/retain employees, and more.

Great examples of trail friendly communities include Chattanooga, TN; Cedar City, UT; Prescott, AZ; Duluth, MN; and Salida, CO.If your community scores well, you may wish to pursue our IMBA Trail Friendly Community official designation, which rewards your community's good work, shares your success, and lets visitors know they can easily access outdoor recreation during their stay.

A trail friendly community doesn't need to be a trail-focused tourism destination, since that's a slightly different goal. If tourism is a goal down the road, this survey will still guide you in the right direction. And if your community already has at least 50 miles of quality singletrack open to bikes, you could potentially qualify for our IMBA Ride Center designation, which recognizes some of the best locations around the globe to visit with a mountain bike.

Who Should Take This Assessment?

Any community member who can leverage the results to improve their local trail amenities and corresponding community support. This could include city or county staff, trail advocates, members of friends groups, economic development staff, tourism or chamber of commerce staff, community development professionals, and so on. This survey should provide food for thought that can be shared across these organizations to inspire ideas, collaboration, and impetus for action.

While an individual may complete the assessment, this tool is most impactful when worked through as a group of stakeholders representing a variety of organizations and agencies involved in creating a great place to live, work and ride.

Make the Most of the Assessment

Answer each question as accurately as possible and you'll gain insights into how your community is doing in each of the topic areas. Understanding where you have gaps in the process helps identify areas of improvement which will inform how you approach officials, stakeholders and funders.

Assessment questions are organized into the following categories, and each has a role to play in effective trail communities: *Access, Existing Trails and Infrastructure, Community Engagement, Assessment, Funding, Trail Planning, Stewardship, Community Vision.*

Assessment Definitions

For the purposes of this self-assessment, please use the following definitions:

Community:
A specific locale, including its landscape, infrastructure and residents, that features residential neighborhoods, essential services and shopping, and recreational trails. This could be a single town, a suburb of a larger city, or a rural area. It may include lands owned by a variety of entities, including city, county, state or federal agencies, etc.

In this assessment, the area of interest will be further defined by a 30-minute driving radius around a central location that is a focal point for that community — its downtown, commercial center, gathering place or city hall. The driving radius can include trail systems where the trailhead can be reached in 30 minutes, even if the trails themselves are outside that circle.

Bike-optimized trails:
Trails designed and built with features developed specifically to enhance the mountain biking experience, such as bermed turns, shaped rollers or jumps. These can be located on shared-use, single-use, or preferred-use trails. Bike-optimized trails are not necessarily "bike-only" trails.

Traditional singletrack:
Trails designed and built primarily for multiple user groups, without specific features meant to enhance the mountain biking experience.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long will this assessment take to complete?
If you are familiar with all of your community's trails and the types of community support around them, it will take about 30 minutes to complete. If you're not a trail user, it may take 30-60 minutes to gather the information you need to complete the assessment.

Should I fill this out by myself?
You can, but the most effective way to approach the tool is to complete it with a group of varied stakeholders that could include the local MTB/trail organization, land managers, officials, community development staff, etc. The conversations that will come from this joint effort will be invaluable to your process. You'll find the survey questions directly below, so that your team can discuss them prior to filling out the assessment.

Can I save my answers to return to the survey?
Yes, you can exit the assessment, return to it, and find your answers saved. We recommend previewing questions in the guide to prepare information in advance of beginning the assessment.

How do I choose the center point used in this assessment?
This point is meant to be the primary "core" of your community, a location that most clearly identifies it. This could be the downtown area, a town square, your city hall, a key gathering place, etc. The purpose of a trail friendly community is to provide easily accessible outdoor recreation to your residents, so this center point should be relatively close to where most people live.

How do I figure out trail mileage within the 30-minute drive radius?
If you use the trails yourself, you'll likely know how long it takes you to drive to the various trailheads or starting points. If you're not familiar with these distances, you can use **Google Maps** to calculate drive time from your center point to each trailhead. If you can reach a given trailhead within 30 minutes of the center point, you may include all trail mileage that originates from that trailhead.

To find the mileage and difficulty ratings of a given trail system, **TrailForks** can be a useful tool.

