

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Fighting Redlining and Climate Change
with Transformative Climate Communities

THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE NOVEMBER 2021



INTRODUCTION

Student participating in an afterschool biking program in East Oakland. Credit: Higher Ground Neighborhood Development Corporation

The COVID-19 pandemic has heightened awareness of structural inequities in the U.S., and it has become undeniable that the climate crisis does particularly severe harm in under-resourced communities, including communities of color and low-income communities. In order to build a future where all communities can build wealth, live in healthy places filled with economic opportunity, and are ready to meet the challenges posed by climate change, the U.S.'s efforts to combat the climate crisis must confront this reality.

California has pioneered a unique approach to fostering community-led solutions that meet the needs of those hit first and worst by climate change through a program called Transformative Climate Communities (TCC). TCC, managed by the Strategic Growth Council, is unique in two ways:

- TCC puts community leadership first, requiring all projects to develop a collaborative governance structure between stakeholders such as local government, community-based organizations and residents. The process works to ensure that projects are derived from resident-identified needs, giving community members ownership over changes taking place in their own neighborhoods.
- TCC then funds communities to develop and implement holistic, connected visions for how to transform their neighborhoods to reduce CO₂ emissions and provide meaningful community benefits such as cleaner air, improved health and job opportunities. For example, this might include building affordable housing near transit, planting an urban street canopy and installing solar on homes, all at once.

TCC was created by AB 2722 (Burke, 2016), cosponsored by The Greenlining Institute and the California Environmental Justice Alliance. Since then, it has provided Planning Grants to 18 communities to develop their projects, and eight Implementation Grants enabling on-the-ground work to begin.

Five years after the program's establishment, The Greenlining Institute is examining TCC's progress thus far, and is beginning to gauge both successes and areas for improvement. Greenlining conducted an intensive qualitative evaluation of how TCC's components work together to deliver equity outcomes. This evaluation included four detailed Case Studies from Ontario, East Oakland, the Northeast San Fernando Valley and Stockton published simultaneously with the evaluation, examining specific local planning and implementation efforts in detail.



Early construction of Vista Verde Apartments, a 101-unit affordable housing project in Ontario. Credit: Aero Cine Pros Inc.

The eight Transformative Climate Communities Implementation grants are working towards reducing 197,271 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent, or MTCO₂e, of greenhouse gas emissions over the next five years while also leveraging over \$625 million in additional funds. TCC investments pave the way for future investors to see the potential for growth and economic prosperity while also centering community priorities.

According to the Strategic Growth Council, here are the project outputs over the next five years:

Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) Project Elements	Anticipated Project Outputs (2019-2025)
Affordable Housing Units	398 new units built
Electric Buses	26 zero-emission buses in operation
EV Charging Sites	105 sites up and running
Bike Lanes	20 miles new bike lanes installed
Solar Panels	637 low-income single-family houses 3,493 KW capacity
Tree Planting	12,995 trees planted
Parks	6 new parks created
Community Gardens	6 new community gardens planted
Workforce Trainees	988 workers trained
Workforce Job Placements	861 workers placed in jobs
Displacement Avoidance Initiatives	50 policy or program initiatives
Community Engagement Workshops	400 workshops
Community Members Engaged	6,901 people



The completed Bradley Green Alley in Pacoima. Credit: Trust for Public Land

Overall, we found substantial success in creating new models for community-centered governance leading to climate action plans that can deliver meaningful benefits to underserved communities while reducing carbon emissions. This model should be expanded in California and replicated nationally, by both individual states and the federal government. Nevertheless, we also identified ways the program could be improved and strengthened in order to more fully accomplish its mission.

Strengths

1. Building equity into every step.

Greenlining defines racial equity as the practice of transforming the behaviors, institutions and systems that disproportionately harm marginalized communities. Equity means increasing access to power, redistributing and providing additional resources, and eliminating barriers to opportunity, in order to empower low-income communities of color to thrive and reach their full potential. TCC is the first climate program in California to robustly thread equity through every aspect of design — from the program’s goals, values and vision all the way through to evaluation.

