



Roadmap to Equitable Community Transportation:

Best Practices for Conducting Mobility Needs Assessments

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 THE
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The Greenlining Institute

The Greenlining Institute Founded in 1993, Greenlining is committed to building a just economy that is inclusive, cooperative, sustainable, participatory, fair, and healthy. We work towards a future where 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. 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 country.

Executive Summary

Advancing clean transportation and mobility initiatives that are effective and equitable must start with a deep understanding of the existing gaps, barriers, and needs of communities that have been underserved by our existing transportation system. A community needs assessment serves as the foundational step to amplify the voices of historically marginalized groups, grasp their unique needs, and collaboratively devise solutions to address them.

The purpose of this resource, ***Roadmap to Equitable Community Transportation: Best Practices for Conducting Mobility Needs Assessments***, is to highlight a variety of common methods for conducting needs assessments including surveys, focus groups, and co-design. This resource is intended to guide community engagement partners or transportation planners in determining how to design a mobility needs assessment process for their community. In this resource, we outline three common methods of engagement for gathering qualitative and quantitative data during needs assessments.

First, surveys can be used at the beginning of needs assessments for broad data collection as well as further along the process to help planners prioritize projects. Second, focus groups can serve to intentionally gather feedback from underrepresented groups like community members with disabilities, youth or non-English groups. Third, co-designed workshops with community decision-making can position residents as collaborators in the design and decision-making process.

A key takeaway gleaned from this research, is that these methods for gathering data are most effective and provide the most in-depth picture of the community when used in combination with one another. These methods are also more effective when they are informed by community members and an organizational or team self assessment to understand knowledge gaps when determining which methods to utilize for the needs assessment.

Through literature review, case studies, and stakeholder interviews, we identified seven best practices that uphold equity in community engagement and planning:

1. *Build intentional, deep relationships with community based organizations (CBOs) and community leaders*
2. *Integrate a multi-sector approach*
3. *Compensate community members*
4. *Empower community through exposure to new mobility technologies and services*
5. *Integrate art and storytelling into community visioning activities*
6. *Celebrate community involvement*
7. *Share and collect feedback from the community on final results of the needs assessment*

By conducting a needs assessment, transportation planners can gain invaluable insights to steer future projects towards equitable outcomes and cater to the genuine needs of the community. This

process not only identifies transportation needs but also serves as a pivotal opportunity to redistribute power, facilitating greater involvement and ownership of solutions among underserved communities.

The overarching purpose of a community needs assessment are to:

- *Identify specific transportation needs in underserved communities*
- *Engage with local communities to co-develop projects and solutions that meet real, on-the-ground needs*
- *Improve equitable access to clean transportation options*

The specific deliverables of a community needs assessment should include:

- *A report and supplementary data outlining root causes, transportation needs, and key findings*
- *Actionable goals or projects that relate to these key findings*
- *Presentation material in a variety of formats that can inform future transportation planning efforts and be made available to community partners for the pursuit of additional project funding*

This resource was created to serve as a guide for the U.S. Department of Energy’s [Clean Cities Energy and Environmental Justice Initiative \(CCEEJI\)](#), and can be useful for other entities in various contexts. CCEEJI is a Justice40 pilot project, and supports 17 coalitions from across the country to hire a Community Engagement Liaison to conduct community needs assessments, identifying clean transportation projects in disadvantaged communities. While CCEEJI refers to community needs assessments as “Community Transportation Action Plans,” this resource refers to the more commonly known term “community needs assessments.” The case studies compiled in this report are intended to serve as a sample of best practices for the different methods of data collection that ultimately create community needs assessments.

Introduction

The interconnectedness of race and climate is starkly evident in our transportation system. For decades, discriminatory practices like redlining systematically denied economic services, investments, and opportunities to communities of color, triggering cycles of disinvestment and neglect. Inequitable transportation infrastructure policies compounded these inequities, with redlined communities of color often targeted for highways and industrial facilities, disrupting communities and saddling residents with higher levels of pollution.

Today, transportation pollution is the single largest driver of climate change, while also contributing to worse public health outcomes due to pollution exposure. Marginalized communities disproportionately shoulder these burdens, suffering the consequences of climate change first and worst, while also navigating the health impacts of higher rates of pollution. They also endure longer,

costlier, and less reliable commutes and generally have fewer mobility options available to them, separating them from economic opportunities and putting them at higher risk in the event of climate disasters. Central to these systemic injustices is that marginalized communities rarely have a say in the transportation planning and decision-making processes that impact them.

Addressing these entrenched transportation disparities will require a broad array of policy changes. As state and federal leaders, decision-makers, and advocates look ahead to a more sustainable and equitable future, it is critical to center marginalized communities' voices and decision-making in transportation planning and decision-making. Informing transportation decisions with community needs assessments is one foundational step that policy and decision-makers can utilize to guide, plan and implement equitable transportation projects.