What if I'm unsure how to answer certain questions? My community falls between answers for some of the questions.
If in doubt, select the answer that reflects the majority of your trails or the most common/typical scenario in your community for that question.

What if my community has a lot more trail mileage than what is asked for? Do I get extra credit?
If you have 50 miles or more within your driving radius, as well as amenities and infrastructure to support trail tourism, you can consider applying for our Ride Center designation, which recognizes some of the best riding destinations in America and around the world.

Why are you asking about bike-only trails? What about the other user groups?
Increasingly, single-use trails are becoming a valuable strategy for communities which experience heavy trail use. They allow for separation of users, which reduces user conflict and enhances each user group's outdoor experience. In nearly all trail systems with bike-only trails, there are corresponding foot/horse-only trails as well.

What happens after I submit my assessment?
You'll see your results immediately, and an email that recaps your score and recommendations will be sent to you. Hold onto this email, since the information in it could be useful for some time to come. If you opt into receiving communications from IMBA, we will also send you periodic information about trail development, fundraising, educational opportunities and more.

How do I use my results?
These scores can be leveraged in a variety of ways, but the main goal is to identify the gaps you see between your community's score and the total score, and read the recommendations for each of these areas. Those will provide you with resources and ideas on ways to improve. Your team can then work together on specific strategies to address those gaps. Remember, while it's tempting to work alone on this, you'll reduce your effectiveness by doing so. Working as a group with other stakeholders will bring greater progress on multiple aspects of trail and community development.

Finally, we are always here to assist you. Visit our website for more resources, and reach out anytime to Marty Caivano, IMBA Community Engagement Manager, marty.caivano@imba.com.

Trail Friendly Community Self-Assessment Questions — Full Preview

Welcome to IMBA's Trail Friendly Community self-assessment tool! This survey is designed to help your community gauge its performance in eight key categories related to natural surface trail development. By completing this assessment, you'll gain valuable insights into areas where your community excels and where there may be room for improvement.

Each question is designed to provide a clear picture of your community's trail development efforts. If in doubt, select the answer that reflects the majority of your trails or the most common scenario in your community. It's important to answer each question thoughtfully to ensure an accurate assessment of your community's trail-friendly status.

Upon completion of the survey, you'll receive a free score indicating how your community measures up against the established criteria. Additionally, you'll receive recommendations for future steps based on your community's strengths and areas of opportunity.

Please note that the Trail Friendly Community self-assessment is provided free of charge as a service to communities interested in enhancing their trail networks. If you'd like to learn more about trail development in person, consider attending one of IMBA's **Trail Lab Foundations** workshops.

If you have any questions about the assessment, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're here to support your community on its journey toward becoming a trail-friendly destination. Let's get started!

Access

Nearly all trail efforts begin with collaboration and outreach, specifically around acquiring official access to public lands. Securing land manager permission to ride existing trails or develop new ones is the critical first step in the process. Although unofficial trails or "handshake permission" trails on privately owned land can feel like an easy solution, these trails have no official recognition or protection when circumstances change. For long-term benefit for the whole community, trails need to be developed with permission on lands that provide formal access.

1.   Is there official permission for the use of mountain bikes on singletrack natural surface trails located on at least one of your community's public lands? And if not, is work being done to secure official access? Do not include lands where MTB access is limited to dirt roads, gravel paths or paved trails. Do not include trails on private property that are not officially open to the public.

a.   No, there are no trails open to bikes, or there are only unofficial/unsanctioned trails, or there are only unofficial trails on private land; and no one is working toward getting access.

b.   No trails are officially open to bikes, but our community is organized and actively advocating for official public access.

c.   Yes, public trails are officially open to mountain bikes.

2.   Does your community have a trails group advocating for MTB trail access and development? This could be an IMBA chapter, other MTB organization, a multi-user trails group, "Friends of" group, etc. Ideally this organization is a nonprofit/501(c)3 with officers, board of directors and regular meetings.

a.   There is no group; or they are just forming; or they are not effective at trail advocacy.

b.   Yes, the group has basic engagement and effectiveness with land managers. The group knows who to talk to and can get basic permissions and needs met.

c.   Yes, the group is highly engaged and effective. There is real partnership with the land manager through regular meetings and/or joint projects.

