

CASE STUDY: ONTARIO

# Building on 10 Years of City & Community Collaboration

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Fighting Redlining and Climate Change  
with Transformative Climate Communities

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THE GREENLINING INSTITUTE NOVEMBER 2021



Community gathering at the Huerta del Valle Community Garden. Credit: City of Ontario

# INTRODUCTION

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, 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, which is included as a separate report outlining best practices and recommendations for community-led transformation. This evaluation also includes four detailed Case Studies from Ontario, East Oakland, the Northeast San Fernando Valley and Stockton, examining specific local planning and implementation efforts in detail.

Ontario Together, the TCC project in this region, offers an example of a strong local government-led collaborative, building upon a decade's worth of existing partnerships and collaboration with community.

## IMPLEMENTATION GRANT

**Ontario Together: People Places Prosperity**

**Award Amount:** \$33.25 million

**Leverage Funding:** \$28.99 million

**Award Year:** Round 1 (2019 - 2026)



Downtown Ontario. Credit: City of Ontario

Sitting in the Inland Empire of Southern California, downtown Ontario is a majority Latinx community that has built a strong foundation of stakeholder collaboration and collective impact. Since 2007, a coalition of residents, community-based organizations (CBOs) and the City of Ontario have been working together under the Healthy Ontario Initiative (HOI) to improve health outcomes and quality-of-life.<sup>1</sup>

HOI came together to address community health and build safe and vibrant neighborhoods, against a backdrop of high levels of poverty and chronic disease burdens. Downtown Ontario is situated amidst busy transportation corridors and a growing warehouse industry, which threatens to widen pollution burdens and social inequities.<sup>2</sup> The majority of households are renters and face housing insecurity due to rising rents. Over 45% of households speak Spanish only, and face barriers related to language accessibility and mixed immigration status.

1 Healthy Ontario. <https://www.behealthyontario.com/>

2 Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice, ESRI. #BlackFridayBlackout. <https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/5d2ba8cbcd1d412897549b9d5d13e548>



Community leaders attend a visioning retreat. Credit: City of Ontario

The TCC collaboration launched under the umbrella name of Ontario Together builds upon over a decade of collaborative work, relationships and trust developed under HOI. A local government-led collaborative, the TCC project leverages the strong relationships developed between the City of Ontario and community stakeholders. Ontario Together seeks to address three primary resident-identified

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 collaborative's vision and projects thus focus on improving overall community health and wellness, creating safe and active transportation options, and constructing affordable housing.<sup>3</sup>



3 Ontario Together. <https://www.ontariotogether.com/>



Construction of the Vista Verde Apartments affordable housing development in June 2020. Credit: Aero Cine Pros Inc.

## COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM

### Overview

Ontario's TCC project and partnerships were seeded over a decade ago, when the City of Ontario convened the HOI to improve community health through inclusive planning. A City-led body, the HOI nonetheless has served as a strong anchor for collective impact and community engagement efforts. The City has then offered both political and administrative support for TCC, and has marshalled significant administrative capacity to serve as the Grantee for the TCC project. With strong anchors in both community and city government, the Ontario TCC effort also contracted with Social Impact Artists, a local consulting organization, to provide technical assistance and support resident organizing and collective impact efforts.

“ I really do think we have a collective impact model that’s evolved a bit. We have the resident leaders, who not only are at the planning tables, but City folks and certainly myself and other partners, we are at their tables. In their homes pre-COVID, in their schools, in their community gardens, in their meetings where we’re going to their tables and learning from them about not just the needs, but what the solutions can be. And then we have the City obviously taking lead on TCC. We have social, entrepreneurial, social benefit businesses like mine engaged. We have nonprofits engaged.”

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— Evette De Luca  
Social Impact Artists

## COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE ECOSYSTEM

### COMMUNITY ANCHOR

**Healthy Ontario Initiative:**  
Coalition of residents, CBOs and the City who have been working together since 2007. HOI is convened by the City, but has become an anchor for broad community engagement.

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT

**City of Ontario:**  
City Manager's office provides critical administrative capacity as the Grantee, while the Mayor's Office and City Council provide political support and buy-in.

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

**Social Impact Artists:**  
Consulting firm brought on to help bring structure to existing resident organizing and support community engagement strategies.

### Community Anchor

The foundation for TCC's community partnerships are grounded in HOI's collective impact model and history of working collaboratively together for over 10 years. Convened by the City and bolstered by two large grants from Kaiser Permanente,<sup>4</sup> HOI has anchored resident-led engagement and action-planning. Ontario's long-standing collective impact model has resulted in a web of partnerships between residents, nonprofit organizations, other stakeholders and the City all working together to build healthy communities and improve quality-of-life.