Definitions

“Transportation” vs. “mobility”: Greenlining’s [Mobility Equity Framework](#) [1] offers a definition for mobility and transportation. While the two terms “mobility” and “transportation” are both used depending on the context, “mobility” is generally defined as the movement of people and “transportation” as the larger transportation system in the United States, which is currently very car-centric. For the purposes of this resource, “mobility” and “transportation” will both be used when discussing a community needs assessment.

Community Transportation Needs Assessment: The [USDOT Toolkit](#) defines community transportation needs assessments as projects that follow a “comprehensive process to identify the specific transportation needs of traditionally underserved communities”[2]. These assessments can engage entire cities or small subsets of communities. They aim to provide baseline information that can be used for identification and prioritization of future infrastructure improvements in hopes of improving accessibility to transportation, mobility, and overall quality of life for underserved and overburdened communities. While the main focus of community transportation needs assessment is ultimately transportation and mobility, needs assessments can also be valuable tools for understanding other intersecting barriers and needs such as housing, health, and safety.

Equity: The [Biden Administration](#) defines equity as “the consistent and systematic treatment of all individuals in a fair, just, and impartial manner, including individuals who belong to communities that often have been denied such treatment, such as Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander persons and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; women and girls; LGBTQI+ persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; persons who live in United States Territories; persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality; and individuals who belong to multiple such communities.”

However, an additional layer of defining equity includes transforming the behaviors and institutions, and addressing the historic and pervasive systems that disproportionately harm marginalized people.

Equity means increasing access to power, redistributing and providing additional resources, and eliminating barriers to opportunity, in order to empower marginalized people to thrive and reach full potential.

Mobility Equity: Greenlining’s [Mobility Equity Framework](#) defines this as a transportation system that increases access to high quality mobility options, reduces air pollution, and enhances economic opportunity in low-income communities of color.

To achieve mobility equity in transportation planning and investments, we must prioritize:

1. Social equity: The fair and just distribution of societal benefits and burdens.
2. Community power: The ability of marginalized communities to influence decisions in a way that addresses their needs and concerns.

Transportation Disadvantaged Communities: Under President Biden’s Justice40 Initiative, the White House’s Council on Environmental Quality developed tools such as [Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool](#) that can help identify disadvantaged regions. The tool notes that communities are identified as “transportation disadvantaged” if they ARE at or above the 90th percentile for [diesel particulate matter exposure](#) OR [transportation barriers](#) OR [traffic proximity and volume](#), AND are at or above the 65th percentile for [low income](#). The purpose of defining “transportation disadvantaged communities” is to identify which communities suffer most from transportation barriers and burdens. The use of these new federal tools are helpful for targeting investments both for conducting needs assessment and equitable project implementation.

However, defining disadvantaged communities may also need to be broadened and tailored to better meet the context, burdens, and needs of the community being assessed. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy’s [Energy Justice: Key Concepts and Metrics Relevant to EERE Transportation Projects](#) resource identifies additional factors that contributes to the marginalization of places and communities including: 1) access to roads, transit, or shared mobility, 2) opportunity to board, and 3) connection to jobs, schools, hospital, and grocery stores as additional criteria. Entities conducting needs assessments may simply utilize existing mapping tools such as CEJST or compile additional criteria that is more context specific.

Participatory Budgeting: The [Participatory Budgeting Project](#) defines participatory budgeting as the “democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget.” Through this process community members can identify, prioritize, and vote on budget allocations of community projects[3]. Individual aspects of participatory budgeting may be utilized on their own, for example, community members voting on which projects they want implemented in a survey, focus group, meeting, or other formats.

Equity Readiness: Organizational Self Assessment

Prior to beginning a community needs assessment, organizations should conduct a self-assessment to determine baseline information on organizational equity readiness. Answering the questions below can further understanding of existing knowledge gaps, strengths, and areas for improvement for both a project team and an organization. This can provide a starting point for operationalizing equity throughout the needs assessment process. It is critical to first understand factors such as internal capacity, gaps, and existing relationships with the community to identify next steps for knowledge building, relationship building, and identifying realistic expectations and strategies to embed equity throughout the community engagement process.

Example Questions:

- *What is your understanding of institutional racism?*
- *Does your team have sufficient budget allocation for engagement?*
- *Does your team/organization have existing relationships and trust with environmental justice communities?*
- *Is there support from your leadership for equity work?*
- *Is there a shared common racial equity analysis?*
- *What is your understanding of communities' readiness to advance a vision of climate resilience and assert a set of community priorities?*
- *What is your understanding of communities' readiness to build community voice and power to get those solutions resourced and implemented?*

Community Needs Assessments: Common Methods

The following three approaches are common methods used to engage community members and collect data to inform a community needs assessment. While other methods may exist, these formats came up most frequently in the literature review. These three methods represent different types of community engagement, and require various levels of time, resources, skill sets, trust, and relationships with the community. Any of these methods may be utilized as a standalone strategy or may operate in combination with one another.