3.   Does a Memorandum Of Understanding, contract, or written volunteer agreement exist between local land managers/owners and your local trail group? These agreements spell out the relationship and responsibilities between the two entities. You can find a sample MOU at the **bottom of this page**.

a.   No

b.   We have agreements with some land managers but not all

c.   An agreement exists with every land manager where trails are open to bikes

4.   Are trails in your area accessible by bike from points in town, using cycling-specific infrastructure like protected bike lanes, paved greenway paths, or natural surface trail connections?

a.   No, a car is needed to access, or all rideable connections are on unprotected road routes.

b.   Yes, some trails are safely accessible, but others require riding unprotected road routes.

c.   Yes, a significant majority (80% or more) of trails are safely accessible

Existing Trails and Infrastructure

All trails are valuable to a community, but this assessment focuses on natural surface, singletrack trails open to mountain biking. Ideally, a desirable trail community has a variety of trail experiences, which include traditional singletrack as well as trails optimized for bikes, plus options for each skill level from beginner to advanced. Additional facilities like bike parks, pump tracks and skills areas are worthwhile additions to your infrastructure, providing skill development and a powerful attractor for youth.

1.   What is the population of your community?
a.   Below 75,000
b.   75,000-150,000
c.   150,000 and above

2.   How many total miles of singletrack officially open to bikes exist within a 30-minute driving radius around your community center?
a.   Under 10 mi
b.   10-25 mi
c.   More than 25 miles

3.   How many total miles of singletrack officially open to bikes exist within a 30-minute pedaling radius around your community center?
a.   Under 5 mi
b.   5-10 mi
c.   More than 10 miles

4.   An ideal trail community has a variety of trails for riders of different skill levels. A useful ratio would be 20% beginner-rated, 60% intermediate-rated, and 20% advanced/expert-rated, since this represents a typical ridership's ability levels. Of the trail mileage you listed above, how close are you to this ratio?
a.   We aren't even close to that — we have far more of one trail type than anything else, or are missing one type entirely

b.   We are off a bit — we have some variety, but most of it skews toward too much beginner trail or too much advanced trail

c.   We are very close to that ratio

5.   Does your community have a bike park, skills area or asphalt pump track?
a.   No
b.   No, but such an amenity is in progress
c.   Yes

6.   Are any of your trails within the 30-minute drive radius designated bike-only?
a.   No
b.   Yes, as part of an uplift-served or municipal bike park
c.   Yes, as part of an otherwise multi-use trail system

7.   Are any of your trails within the 30-minute drive radius directional (downhill-only, uphill-only, alternating directions)?
a.   No
b.   Yes, as part of a bike park (uplift-served or municipal bike park)
c.   Yes, as part of a multi-use trail system

8.   Do the primary trailheads within your 30-minute drive radius include basic amenities like ample parking, signage and restrooms?
a.   None or very few trailheads have these amenities
b.   Most of our primary trailheads have these amenities
c.   All of our primary trailheads have these amenities

9.   Do the majority of your trail systems have consistent signage throughout, providing clear wayfinding both at the trailhead and at relevant intersections?
a.   None of our trail systems are signed
b.   Less than a majority of our trail systems are signed, and/or signage is generally inconsistent/unclear
c.   A majority of our trail systems are clearly and consistently signed.

Community Engagement

Trail development occurs best as a community-wide process. Although the effort may begin with a group of advocates, it should eventually include entities across the community, including businesses, government officials, and many others that stand to be involved or benefit from trail development. This broad involvement takes time and effort, but is well worth it over the long haul, leading to easier approvals, funding and general support.