HOI is coordinated by the City's Planning Department, and thus our "community anchor" in this case is led by the local government. This is an important distinction, and some of our stakeholder interviewees emphasized that HOI and the TCC initiative didn't emerge from grassroots decision-making. While not derived directly from community, HOI has nonetheless been an effective body for connecting multi-stakeholder partners, achieving broad trust and advancing community-led priorities. HOI has developed multiple pathways for resident engagement and leadership, and as a result, many Ontario residents show relative comfort in engaging with institutional processes and with the City.

### Local Government

Ontario Together benefits from a supportive and collaborative local government, which sets Ontario apart from the majority of the other Case Study

“ TCC truly is built on six years or more of actual hard-core community collaboration. And so the strength is that all of this was already going on. There was all of this communication infrastructure between City planning and other City offices and community organizations... They had been having these conversations for years at this point. ‘What’s important in your community? What do you want to see?’... We have known the Planning Department since 2012, so we already had a six year working relationship.”

— Arthur Levine  
Huerta del Valle

4 Healthy Ontario. Kaiser HEAL Zone. <https://www.behealthyontario.com/initiatives/heal-zone/>



Community engagement staff and residents. Credit: City of Ontario

communities we examined. In our experience, local governments are often the perpetrator of harms, rather than partners with the community. In Ontario's case, however, stakeholders described their City government as collaborative and open to partnership. For example, the City's General Plan goes beyond the required elements to also include a focus on health, well-being and culture.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as noted above, HOI itself is led by the Planning Department.

Ontario's government leaders have also supported finding opportunities to advance community priorities. Senator Connie Leyva (D- Chino) encouraged Ontario to apply for TCC and consistently advocated for Ontario's application effort. The City Council has also supported the vision and collaborative work of Ontario Together since application.

Moreover, Ontario Together benefited not only from the political will of key decision-makers, but also the buy-in of City staff who are responsible for the day-to-day implementation of TCC. The City of Ontario serves as the Grantee for Ontario Together. In contrast to some of the other Case Study communities, Ontario's Deputy City Manager has been enthusiastic about TCC from the beginning. The Deputy City Manager serves as the primary project lead, and has marshalled the resources of the City Manager's office to manage TCC's considerable fiscal and administrative requirements.

5 City of Ontario. Policy Plan. <https://www.ontarioplan.org/policy-plan/>

“ There was political will in the City Manager's office. Then also really key was that department heads and managers had buy-in... It's been years of this work... easily over 10 years ago... So I think some of it is a function of readiness. You had key individuals, at not just the executive level, but also there was the department head willingness.”

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— Leslie Sorensen  
Ontario-Montclair Schools Foundation



Construction of the Vista Verde Apartments affordable housing development. Credit: City of Ontario

“ The two strongest elements of our community engagement would be the resident leaders themselves and the wisdom that they hold because they’ve been engaged for some time. And then the collective impact model that we have... My job was just to engage in a deeper way and help bring structure to the natural resident leadership and community engagement that was already in place.

— **Evette De Luca**  
Social Impact Artists

### Technical Assistance

Social Impact Artists, a local consulting organization, provides critical skills, capacity and technical assistance by supporting resident leadership. Social Impact Artists has been engaged in community engagement and strategic planning efforts in Ontario for over five years. For TCC, Social Impact

Artists leveraged Ontario's existing collective impact model, health hubs and Community Health Improvement Association (CHIA, a resident-led group that emerged out of HOI) to identify community engagement strategies and bring structure to Ontario's existing resident leadership.

## PARTNERS

### Partners

Partners responsible for the implementation of TCC projects or plans

1. City of Ontario (Grantee)
2. National CORE
3. City of Ontario Housing Authority
4. Huerta del Valle
5. Partners for Better Health
6. GRID Alternatives
7. Omnitrans
8. San Bernardino County Workforce Development
9. San Bernardino County Public Health Department
10. Inland Empire Small Business Development Center

### Stakeholders

Additional collaborators providing technical assistance

1. Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice
2. Safe Routes to School National Partnership
3. Ontario-Montclair Schools Foundation
4. Inland Empire Fair Housing and Mediation Board
5. Mercy House
6. Neighborhood Partnership Housing Services
7. San Bernardino County Transportation Authority

Among the City-led projects we studied, Ontario Together offers an overall best practice for collaborative governance. As might be expected of a local government-led effort, the collaborative operates in a hierarchical manner, with the City serving as the Grantee. Nonetheless, because the City and community-based partners share a deep history of working collaboratively together and high levels of familiarity, the partnership works. Community partners participate in decision-making, while also leveraging the City's capacity to apply for and manage a grant as resource-intensive as TCC.