While each method can serve to gather data, community needs assessments are able to provide the most comprehensive and accurate picture of the community when these methods are used in combination. For example, one way to use a survey is to provide a broad overview of qualitative data

such as general demographics and transportation preferences. They can also serve as a starting point to engage participants in a focus group. A focus group can answer qualitative questions in more depth where moderators can ask follow-up questions and dive deeper to further understand the context of answers that participants offer.

Each method presents its own set of advantages and limitations for gathering data. **When determining which needs assessment method may be right for your community, it is best to first gather input from community partners and other stakeholders who can provide insight on which method may be most feasible given your budget, timeline, and existing relationships within the community.** In the following section, each of these community needs assessment methods is further illustrated and described through example case studies.

Surveys

Surveys are a useful method of collecting data such as demographics, mobility preferences, and other general information from community members or community groups. Surveys can be utilized both at the beginning of a needs assessment to collect data from the broader community as well as towards the end of a needs assessment as a way for people to prioritize mobility needs and solutions.

Ways to Conduct Surveys

- Online Surveys
- In person surveys (on paper or on a tablet) at community events and through community networks such as schools, farmers markets, local food distributions, town events, buses, trailheads, etc.
- Door-to-door canvassing
- Mail in surveys
- One-on-one verbal surveys

Benefits

- Can collect data from a large sample of the community population
- Can be translated into multiple languages
- Cost-effective
- Less time intensive
- Can be administered in person, mail, social media, telephone, etc.

Barriers

- Lack of person-to-person engagement and relationship building
- Limited opportunity for more in-depth feedback
- Community members may feel “over-surveyed” or undervalued without compensation

Focus Groups

Focus groups typically involve a small group discussion of people facilitated by a skilled moderator. Focus groups are a useful option when intentionally assessing a more specific subset of the community.

Examples of Focus Groups Themes

- Multi-generational
 - Students and youth
 - Seniors and individuals with greater support needs
- Non-English language groups
- Residents without vehicles
- Disability advocates
- Low-income groups
- Underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups

Benefits

- Provides tailored insights from a smaller subset of people
- Discussion can be tailored to answer a particular question
- Open-ended questions produce rich qualitative data
- Listening sessions flip the traditional power dynamic: residents and grassroots stakeholders are empowered as the experts and do most of the speaking while elected officials, decision makers, etc. are asked primarily to listen.

Barriers

- Recruitment and compensation of participants can be costly and limit participation
- Time intensive preparation and requires a skilled and unbiased moderator to facilitate the focus group
- Representative of only a small subset
- Can be challenging to ensure equitable participation and representation of all stakeholders

Co-design and Community Decision Making

Co-design workshops are collaborative sessions where stakeholders are deeply involved in the design process, project direction, and decision-making process. Community stakeholders are a core part of the team and shared vision building.

Examples of Co-Design and Community Decision Making

- Multi-generational
 - Students and youth
 - Seniors and individuals with greater support needs
- Non-English language groups
- Residents without vehicles
- Disability advocates
- Low-income groups
- Underrepresented racial and ethnic minority groups

Benefits

- Community ownership—community is involved in the process from beginning to end
- Shifts traditional power dynamics of decision making structures
- Shared community buy-in and vision building
- Leads to more equitable outcomes

Barriers

- Recruitment and compensation of participants can be costly and limit participation
- Preparation, project management and regular engagement of stakeholders is time and resource intensive
- Can be challenging to ensure equitable participation and representation of all stakeholders
- May be difficult to implement co-design solutions identified due to lack of funding or buy-in from decision makers

Best Practices from Case Studies

This report identifies seven best practices for conducting community needs assessments that center equity and community voices. Each community has a unique set of strengths and needs that cannot be addressed through a “one size fits all” approach, therefore engagement strategies and practices will vary from community to community based on resources, timeline, trusting relationships, goals, and capacity.

1. Build intentional, deep relationships with community-based organizations and community leaders

Early and continuous involvement from CBOs is critical to the development of a needs assessment starting at the pre-development stage (creating surveys, designing focus groups, outreach, etc.) and throughout completion and evaluation. Strong partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) throughout the planning process increase equitable outcomes, foster greater community participation and allow for a deeper understanding of the community. Understanding the history and culture of a community is at the center of deepening relationships with community members.