1.   Do your community's officials support the planning, development and maintenance of trails?
a.   No/very little support and/or haven't started the conversation
b.   Some support and engagement, but erratic/unreliable
c.   All partners engaged; agreements and funding exist where needed

2.   Does your community's economic development department, tourism unit, or another public entity support the planning, development and maintenance of trails.
a.   No/very little support and/or haven't started the conversation
b.   Some support and engagement, but erratic/unreliable
c.   All partners engaged; agreements and funding exists where needed

3.   Does your community have an active multi-stakeholder advisory group including county or municipal representatives for outdoor recreation development?
a.   No/very little support and/or haven't started the conversation
b.   Some support and engagement, but erratic/unreliable
c.   All partners engaged; agreements and funding exists where needed

4.   Does your community have a paid staff position whose primary focus is trails? This person would likely be employed by a land manager (i.e., city/county/federal agency) or by a trails group.
a.   No
b.   Yes, part-time
c.   Yes, full-time

Assessment

Analyzing the use of your trails is an important step in understanding their impact and validating their construction, as well as showing the need for future development. These numbers can be useful for fundraising as well. Meanwhile, tracking ongoing maintenance needs and user feedback allows land agencies to adjust their management approach as needed.

1.   Does your community have mechanisms or systems in place to assess and publicly report user/rider volumes, activities, and trends? For example, this could include trail counters, user intercept surveys, online surveys, etc. These could be implemented by your land manager(s), your trail group, or a combination of both.
a.   No
b.   A system is in development (please explain)
c.   A tracking mechanism exists (please describe)

2. Does your community have a mechanism established for users to communicate feedback and report trail maintenance needs? Possible methods vary, and may include options such as: 1. Trail users report issues within Facebook riding/hiking groups or TrailForks ride logs, hoping the information makes it to land managers. 2. Trail groups collect information and convey it to the land manager. 3. Land managers maintain an official website form, hotline or other portal for ongoing feedback.
a.   No
b.   Rely on word of mouth or methods such as unofficial Facebook groups
c.   A specific communication mechanism exists (please describe)

Funding

Although trails are often less expensive than other recreation amenities, and volunteers may play a vital role in their development, funding is still a critical need for high-quality trails that will last. There are far more funding sources and strategies than can be explained here, but once a community has fully embraced the benefits of trails, support can be more easily found and established across the entities involved.

1.   There is a local fund, campaign, or organization that allows donations to support MTB, outdoor recreation and/or trails.
a.   No
b.   Yes, minimal funding
c.   Yes, impactful funding (please describe)

2.   The community uses public funds for trail planning, development and/or maintenance.
a.   No
b.   Yes, minimal funding
c.   Yes, impactful funding (please describe)

3.   Our community or local organization has applied for and made use of grants for trail development.
a.   No
b.   Yes, minimal funding
c.   Yes, impactful funding (please describe)

4.   Our community has designated a portion of property or sales tax to outdoor recreation.
a.   No
b.   Yes, minimal funding
c.   Yes, impactful funding (please describe)

Trail Planning

Like a blueprint for a house, trail planning sets the foundation for the numerous steps in trail development. Without planning, trails may be haphazardly placed on the landscape with little thought to the opportunities or constraints of the project area's landscape, often resulting in mistakes that may be expensive to mitigate. Planning usually begins at the land manager level in comprehensive and strategic efforts, then will move into site specific planning. Within that task, a professionally developed trail plan is needed to identify where the desired experiences can be constructed. It's critical for mountain bike advocates to participate in these planning efforts, so that trails with bike access are part of the process from the outset. After planning is complete, site specific design and construction follows close behind. Once trails are in place, maintenance plans ensure that trails remain safe and fun to use.

Does your community have and to what extent the following planning processes:

1.   Has a person or organization that works on trail recreation participated in your city/county/state/forest comprehensive planning exercises and documents? How effective are they at getting recreation priorities included in these plans?
a.   No participation
b.   This person or organization is participating, but not getting the needed results
c.   They are participating, and trail recreation is included in these plans

2.   Your current or most recent trail development effort (trails, bike park, etc) included a trail-specific planning process. Examples include: **Trail system concept plan** and **bike park schematic design**.
a.   No
b.   Yes, but this was done informally or piecemeal
c.   Yes, we used trail professionals to plan these amenities from the start

3.   Do you have a trail or MTB group that participates in local open space planning efforts? If so, are they consistently at the table during these exercises, and are they effective at advocating for trails and MTB access?
a.   Not participating
b.   Their participation is intermittent and/or ineffective
c.   They consistently participate and are effective at ensuring trails and MTB access are included in these plans.