2. Integrating planning and implementation to ensure tangible benefits based on community needs.

The TCC program creates a robust pathway from planning to implementation: TCC funds community planning processes through the Planning Grant, and then provides significant and catalytic funding for capital projects through the Implementation Grant. Moreover, TCC Implementation Grants deliver a wide range of integrated and coordinated greenhouse gas-reducing projects, such as affordable housing, solar installation and public transit. Too often, government grants are siloed by narrow issue areas, but TCC bundles multiple projects together under one program, making it easier for communities to access significant funding and support without the burden of having to apply and report for each grant separately. For example, in Ontario, residents identified three top priorities: the need to breathe healthy air and be free from chronic disease, to feel safe and comfortable walking and biking, and to live in an affordable home. The resulting projects include new affordable housing, improved transit service, bike lanes, pedestrian improvements, rooftop solar power, planting 365 trees and a composting program — all integrated under the TCC program.

3. Collaborative governance and community ownership over the solutions.

No one knows better than community members themselves what is needed in their neighborhoods, yet rarely are community voices centered in the decision-making processes that impact their daily lives. That's why TCC requires multi-stakeholder governance and deep community engagement, facilitating community ownership over the solutions. TCC asks communities to identify a collaborative structure that includes residents and community-based organizations. For example, the Northeast San Fernando Valley TCC effort has been led by a local nonprofit in conjunction with community groups and residents, with local government as a supportive partner. This structure requires that TCC communities work and make decisions together, catalyzing capital investments in ways that are governed by communities themselves and that advance significant tangible, equitable outcomes for underserved communities.



Residents participate in community planning activities for Eastern Coachella Valley. Credit: Leadership Counsel for Justice & Accountability

4. Comprehensive community engagement through proposal development and implementation.

Too often, “community engagement” means holding one or two town halls or sending out a survey and nothing more — checking a box but not really deeply involving affected communities. TCC requires a much more robust and thorough approach. TCC requires Implementation Grant applicants to develop Community Engagement Plans grounded in community priorities and leadership, and applicants are evaluated based on the extent to which they incorporate meaningful community engagement into their plans. Grantees must spell out how they will provide outreach and information to the community, how they will solicit and receive feedback on implementation from the community, and how the required Collaborative Stakeholder Structure will support implementation of the Community Engagement Plan.

5. Integrated and holistic multi-benefit plans.

TCC amplifies its equity impact by requiring several Transformative Elements designed to ensure broad benefits to the community while minimizing potential harm. These include workforce development, displacement avoidance and climate resilience. TCC communities are asked to develop comprehensive and overarching plans to address these components, ensuring that TCC projects also create local, high-quality jobs, include strategies to protect residents and small businesses from displacement pressures, and increase community resilience to the impacts of climate change. Together, the Transformative Elements work to ensure that TCC communities comprehensively address multiple facets of community and economic development while mitigating greenhouse gas emissions.

Challenges

1. Funding has been inadequate and inconsistent.

TCC has received wildly inconsistent funding over the years. The program received \$140 million in 2018, its first year of funding, but was cut to only \$10 million the following year. It has bounced up and down in between those amounts since. This has left communities and local governments confused and frustrated while leaving many worthwhile proposals unfunded or underfunded. Investments increased through budget legislation passed as this report was being finalized in September 2021, but stable, adequate funding must be maintained.



Stockton residents "greenlining the hood" in a vacant lot that has been transformed into a community garden. Credit: Rise Stockton

2. Funding restrictions hamper community efforts.

In addition to the lack of money overall, State grants in general impose restrictions on how funding is disbursed and can be used. For example, funding is typically disbursed on a reimbursement basis as opposed to paying in advance, creating serious cash-flow problems for small, community-based organizations. In addition, restrictions on funding important community engagement expenses can hamper the ability of CBOs to deeply engage residents. Shockingly, California State programs generally prohibit funding for important expenses such as the provision of food and child care during outreach or organizing activities. This creates an unnecessary obstacle to engaging with working parents and low-income families.

3. Capacity remains a major problem.

Legacies of disinvestment, coupled with TCC's ambitious scope, all but guarantee that communities will struggle with capacity challenges through both the grant application and implementation phases. While the Strategic Growth Council does provide technical assistance in a variety of ways, which represents an important step forward, more needs to be done. The TCC application, management and reporting requirements each represent huge capacity lifts. Moreover, TCC implementation requires an unprecedented level of collaborative governance and coordination between partners. Our most under-resourced communities are the least likely to have the staffing or technical expertise to manage these requirements, and stakeholders from both the nonprofit and public sectors all reported contributing significant uncompensated time and labor in order to develop and implement robust, community-informed and collaborative projects.