- i Develop an understanding of the community demographics, local context, and history of previous planning efforts through conversations and interviews with CBOs and community leaders.** Meeting with leaders in the community, even multiple times, *prior* to conducting a needs assessment ensures that the needs assessment is responsive to the community and conducted through a non-extractive process. Build working relationships with community representatives to gain insight into local history, previous planning efforts and attitudes with the community needs assessment, capacity gaps, and who the underserved populations are.
- ii Involve CBOs in the design, development, and distribution of a needs assessment.** Partner with community-based organizations to inform the engagement processes, lead outreach, lead community workshops, and co-design.
- iii Co-create needs assessments with community representatives through paid advisory committees or task forces.** Pay and partner with community representatives to help co-create the needs assessment to ensure the language is accessible for community members of different ages and backgrounds. For example, outreach, and needs assessments should be translated into other languages that reflect the demographics of the community. Language should also be non-technical and accessible for people from different backgrounds, education levels, etc. so they can engage without any previous background in planning or transportation.
- iv Minimize barriers to participation and collaboration through inclusive communication and outreach.** Consider factors such as time of day, location, and accessibility when conducting engagement at all stages of the needs assessment. Close access to a transit stop, the opportunity

to participate virtually, and attention to how content is communicated can all minimize barriers to participation.

- v **Build a shared decision-making structure or group to foster consensus building and mediate competing interests.** For example, a collaborative governance structure can be a way to engage CBOs, community leaders, and residents to work together for goal setting, shared visioning, decision-making and co-creation of the needs assessment, such as in the [Transformative Climate Communities case study](#) in Ontario.

2. Integrate a multi-sector approach

Ensure that the needs assessment is multi-sector in its approach to evaluating community needs, gaps and strengths by considering issues that intersect with mobility such as safety, housing, health, employment status, etc. For example, you may learn that someone may not want to utilize a certain mode of transportation due to personal safety concerns, transporting children, or immigration status. It is also important for a needs assessment to capture a broader picture of needs to inform future funding opportunities.

- i **Develop questions in the needs assessment to gauge multifaceted community barriers, gaps and strengths indirectly related to transportation.** Incorporate questions in the community needs assessment to understand other intersecting community barriers, needs and concerns such as housing, childcare, jobs, health, and safety in addition to community strengths.
- ii **When collecting information on other intersecting needs, be transparent around the limitations of your scope and funding,** but also be clear about why it is still important to collect additional data.

3. Compensate community members

In order to ensure that all community members are able to meaningfully engage in the process, compensation or incentives must be provided to empower the participation of traditionally under-resourced community members.

- i **Community members are the experts in their own lived experiences and assessing local needs or resources.** Compensating community members for their expertise and participation in surveys, focus groups, and co-design workshops through money, gift cards, transportation vouchers, food, child care support, and other incentives creates more inclusive and equitable community engagement.

4. Empower community through exposure to new mobility technologies and services

People from different backgrounds must be empowered with the knowledge, tools, and exposure to new forms of mobility to effectively engage in the conversation on transportation and mobility. Local governments and organizations are responsible for engaging with underserved populations and

providing opportunities for community members to understand their mobility options and make more informed decisions.

- i In tandem with community needs assessments, incorporate an educational component on mobility options when engaging the community.** Develop a shared understanding and shared vocabulary of forms of mobility as well as the cost and benefits of services. Community members must be empowered with the knowledge of their mobility options to promote informed community decision making and produce the most equitable outcomes. This educational component can be as simple as including information about various mobility options in a survey or more involved such as an in-person event that allows participants to try new mobility options.

5. Integrate art and storytelling into community visioning activities

Art and storytelling activities are powerful ways for community members to share their mobility experiences and visions.

- i Integrate interactive art-based, mapping, or visual storytelling components for communities** who may not otherwise engage with transportation planning.
- ii Involve youth and multi-generational participants.** Art-based or activity-based engagements such as mapping activities create ways to collect data from different people. Youth are given an opportunity to share their experiences and ideas in a process they may not otherwise engage in.

6. Celebrate community involvement

In addition to being involved throughout the needs assessment process, community members must be celebrated.

- i Lifting up community-led input and ideas at every phase of the project is important to rally community support, demonstrate that community voices matter, and celebrate community members.** For example, in the Southeastern Community Mobility Roadmap (case study presented below) organizers hosted a community celebration to share community needs assessment results with the community where they offered food and fun activities.

7. Share and collect feedback from the community on final results of the needs assessment results

To ensure accountability, transparency, and continuous collaboration, share the final results of the needs assessment with community members.

- i Return to the community after the results of the needs assessment are gathered** to ensure that participants have an opportunity to voice any final feedback and ensure they were accurately captured.

Case Studies of Community Transportation & Mobility Needs Assessments

The following case studies dive deeper into the three common methods of community needs assessments, provide examples of equitable, meaningful community engagement, and illustrate examples of the best practices described above.

- **The Living Cully** case study is an example of a needs assessment that employs both a survey and a focus group.
- **The Southeastern** case study is an example of a needs assessment that centers community co-design and decision making.
- **The Big Pine** case study highlights a needs assessment in a rural, tribal community that deployed both a survey and focus group.