4.   Are the trails within your 30-minute drive radius regularly maintained?
a.   No maintenance is taking place, or only a small number of trails are receiving maintenance
b.   The trails are unreliably maintained, or only maintained in a reactionary manner after weather events
c.   The majority of trails receive regular maintenance

5.   Do written maintenance plans exist for the majority of trails within your 30-minute drive radius? These plans ensure that the trails see regular, organized maintenance. In some cases, the

plans may sit within the land manager's responsibilities, or in others, be part of a trail organization's agreed-upon duties.

a. No plans exist
b. Written plans exist for some of our trails but not all
c. Written plans exist for all of our trails

Stewardship

As a part of the natural landscape, even sustainably built trails require regular maintenance. It's common for volunteers to be involved in this work, since the quality of the trail experience is important to them. Established trailwork events provide consistent care of the trails as well as establish a reliable volunteer base. Meanwhile, group rides, clinics and social events enhance the fun factor and help bring new riders into the sport.

1. Does your community have at least one organization that leads volunteer maintenance efforts?
a. No
b. Yes, low priority and low participation
c. Yes, high priority and high participation

2. Does your community have paid staff doing inspections and maintenance (could be staff through the land manager or trail group).
a. No
b. Yes, low priority and low participation
c. Yes, high priority and high participation

3. Does your community have organized group rides, clinics, and/or social events to bring the community together around trails and stewardship?
a. No
b. Yes, low priority and low participation
c. Yes, high priority and high participation

4.   Does your community have programming at local schools focused on mountain biking and/or trail stewardship, or is your community otherwise focused on getting youth on bikes/outdoors?

a.   No

b.   Yes, low priority and low participation

c.   Yes, high priority and high participation

5.   Are trail closures, conditions, and maintenance events regularly communicated to the public?

a.   No

b.   Yes, but only within the specific audience of our trails group, or through trail apps like TrailForks, etc.

c.   Yes, through land manager communications to the entire community, through a public website, dedicated Facebook pages for given parks/trail systems, etc.

6.   Are accurate maps of the trails in your 30-minute drive radius made publicly available? This could include maps on websites or trail apps, paper maps, etc.

a.   None of our trails are publicly mapped

b.   Some trails are publicly mapped, but not all; or maps exist but they are incomplete or inaccurate

c.   All of our trails are completely and accurately mapped, and are publicly accessible

7.   Does your community have a bike shop?

a.   No

b.   Yes, as part of a co-op, REI or larger outdoor store

c.   Yes, a standalone bike shop

Community Vision

In places like Fruita, CO, Knoxville, TN and Bentonville, AR, multiple sectors of the community work together on a collective vision for what trails and bike amenities can bring to their residents and visitors. This vision shapes collaborative efforts in fundraising, trail development and stewardship in order to meet shared goals throughout the community. Reaching this level is a sign that your

locale has truly embraced the value of trails in regards to quality of life, physical and mental health, economic impact, land protection, and community pride/connection.

1.   Does your community have a "trail champion?" This person demonstrates the ability to consistently rally others around the vision for trail development. These people show leadership, charisma, momentum, and ability to create change.
a.   Our community does not currently have a person like this
b.   We have a person who embodies some of these qualities, but they're still learning how to be effective
c.   Our community definitely has a trail champion, and that person is effective in leading community change through trails

2.   Is there a broad community vision for trail development, where a variety of sectors (government, business, tourism, residents) recognize the benefits of trails?
a.   No, only a few people/organizations see the potential of trails
b.   We're getting there, but some sectors of our community aren't on board yet
c.   Yes, we have a shared vision across those sectors in support of trail development

Take the Self-Assessment Here

When You're Finished:

Once you have completed the assessment you'll receive your score and further recommendations, including a follow-up email for you to reference and share. Remember, any score is useful, since demonstrating your needs and gaps to local stakeholders can help pave the way for progress. You can use this survey result to work with others in identifying priorities and next steps within your community.

Feel free to explore our **Resource Hub,** where there are many options to help you progress. And we at IMBA can help you with any barriers along the way!

Contact Marty Caivano, IMBA Community Engagement Manager, **marty.caivano@imba.com**.