

2019 Women's Cycling Conference Overview & Takeaways

On November 16th, 2019 in Red Deer, Alberta, the ABA and SCA hosted over 70 female cyclists from Alberta and Saskatchewan of all ages, abilities, disciplines, backgrounds, and experience levels. The purpose of this event was to provide female cyclists the opportunity to meet, share ideas, listen, and brainstorm ways to increase participation in organized cycling clubs and events. As a first-time event for the ABA and SCA, we were overwhelmed by the interest, attendance, and positivity of the attendees. During the interactive sessions throughout the day, which were based on general, overarching topics and themes, information was recorded onto poster paper. The goals were to define key themes and barriers as well as to identify more specific issues or challenges that the female cycling communities in Alberta and Saskatchewan face. This document summarizes both the information shared and the potential opportunities and initiatives that could be explored by the ABA and by clubs or groups to remove some of the barriers that exist.



Emergence of Key Themes

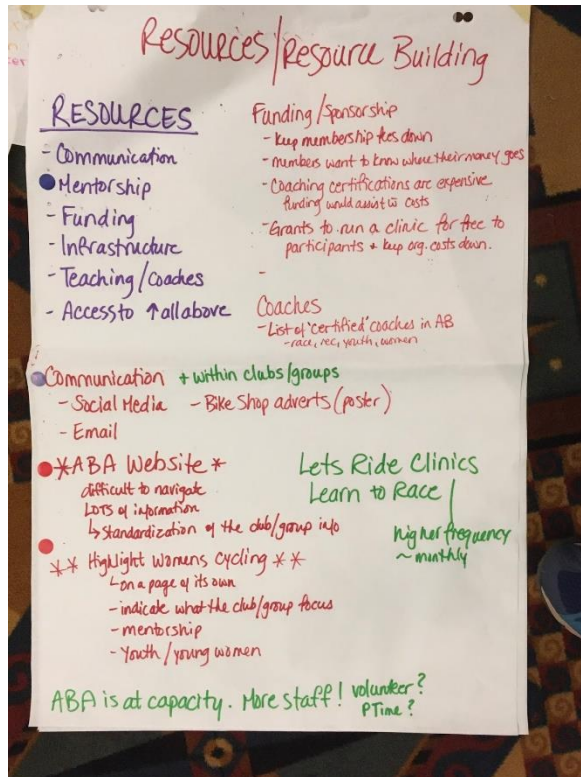
Topics were purposely chosen by the organizers to be broad and cover a wide range of issues. This approach was chosen so that key themes would emerge that could be used to identify opportunities or initiatives for both the ABA and clubs. Three important themes emerged from the sessions: Connectivity Information/Knowledge/Education, and Self-confidence.

1. **Connectivity** – there is a need and desire for connections to exist among female cyclists. These connections are multi-faceted, and range from connections among peers, clubs, those involved in other disciplines, and riders at different levels. Improving connections among all types of female cyclists will ensure a strong network of support and camaraderie, which will contribute to positive experiences and positive recognition by others (e.g., male cyclists; non-cyclists).
 - a. ABA/SCA opportunities:
 - i. Foster connections between disciplines
 - ii. Strengthen communication between clubs
 - iii. Support mentorship programs/initiatives
 - b. Club opportunities:
 - i. Engage with other clubs
 - ii. Increase communication among members
 - iii. Encourage attendance at midweek racing
 - iv. Engage with shops to provide information/training/demos
 - v. Support mentorship programs

- 2. Information/Knowledge/Education** – information and knowledge is power for female cyclists; however, finding the information needed and the opportunities to learn or acquire new skills is not always a clear path or available in an easily accessible or intuitive format. The creation of mentorship programs was key idea that was highlighted as breaking down the barrier of lack of information or knowledge, as well as female-specific courses (skills, coaching, etc.), and exploring the role of social media as sharing platforms.
- a. ABA/SCA opportunities:
 - i. Serve as an information hub for high-level information (e.g., clubs and club profiles; licensing and insurance information; 'how to' information for running clubs and events; information on available programs/courses; listing of coaches and certifications)
 - ii. Facilitate/offer women-only training programs (e.g., learn to race; coaching; commissaires) when there is a demonstrated need or demand
 - iii. Support mentorship programs/initiatives
 - b. Club opportunities:
 - i. Increased/better communication from the top down in clubs
 - ii. Serve as an information hub (for club members)
 - iii. If possible, provide women-specific training/clinics
 - iv. Promote attendance at clinics/events/midweek racing