Survey and Focus Group Case Study: Living Cully Mobility Needs Assessment

Background

The [Living Cully Mobility Needs Assessment](#) focused on the advancement of a clean mobility project in the Living Cully Plaza/Las Adelitas affordable housing redevelopment. The needs assessment collected data primarily through the administration of 120 surveys and focus groups. The surveys focused on understanding the transportation needs, current behaviors, barriers, and community-identified clean mobility recommendations.

Located in Northeast Portland, Cully has some of the most racially/ethnically diverse Census tracts in the state of Oregon. Compared to Portland's inner neighborhoods, where the infrastructure provides mobility access and choices for its residents—Cully lacks walkability, parks, bike lanes, and general neighborhood services. Cully also suffers from a history of environmental injustice issues such as contaminated, post-industrial land that create further disparities between the Cully neighborhood and its inner Portland neighborhood counterparts. Living Cully is a cross-partner collaboration created with the intention to address and actively invest in the Cully neighborhood through clean mobility, environmental justice, and traditional community development resources. The Living Cully Plaza is one of the pilot projects building affordable housing for the Cully community as well as investing in energy and environmental solutions that serve the needs of low-income residents. The Living Cully Community Mobility Needs Assessment was specifically designed to help understand and shape the future of clean mobility projects within the Living Cully Plaza/Las Adelitas affordable housing redevelopment projects.

Engagement Process

Project Partners	Community Stakeholders	Total participants
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Verde• Habitat for Humanity Portland/Metro East• Hacienda CDC• Native American Youth and Family Center	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Living Cully Plaza residents• Las Adelitas residents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 102 survey respondents• 35 focus group participants

Iterative Survey Design

Verde worked with several community partners through an iterative process to develop the survey. Verde developed the initial draft of the survey and then worked with community partners to gather feedback and review. Community partners provided feedback on the questions as well as input regarding specific community members to engage based on the goals of the project.

Community-Led Survey Distribution and Outreach

Community members in the Lideres Verdes Program, an annual training program that builds the capacity of community members to participate in environmental advocacy, led the outreach. Lideres Verdes was composed of six community members who were paid to review, provide feedback, and distribute the surveys to the extended community. Prior to leading the outreach, the Lideres Verdes team also reviewed the survey and provided valuable feedback regarding the importance of keeping the survey brief. A full copy of the survey can be found in the [Appendix of the report](#).

Survey Engagement

The survey reached a total of 102 community members and was distributed in three different languages. The following is a high-level overview of the survey details.

- A local capacity building outreach team, Lideres Verdes, was hired to distribute the surveys.
- Members who conducted outreach were compensated adequately for their time.
- Survey was distributed in both English and Spanish to community members residing in a predominantly low-income Latino affordable housing community, Hacienda CDC Clara Vista Housing.
- An additional local Somali community member was hired to survey Somali residents in Hacienda CDC Clara Vista Housing.
- Community members who took the survey were compensated with a gift card.

The overarching goal of the survey was to understand baseline demographics, transportation behaviors and needs of residents to best understand the type of clean mobility solutions that would best serve the transportation lifestyle of community members. The five key sections of the survey were:

1. Understand participants current transportation needs and behaviors;
2. Understand participants' familiarity with alternative forms of transportation such as electric vehicles (EVs), electric bikes, and ridesharing/carsharing;
3. Identify participants' "ideal future vision for transportation solutions" in regard to transportation solutions;
4. Identify what solutions for the Living Cully Plaza/Las Adelitas redevelopment are most popular among participants and;
5. Understand the basic demographics profile of participants.

The survey also included specific questions related to the ownership of a savings or banking account as well as familiarity with clean mobility options in order to establish a baseline understanding of the barriers the community may face in accessing clean mobility options such as ridesharing or electric bikes because these options require access to technology and banking.

Focus Group

Thirty-five residents of the Cully neighborhood participated in a focus group where the goal was to provide background on the redevelopment of Living Cully Plaza, general information about the mobility needs assessment, and for residents to participate in key decision making. The focus group also centered on understanding broader concerns related to transportation such as air quality and the environment, particularly given the history of environmental injustice. Focus group participants were provided both dinner and childcare as well as an opportunity to win gift cards through a raffle at the end of the session. During the focus group, residents were able to vote on specific transportation features for Living Cully with three different options:

1. Cully neighborhood shuttle for Las Adelitas residents
2. shared EV's and charging stations and
3. shared e-bikes or scooters.