Ontario Together's CSS thus offers a model for effective and streamlined grant management led by local government. The City, acting as the Grantee, serves as the primary lead and is responsible for overall grant administration. The City employs its internal capacity and expertise to manage TCC's many fiscal, administrative and reporting requirements. The project leads coordinate on a quarterly basis, and multiple resident-led advisory bodies offer regular opportunities to share progress updates, gather feedback and offer an accountability checkpoint to the primary project leads.

## COLLABORATIVE STAKEHOLDER STRUCTURE

**Grant Administration:** The City of Ontario is the Grantee, responsible for overall grant administration. The Deputy City Manager has served as the primary grant lead, and the Housing Department is responsible for many aspects of grant administration, including finances and invoicing.

**Project Implementation & Oversight:** The Trustees provide oversight for project implementation. The Trustees consist of 17 members including the Grantee (City of Ontario, which facilitates the body), partners (responsible for project implementation), stakeholders (offer technical advice for implementation) and a member nominated by the Neighborhood Council. The Trustees each have equal voting power, and the body meets on a quarterly basis.

**Advisory Council:** The Neighborhood Council is a non-membership advisory body, built out of HOI. Anyone is invited to attend Neighborhood Council meetings, and the Neighborhood Council may call a special meeting of the Trustees at any time.

**Resident Leadership:** The Community Health Improvement Association (CHIA) is a resident-led group that emerged out of the HOI, focused on providing a community voice on health, environment and equity. CHIA is governed by 12 resident leaders, meets monthly and engages in an advisory capacity with Ontario Together.

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES

Ontario Together's community engagement strategies built upon the HOI foundation and existing resident-led bodies. Essential visioning that formed the foundation of the TCC process began in 2012, when a core group of 68 residents and stakeholders articulated a vision of their neighborhoods with better housing and transportation options, cleaner air and decreased pollution, and safe and active lifestyles that promote community health. Since 2016, over 200 residents have participated in planning and mapping workshops, focus groups, CHIA meetings, post-Zumba events<sup>6</sup> and HOI collaborative meetings to develop the vision for TCC.

In engaging Ontario's predominantly Latinx community, organizers expressed both successes and frustrations in engaging undocumented residents. Organizers intentionally work to engage undocumented residents and try to address the vulnerabilities specific to that community. At the same time, not all project partners have demonstrated the same level of commitment in their public outreach.

“ Many people didn't attend and make their voices heard. And which ones are those? People afraid to show up to places where they feel that their immigration status is not helpful to them in those places.

— **Maria Alonso**  
Huerta del Valle

Some meetings and programs remain inaccessible to the most vulnerable residents due to technology, language and education barriers. Many undocumented residents remain fearful of engaging with government programs and are reluctant to learn more about TCC's programs. Thus, while TCC is creating significant and tangible benefits, those benefits are still not equitably distributed amongst Ontario's most vulnerable residents.

6 The City of Ontario offers health-related services to prevent chronic disease and improve general wellness, including free Zumba classes offered six days per week at four different community centers within the Project Area. Zumba has become an anchor for engaging residents and developing community leaders. Healthy Ontario. Park-It Campaign. <https://www.behealthyontario.com/2018/12/17/park-it-campaign/>



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

## PROJECTS

The neighborhoods in the Project Area had been the focus of intense planning and community engagement for many years, and residents had identified affordable housing, safe and green neighborhoods, clean air, improved health and active transportation as top priorities. Many of Ontario's project ideas were also "shovel-ready," meaning that planning was sufficiently far along that construction could begin shortly after funding was secured, and Ontario could more easily identify project ideas to meet community vision.

TCC then provided the capital to turn that big vision of a thriving, healthy community into tangible, real investments. Importantly, TCC's focus on collaborative governance, multi-benefits, and place-based investments honored the collaborative and intersectional foundation that Ontario had already built. Taken together, Ontario Together's 10 TCC projects focus on community wellness and health, building affordable housing, incentivizing safe and active transportation options, and establishing green job opportunities.