GRID Alternatives staff and trainees install rooftop solar in the Northeast San Fernando Valley. Credit: GRID Alternatives

1. Funding must be adequate and consistent.

TCC can only fund catalytic, transformative, community led-change if it is adequately funded. Governor Gavin Newsom's 2021-2022 budget recently proposed \$420 million over three years for TCC, and this represents a good start. To sustain community transformation, the governor and legislature should explore ways to establish a consistent funding source for the program.

2. Remove needless funding barriers.

The State of California should allow advance payment so that community organizations don't face insurmountable cash flow challenges. Restrictions that hamper community outreach, such as inability to use State funds to pay for child care or food for participants, should be removed immediately.

3. Help communities build capacity.

To meet capacity challenges and support TCC communities from planning to implementation, the Strategic Growth Council should provide increased guidance, resources, technical assistance and peer learning, fully stepping into the role of a State partner facilitating, supporting and incubating community-led transformation. SGC should clarify and streamline overall guidance, provide publicly accessible models and best practices, offer tailored technical assistance and solutions thinking, and facilitate peer-to-peer learning.

4. Expand TCC nationally.

As the federal government and other state governments expand their climate change efforts, they should use TCC as a model for programs to be implemented all over the U.S. To simultaneously fight climate change and build community health and prosperity, funders and policymakers must invest in community capacity and community-led transformations at all levels. We must fund the pathway from planning to implementation, and support the local ecosystems needed to support community transformation.



Free biking afterschool program with the Original Scrapper Bike Team and Higher Ground Development Corporation in East Oakland. Credit: Higher Ground Neighborhood Development Corporation

Transformative Climate Communities offers a model for fighting climate change, building economic prosperity and redressing the historic oppression of our most under-resourced communities. The TCC program empowers the communities most impacted by poverty and pollution to choose their own goals, strategies and projects to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and deliver multiple tangible benefits.

This approach represents a model for national climate change efforts that should be replicated at both the federal and state levels.

ABOUT

The Greenlining Institute

The Greenlining Institute works toward a future when communities of color can build wealth, live in healthy places filled with economic opportunity, and are ready to meet the challenges posed by climate change. To achieve this vision, Greenlining is committed to building a just economy that is inclusive, cooperative, sustainable, participatory, fair and healthy. Our multifaceted advocacy efforts address the root causes of racial, economic and environmental inequities in order to meaningfully transform the material conditions of communities of color in California and across the nation. We act as an incubator of new policy ideas, a bridge builder between people, communities and government, and an advocate to build momentum for transformative change.

Authors

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Emi is a bridge-builder and policy advocate, dedicated to supporting community-led solutions. As the Associate Director of the Capacity Building team, Emi leads Greenlining's place-based work to meaningfully connect communities to the organization's policy strategies. To reverse decades of disinvestment and racist policies, we must double down on community ownership of the solutions. The Capacity Building team supports low-income communities of color from the bottom-up to gain equitable opportunity to lead their own transformations. The team also works to change systemic and policy conditions from the top-down so that our communities can thrive. Emi has significant experience supporting local stakeholders with strategy and partnership development, as well as extensive experience in developing and implementing policy strategies that center community capacity building and leadership. Emi graduated from Vassar College with a B.A. in History.

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Rachel works to advance strategies that address the social, economic, and environmental impacts of pollution on low-income communities of color. She is currently pursuing a Master of Urban and Regional Planning at the University of California Los Angeles' Luskin School of Public Affairs, where she studies topics at the intersection of transportation equity, environmental justice, and land use. Prior to graduate school, Rachel worked at The Greenlining Institute where she leveraged talents in storytelling, fundraising, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to grow the organization's racial and economic equity policy programs. She launched her career in San Francisco at Mission Economic Development Agency, where she provided low-income Latinx families with essential services for economic stability. Today, Rachel serves on the board of a transportation advocacy non-profit called TransForm, the WTS-UCLA student chapter, and Planners of Color for Social Equity UCLA. She graduated from the University of Michigan with a B.A. in Environmental Studies.

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