Data Analysis

Qualitative and quantitative data for both the surveys and focus groups were compared across demographics such as income, ethnicity/race, and generation to identify variations and themes. Results were broken down around different themes: demographics, current transportation needs and behaviors, familiarity with clean transportation, technology/banking access and usage, future transportation improvements and solutions, and transportation concerns. Understanding current residents' usage and access to banking and technology was essential to provide additional context around how financial and technological requirements to programs may be a barrier to accessing clean mobility options. Additionally, surveying for broader issues such as air quality and environmental concerns was essential to understanding access, benefits, and burdens of transportation within the community.

After analyzing both the surveys and focus group, the planning team provided a detailed overview summarizing the results of both. These results informed several recommendations for next steps and future community projects. Among residents, the implementation of a Cully neighborhood shuttle was the most popular transportation option.

Outcome

After analyzing the survey and focus group results, Verde hosted a meeting with community members to review the data analysis report and results to ensure that the voices of community members were accurate. During the meeting, community members were encouraged to discuss, ask questions, and share ideas around the recommendations for clean mobility projects. Residents provided additional context around the implementation of a Cully neighborhood shuttle and how the shuttle would best serve the transportation needs of residents. Community members were also encouraged to provide general feedback on the mobility needs assessment process and their experience. Through a final community review meeting, Verde ensured that the mobility needs assessment was an interactive process shaped by community voice and decision-making.

Community Co-Design and Decision Making Case Study: Southeastern Community Mobility Roadmap

Background

The [Southeastern Community Mobility Project](#) engaged community-based organizations and resident leaders to understand and facilitate conversations with community members on their everyday experiences and vision for mobility. The planning process took 12 months to complete. Once the experiences of the community were more deeply understood through engagement, community-identified priorities were developed and informed the participatory budgeting project pilot which began a process for community members to vote on how to use \$100,000 to implement a pilot mobility project. This project was partially funded by the state and helped to facilitate a partnership between local CBOs and City government. This represents the importance of various levels of government supporting community-driven planning processes.

Southeastern San Diego is one of the most ethnically diverse communities in the City of San Diego. The area's population is composed primarily of Latinos, African Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. Compared to the greater San Diego region, Southeastern San Diego has a higher Spanish-speaking population, is significantly younger in population and has lower household incomes than the rest of San Diego.

Engagement Process

In an effort to understand community experiences, culture and local context, the planning team grounded the planning process through initial conversations about previous experiences with planning efforts. A total of 500 participants were engaged. Community experiences with previous planning efforts highlighted that past efforts made community priorities feel unheard and lacked visibility and coordination causing previous community participation in the planning process to feel extractive. Through the Southeastern Community Transportation Equity & Participatory Budgeting Project, Pueblo Planning centered community collaboration and built in processes that fostered intentional, deep communication, accountability to community priorities and community ownership of the Community Mobility Roadmap. Through co-developing shared mobility priorities, vision, and a participatory budgeting process, residents shaped community priorities and solutions.

Community Based Organizations (CBOs) were selected as co-design partners based on the local context of the community, and existing relationships and trust within the community. Four Black-led community organizations were selected. The role of the CBOs informed the planning team's understanding of the community throughout the process. CBO partners also served as community bridge builders, assisted with outreach for community workshops, co-developed the participatory budgeting framework and approach, and ultimately helped co-design the development of the Southeastern Community Mobility Roadmap.

Project Partners	Southeastern Community Based Organizations Co-design Partners	Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Greenlining Institute • Grid Alternatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Total Compensation: \$12,000/each • Project New Village • I am Green • The Urban Collaboration Project • San Diego Urban Sustainability Coalition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gompers High School students, staff, teachers, and families • Millennial Tech Middle School students, teachers, and staff • Mount Hope Neighborhood community participants and gardeners • Multigenerational participants from younger than age six to elderly folks • Chollas Valley Community Planning Group • Local Community Planning Groups

The CBOs provided critical feedback on the engagement framework of the project and contributed to deciding on the visual aids, facilitation, and location of each event. For the planning team, it was critical that the CBO partners led the effort, honoring the cultural uniqueness of each community space and event.

The planning team convened 10 community engagement events. Throughout the process, non-traditional engagement tools were implemented to ensure language accessibility literacy, and that planning or technical terms for transportation were never a barrier. The team also strove to create an environment that fostered multigenerational participation. Through art and storytelling, Pueblo Planning created interactive maps and visioning where members of the community could use collaging and pictures to share their vision. Mapping activities were used in pop-ups, virtual workshops, and listening sessions, as a way to show areas of concern for mobility and transportation needs. By facilitating interactive activities and creating a warm, friendly environment, the planning team was able to engage community members of all ages and ensure a multigenerational approach.

Stories and visioning activities allowed the community to share their priorities. During this process and throughout the project, CBO partners engaged directly with City and Mayoral staff acting as a bridge builder for community vision and advocacy efforts. These efforts resulted in \$1.5 million allocated for lighting and street safety infrastructure in Southeastern as well as relationship building between community-based organizations and City staff.