“ When people don't see any outcomes they feel uncertain and unsure about something being realistic. But when they can see that, 'Oh, they built the bike lanes, oh they added more public transportation,' then they start saying on their own, 'Ah, so it IS true.' And then they start asking, 'And where did you say the homes are located? And where can I file my application?' ”

— **Maria Alonso**  
Huerta del Valle

## PROJECTS

### \$33.25 Million Funded Primarily Through TCC



**Affordable Housing:** Construction of the Vista Verde Apartments, a 101-unit affordable housing development, as well as public transportation and pedestrian/bicycle improvements. These improvements provide increased affordable housing and reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT).



**Transit Operations:** Expands the frequency of bus service along a central corridor and provides free transit passes, improving transit ridership and reducing VMT.



**Urban Forestry:** Plants 365 trees to reduce the urban heat island effect, sequester carbon and shade nearby buildings.



**Rooftop Solar:** Installation of free rooftop solar on multi-family developments serving homeless and low-income residents, as well as on 100 low-income single-family homes. Solar will enhance local renewable energy production and lower energy costs, and on-the-job training opportunities will be targeted to residents.



**Composting:** Construction of an “Ontario Carbon Farm” composting system. Compost produced will be used locally for gardening and farming, and green jobs training will be provided to residents. Compost diverts organic material that would normally be sent to the landfill and releases methane.



**Active Transportation:** Creation of five miles of bike lanes and three miles of pedestrian improvements, increasing active transit options and connectivity to downtown.

### \$28.99 Million Funded Through Additional Leveraged Funding Sources



**Health and Wellness:** Builds upon the HOI to connect residents to physical activities and healthy eating options, with the overall goal of improving community health.



**Small Business Support:** Creates a small business support program to attract and retain small downtown businesses. The program features a small business incubator space and a maker space, and will provide improved pathways for local business support.

## TRANSFORMATIVE PLANS

Ontario Together's Transformative Plans work together to build resident leadership, create economic opportunity, and protect existing residents and small businesses from displacement pressures.

### TRANSFORMATIVE PLANS



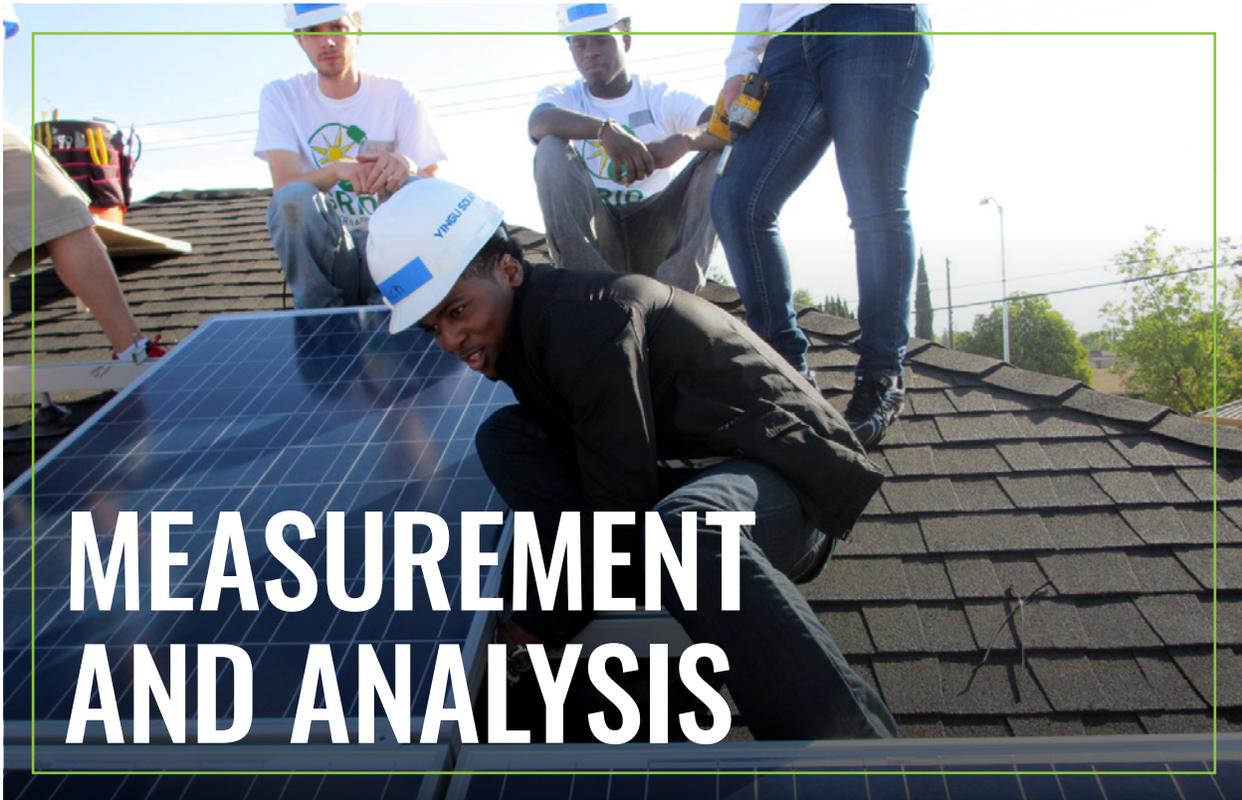
**Community Engagement Plan (CEP):** The CEP builds upon the deep community relationships and partnerships forged over the past five years. Residents and businesses are engaged through various levels of participation, ranging from project-level opportunities to participating and leading in the overall governance structure of TCC. Community engagement strategies include focus groups, world cafes (meetings with local leaders), surveys, workshops, street teams, trainings and more.