3. **Self-confidence** – female cyclists at all ability levels can struggle with self-confidence, which can ultimately hinder participation in activities, or in extreme cases, result in withdrawal from sport. Those starting out can find “the scene” intimidating or overwhelming. Those progressing as riders often find themselves in “no woman’s land”, and struggle with being too fast for the slower groups and too slow for the faster groups. Experienced riders, even those at very high levels, can worry about how they are perceived by others, and may struggle with if or how to share their experience and wisdom with newer or less experienced riders. At all ability levels, there can be a worry of fitting in and belonging, a feeling of a lack of recognition within clubs or at shops as a valuable component of the cycling community, as well as issues with the stigma that cycling (especially mountain biking and BMX) is a male sport. Even as the presence of women in cycling increases and continues to become established, women cyclists still find they are forced to deal with negative experiences because of male attitudes and stereotyping.



- a. ABA/SCA opportunities:
 - i. Provide organizational support for clubs, especially new clubs
 - ii. Remove mental barriers through community development
 - iii. Potential creation of a women’s-centered website page, and/or social media account (promote clubs/activities/achievements, etc.)
 - iv. Support mentorship programs/activities
- b. Club opportunities:
 - i. Ladies-specific ride groups
 - ii. Level-specific ride groups
 - iii. Engagement from top down to female club members (what do your female club members need?)
 - iv. Follow up with new attendees/members

Other Important Findings/Realizations

A number of additional issues and challenges emerged that reflect the unique qualities of our provincial female cycling communities. Being mindful of these unique challenges will help us create programs and events that build up the female cycling community.

1. A substantial proportion of the female cycling community in Alberta are mothers, and this aspect of their lives factors into how, when, and how much they are able to participate in activities and events. Their unique challenges should not be seen as a burden or as a restraint that has been imposed on them for having a family. Instead, this important

sector of the cycling community should be supported and acknowledged. For example, including family friendly aspects into events can help to facilitate participation, and also fosters the interest and participation of the next generation of cyclists.

2. Recruitment and retention of Junior female cyclists (i.e., aged 17 and under) in all disciplines is a challenge that needs to be considered and explored.
3. Race categories for women, especially in road and cyclocross, continue to create challenges with regards to timing/timeliness of upgrades. A more general “Citizen” mixed age and sex category could help to bring new riders into the sport; however, understanding how to best integrate this category into events requires exploration.
4. There is a need for more leaders, both at the club level and more generally. Importantly, leading doesn’t need to be shouldered by single individuals, and if there are ways to allocate responsibilities among club or group members, less burn out may occur.



Other Gaps/Issues that Participants Identified

Additionally, there were some gaps that were identified during the conference. These gaps will require some more exploration and longer-term work, but over time, addressing these issues will also help to grow women’s cycling and participation in organized events.

1. **Funding** - there is a desire that the ABA/SCA provide more financial support to develop clubs, riders, programs, and coaches; however, it should be recognized that monetary resources available to the ABA/SCA are limited. Therefore, grants and programs will need to be considered and offered on an ongoing basis in the context of each organization’s budgets and priority needs. One topic that could be investigated is reduced membership fees for individuals or families that have financial limitations.

Funding from corporate sources should also be explored as a way to increase resources.

2. **Racing** - there is a need for events/races that are more beginner friendly and/or that cater more to the novice/beginner racer. Suggestions from conference attendees included, shorter and/or separate races for beginners, more categories, and events that are not necessarily results focussed. Importantly, the ABA/SCA are not event organizers/promoters and do not have the capacity to run events; however, the ABA/SCA will endeavour to provide logistical support and promote events that are focussed on attracting and retaining new and developing female riders.

Acknowledgements

The ABA and SCA sincerely thank all the participants for their time and feedback. We hope this will be the first of many engagement sessions and look forward to using what we've learned to implement changes that will grow women's cycling in both provinces. We welcome any additional feedback and ideas as we go forward. We would also like to thank Rocky Mountain Bicycles and Specialized Canada for their support and donation of draw prizes.