“Children experience the built environment as well so it’s about how we can facilitate processes where children alongside parents and adults can contribute as well. For the Southeastern Roadmap, our youngest participant was five years old. I feel like we have done our job well if we have cross-sector community participation including multigenerational participants.”

— Shalem Aboody-López, Pueblo Planning

Participatory Workshops & Pop-Ups

Total budget: \$1,000 for materials

Engagement activities:

- Pop-ups
 - Pop-ups, temporary engagement events held in public spaces, included 1:1 conversations with community members and interactive mapping activities that fostered visual storytelling
- Virtual Workshop
 - Virtual activities including virtual mapping activities where community members were able to locate areas of concern and express their priorities and vision for community mobility
- In-Person Listening session
 - Listening sessions were centered around interactive activities where community members were able to show areas of concern and express their priorities and vision for community mobility.
- In-Person Feedback Workshop
 - Feedback workshops were used as an opportunity and check point for community members to reflect on the information gathered from the planning team in previous sessions and provide any additional feedback, corrections, or points that the community wanted to uplift.

Participatory Budgeting

After gathering key mobility priorities and visioning through initial community engagement, the planning team identified potential agencies and funding streams where community-identified projects could potentially be addressed under the appropriate agency jurisdiction. For a comprehensive list of the Community's Mobility Priorities & Vision, please see the full roadmap. Community-identified mobility priorities included: increased access and more equitable electric bike ownership, access to free and community-based e-vehicles and free hyper-local e-shuttle services. Constraints such as a limited budget of \$100,000 for the implementation of the project and lack of commitment from public agencies who had jurisdiction over the implementation of projects posed challenges that ultimately made certain community projects unfeasible. Given these considerations, the planning team and partners presented community members with three different project options to vote on, listed below.

Community-identified projects:

1. Electric Bike Ownership Program
2. Electric Vehicle Purchase for a local CBO to manage a community car-sharing program
3. Wayfinding and Community Art Project(s)

Understanding the community's history with extractive planning methods and general feelings around a lack of accountability from planners and decision makers, it was critical for the planning team to coordinate a participatory budget process. With CBO partners leading, the planning team coordinated a participatory budgeting process that allowed the community to identify, prioritize, and vote on a community pilot mobility project that best served their needs. The process was guided by intentional trust building practices such as information sharing in public spaces, ongoing communication, and transparency around the status of the voting process.

The participatory budget framework was co-developed by CBO partners. For example, leveraging community leadership, CBO partners led initial education and outreach efforts as well as identified central locations that were most accessible for community members as a space to vote. In this case, surveys were used as a tool to understand priorities. Community members could determine how to use the funding to implement a pilot project through a democratic voting process.

Key considerations throughout the participatory budgeting process included:

- Opening voter eligibility criteria broadly to all participants without restrictive requirements that posed as barriers.
- Educating community members on what participatory budgeting is and addressing any concerns members may have had about this process through robust education and outreach methods.
- Education and outreach methods included communication through: community event tabling, Community Pop-up Teach In, an interactive website, and involving other organizations through the process of learning and distributing information on the project itself as well as the voting process.

- Co-designing friendly, culturally inclusive ballots translated in several languages with CBO partners. Establishing a clear ranking system of community projects in the ballot design.
- Ensuring ample voting opportunities for community members including online and in person voting for a three-and-a-half-week voting period.

Once votes were counted, CBO partners expressed the importance of gathering the community to share results and also celebrate their involvement in the participatory budgeting process. By continuing to engage the community, the planning team ensured continued transparency and communication. Through food, music, and activities, the planning team shared the priority community pilot project: Community Beautification; Wayfinding, and Art Projects.

Outcome

The Southeastern San Diego Community Mobility Roadmap offers a model for centering co-designing and decision-making with CBO partners and community. The approach uses several best practices for community engagement that centers community voice, priorities, and decision making through the participatory budgeting process.

Rural and Tribal Case Study: Big Pine Paiute Tribe Transportation Needs Assessment

Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley Community is an underserved small, rural community located on 279 acres across the town of Big Pine, California. The [Big Pine Transportation Needs Assessment](#) assessed mobility needs, transportation gaps, barriers, and safety concerns. The community needs assessment included a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collection methods including surveys, focus groups, interviews, and workshops. In addition to identifying transportation gaps and recommendations, the planning process included a community outreach component that further informed community members about different mobility options such as electric vehicle and electric bike demonstrations. Participants were also able to rent an E-bike to familiarize themselves with that option.

Community Engagement Outreach

- **Project website**
 - Project website included an online comment map to gather location-specific feedback.
- **Announcements and feedback opportunities through social media**
 - Announcements for engagement activities were posted via social media. Social media was also used as a tool to gather feedback from the community for the needs assessment process.
- **A survey that was available on online and printed**
 - The needs assessment was distributed to all residents online and via mail. Community members were encouraged to drop off the survey in person at the project coordinator's office as part of the relationship building strategy. Participants who completed the survey were eligible to receive a \$75 gift card for local shopping.
- **Stakeholder phone calls**
 - Individual stakeholder interviews were held with local leaders.