**Displacement Avoidance Plan (DAP):** The DAP leverages both City and County policies to increase affordable housing supply and protect vulnerable residents and small businesses. To increase the supply of affordable housing, Ontario Together constructs 175 affordable housing units and uses inclusionary zoning incentives to encourage additional affordable housing construction. To protect existing residents and small businesses, Ontario Together conducts annual displacement vulnerability assessments, provides increased tenants' rights training and implements homeowner rehabilitation loans and emergency grants for residents at risk of foreclosure.



**Workforce Development & Economic Opportunities Plan (WDEOP):** The WDEOP creates a new satellite workforce development program in downtown Ontario and connects residents with job training and employment opportunities created through TCC, including jobs in construction, waste management, health education and solar installation.



GRID Alternatives staff and trainees install rooftop solar. Credit: GRID Alternatives

The UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation serves as the lead evaluator for TCC's first round of funding, including Ontario Together. Evaluation focuses on key accomplishments and estimated benefits of TCC projects, with the goals of tracking TCC outcomes while also helping to improve the design and implementation of the TCC program.

Ontario Together began implementation of TCC projects in early 2019, and UCLA Luskin has completed the first two Annual Reports on Ontario Together, offering baseline data from which to compare future years of TCC implementation and early milestones of progress.<sup>7</sup> Evaluation of Ontario Together remains relatively early, and we look forward to better understanding Ontario Together's impact and outcomes, as well as the project's evaluation methods, over the coming years.

7 University of California Los Angeles Luskin Center for Innovation. Tracking Groundbreaking Climate Action. <https://innovation.luskin.ucla.edu/tracking-groundbreaking-climate-action>



# CONCLUSION

Resident leader Beatriz Castro at the Huerta del Valle Community Garden. Credit: UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

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. For our full analysis of the Transformative Climate Communities program, see *Fighting Redlining and Climate Change with Transformative Climate Communities*.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are so grateful to the nearly 50 stakeholders across 5 Transformative Climate Communities sites who we interviewed for this evaluation. These interviews form the backbone of this evaluation, and our interviewees included residents, community-based organizations, non-profit organizations, local government and other stakeholders who are pioneering what it means to make community-led transformation real. We are indebted to our interviewees for their deep work in community, and for sharing their wisdom, stories, expertise and critical insights.

**Arthur Levine**, formerly with Huerta del Valle

**David Sheasby**, formerly with the City of Ontario

**Esther Portillo**, Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice

**Evette De Luca**, Social Impact Artists

**Jaime Alonso**, GRID Alternatives Inland Empire

**Leslie Sorensen**, Ontario-Montclair Schools Foundation

**Maria Alonso**, Huerta del Valle

We are also extremely grateful for the partnership of the University of California Los Angeles Luskin Center for Innovation. As the evaluator for five TCC sites, UCLA Luskin is conducting comprehensive quantitative and qualitative analysis of the progress, challenges and outcomes of implementing TCC. We were lucky to be able to consult with them at every stage of this evaluation, from designing the interview methodology to reviewing our findings. Special shout-out to Kristen Soares, who supported in conducting interviews with the TCC stakeholders.

**Colleen Callahan**, UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

**Emma French**, UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

**Jason Karpman**, UCA Luskin Center for Innovation

**Kristen Soares**, formerly with UCLA Luskin Center for Innovation

**Silvia González**, formerly with UCLA Center for Neighborhood Knowledge

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# 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

### **Emi Wang**

Associate Director, Capacity Building,  
The Greenlining Institute

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.

### **Rachel Lu**

Policy and Research Consultant,  
The Greenlining Institute  
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Planning Candidate, UCLA

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.