Community Engagement Activities

- **Two workshops:**
 - The first workshop was used to gather information about residents including travel behavior and overall preferences for future transportation options.
 - The second workshop provided a project update and collected additional feedback. Discussion was organized around specific categories such as bus access/E-Shuttles, electric vehicles, and bicycle safety.
 - Both workshops included interactive exhibits, electric vehicle and electric bike demonstrations, as well as food and refreshments.
- **Focus Groups:**
 - Given the unique mobility needs and barriers that elders face, there were two separate focus groups for elders and commuters.
- **Survey**
 - The needs assessment survey was distributed to all members of the reservation via mail and through social media. The survey received a total of 176 responses out of the 190 distributed, receiving almost a 90% response rate.

Outcome

Following data collection and analysis, the project team recommended both short term and long term improvements for the Big Pine Paiute Reservation based on findings of the Mobility Needs Assessment. Recommendations included an electric vehicle shuttle program to address mobility gaps through the reservation as well as additional transit stop amenities such as bus stop shelters. The Big Pine Paiute Community Needs Assessment offers a model for combination of community engagement methods to comprehensively assess a tribal, rural community.

Conclusion

The best practices and case studies included within this resource are examples of what equitable, community-centered needs assessments can look like when community voice, collaboration, and decision making are thoughtfully and intentionally embedded throughout the process.

Appendix

References

- [1] Creger, Hana, et al. 2018, *Mobility Equity Framework: How to Make Transportation Work For People*, <https://greenlining.org/publications/mobility-equity-framework-how-to-make-transportation-work-for-people>
- [2] “Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making.” U.S. Department of Transportation, Apr. 2022, www.transportation.gov/priorities/equity/promising-practices-meaningful-public-involvement-transportation-decision-making.
- [3] “What Is PB?” *Participatory Budgeting Project*, 2023, www.participatorybudgeting.org/.
- [4] Mohnot, Sona, et al. *Make Equity Real In Climate Adaptation And Community Resilience Policies And Programs: A Guidebook*. <https://greenlining.org/publications/making-equity-real-in-climate-adaptation-and-community-resilience-policies-and-programs-a-guidebook>

Community Transportation/Mobility Needs Assessments

[Smart Transportation Needs in the City of Portland, OR](#)

Transportation needs assessment of traditionally underserved populations (low-income communities of color and residents with mobility challenges) primarily through surveys and focus groups.

[Car Sharing and Mobility Hubs in Affordable Housing Pilot Project, CA](#)

Focused needs assessment in three separate affordable housing sites involving targeted surveys and focus groups to inform residents’ mobility needs.

[King County Community Transportation Needs Assessment](#)

Transportation assessment that includes a robust literature review of previous needs assessment materials and efforts related to transportation and mobility.

[Community-based assessment of Smart Transportation Needs in the City of Portland](#)

Smart transportation needs assessment of lower-income communities using surveys as the primary method of engagement.

[Beat The Heat - Huntington Park Report](#) & [Toolkit](#) The toolkit contains “how-to’s,” facilitation guides, templates, example work plans, etc.

Additional Resources

[Towards Equitable Electric Mobility Community of Practice](#) This paper outlines how organizations can partner to advance equitable electric mobility. The resource outlines lessons learned and challenges on community listening sessions and centering residents' needs during the engagement process.

[Community Tool Box](#) This detailed toolkit is a starting point that offers information detailing how to conduct a needs assessment.

[Forth Mobility: Equity in Practice](#) This report includes best practices and strategies on how to center equity in the assessments of transportation electrification plans. It includes specific examples of equity assessments conducted with strategies for focusing on communities of color, historically underserved communities and strong public engagement strategies.

[Mobility Equity Framework: How to Make Transportation Work for People](#) outlines three steps that center equity and community in creating a transportation plan.

[PACE](#) This Community Needs Assessment Toolkit is designed to support community leaders in the development of a Community Needs Assessment. The toolkit aims to provide a holistic, ecosystemic view of identifying actionable strategies to meet their community needs and create a shared vision while building long-term capacity through the process of developing a community needs assessment.

[US DOT Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making](#) This guide contains promising practices that highlights the approaches and benefits of meaningful public involvement in each stage of the transportation decision making process and project life cycle.

Stakeholder Interviews

Cindy Duriscoe, Air Program Coordinator for Big Pine Paiute Tribe

Lauren N. McCarthy, Director and Strategic Lead, California and Western States Program

Shalem Aboody-López, Social Justice Planner + Ethnographic Artists, Pueblo Planning



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