MAKING EQUITY REAL:
COMMUNITY BENEFITS & ENGAGEMENT

WHY EQUITY

Equity is not just a commitment – it is a practice. Equity is transforming the behaviors, institutions, and systems that disproportionately harm marginalized communities.

Due to a history of discriminatory government practices, communities of color have borne the brunt of generational disparities in socioeconomic and health outcomes, as well as in ownership over the decisions that impact them. Equity means increasing access to power, redistributing and providing additional resources, and eliminating barriers to opportunity, in order to empower marginalized communities to thrive and reach full potential.

THE PROBLEM

Grounding your Project in the needs, priorities and leadership of local residents, especially those from disadvantaged or low-income communities, is critical to ensuring that the Project does no harm, addresses community-identified needs and delivers multiple direct and meaningful benefits. Significantly, community engagement should not simply consist of one-way engagement or participation. Community engagement that identifies community needs, centers the leadership of impacted residents, and delivers multiple direct and meaningful benefits must be a core tenet in the development and implementation of the Project.

PLANNING FOR EQUITY

The AHSC narrative portion of the application requires that you identify how your Project addresses community-identified needs. The Community Benefits & Engagement section of the narrative is the most heavily weighted section of the narrative. To maximize points, this handout helps you create an effective community engagement strategy to help you identify the true needs of local residents.

Community voice, perspectives, expertise and input must be meaningfully incorporated early and consistently in the development and decision-making of the Project. Unfortunately, communities are often only "informed" about projects, rather than truly engaged and empowered in all stages of the project. The bare minimum - where communities are only "informed" - occurs when community engagement is not valued or centered in a program. Community engagement should not be an "add-on" to projects but should help drive the direction of the project. Robust engagement can bring about better decisions through increased input from different perspectives, increased buy-in and acceptance of decisions and support for their implementation.

We offer the following guiding questions to begin thinking about how to engage community members, build partnerships and relationships, and share decision-making.

Guiding Questions for Community Engagement and Shared Decision-Making	
Engagement	• What are the communities served by the Project? Which vulnerable populations may be impacted by or could benefit from the Project? • How have you identified these communities? (ex: local needs assessments, local plans, CalEnviroScreen 3.0 etc.)? • How will you assure the inclusion of vulnerable populations? How will you engage and reach out to these communities? • How will the Project provide for local capacity building to facilitate meaningful engagement? (*e.g.* through funding, expanded knowledge base or other resources?)
Community Partnerships & Relationship Building	• How does the Project reflect a collaborative effort among multiple organizations? • Does the Project align with and support existing community priorities, creating an opportunity to leverage resources and build collaborative partnerships? • Does the Project help foster the building of effective, long-term relationships and trust between diverse communities and stakeholders? • How would a local community-based organization describe the community engagement process and how feedback from Project Area residents was incorporated into the Project?
Shared Decision-Making	• How does your proposal include residents in defining Project goals and implementation? • How are community members significantly involved in the visioning and development of the Project? • How are residents and community-based organizations involved in the development and selection of Project components included in your application? • How will the impacted community have ownership over the Project? • Have you designed a process to collaborate with vulnerable populations that engages and empowers them in a meaningful, authentic and culturally appropriate manner?

THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

To begin the community engagement process, you should develop trust and partnerships with at least one local community-based, grassroots organization; i.e., a community-based organization (CBO) to help design community engagement and build community capacity. AHSC requires a support letter from the local organization describing the community engagement process and how feedback from local residents was incorporated into the project. You will also be asked to submit a Community Engagement Tracker as part of your AHSC application, too, so please keep a record of your meetings. We additionally recommend that you go beyond the application requirements to meaningfully engage in partnership with CBOs:

- Develop a written collaboration agreement or memorandum of understanding that defines respective roles, expectations, desired outcomes, and agreements for how to work together (including decision-making and conflict resolution).[i]
- Compensate community partners financially for their time and community engagement activities. This is especially important when partnering with community-based and grassroots organizations, many of which are already low-staffed and under-resourced.[ii]

In partnership with CBOs, you should then develop a clear community engagement process at the outset of the development of the Project, rather than trying to fit in engagement activities after it's developed. Start early!

As you plan your community engagement process, ask yourself the following questions: What is your process to identify community needs? What is your plan to engage and increase community voice in decision-making in the Project? Your community engagement plan should describe the methods that will be used to engage Project Area residents and key stakeholders during every stage from visioning to planning to implementation. Plan should at a minimum include:

Community Engagement Plan Components[iii]
• Description of key stakeholders and residents, including any existing neighborhood organizations or advisory councils • Description of recent history of resident engagement in neighborhood issues, including involvement in any planning or community development activities administered by the local government or other administrative entities • Description and timeline of proposed community engagement activities • The process that has been used to identify the needs of residents and other stakeholders during the proposal development and selection of proposed projects • How the public will be informed of implementation progress

As part of the community engagement plan, you will need to carry out activities to meaningfully incorporate community members during both proposal development and implementation. Ideally, your community engagement activities will build off a history of prior engagement and resident priorities.

The following table provides examples of community engagement activities at different stages. In addition to the activities below, we strongly recommend reading the SB 1000 Toolkit developed by the California Environmental Justice Alliance, which offers robust, detailed and comprehensive strategies for effective community engagement.[iv]

Examples of Community Engagement Activities[v]	
Category	**Activities**
Activities to Inform Community Stakeholders and Solicit Stakeholder Input	• Public workshops/meetings • Door-to-door canvassing • House meetings • Established website and/or social media • Distributed flyers or other printed materials • Outreach to existing community groups • Surveys • Focus groups • Involve local health and workforce departments, which can help reach community-based organizations and frontline community members
Activities to Engage Community Stakeholders in Development of Proposal	• Design charrettes • Community-based participatory research • Participatory budgeting[vi] • Convene advisory body or shared decision-making body • Establish website and/or social media • Community benefits agreements

Activities to Ensure Community Engagement During Project Implementation	• Public workshops/meetings • Door-to-door canvassing • House meetings • Established website and/or social media • Surveys • Focus groups • Sub-contract with existing CBOs that organize frontline communities to conduct outreach • Allocate staff positions focused on community engagement • Advisory body or shared decision-making body

When carrying out community engagement activities, it is important to remember that cultural differences may be present between and among community members. Understanding different interaction norms, priorities, levels of comfort with professional terminology, and expectations for project completion is essential to a productive process.

You must make every effort to make opportunities for involvement accessible to all Project Area residents and stakeholders. Designing a community engagement process that is sensitive to cultural considerations encourages broader, more equitable, and more informed participation.[vii] To ensure equitable community engagement practices, the following factors should be considered:

Cultural Consideration Factors	How to Address Cultural Consideration Factors in Community Engagement[viii]
Literacy Level	It may be more difficult to reach out to Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals, immigrant communities, or people with lower educational attainment. Awardees should design materials and events for community engagement to accommodate different literacy levels and provide background information when referring to complex concepts. Avoid the use of acronyms where possible.
Socioeconomic Status	Groups with lower socioeconomic status are often disproportionately affected by environmental hazards while facing greater barriers to participation in engagement efforts to remediate them. These barriers may be addressed by considering factors such as the location and timing of activities, accessibility by public transportation, availability of childcare, and availability of food.
Language	All communication should be done in the major languages spoken in the community. This includes written background materials, live interpretation at key public events and captioned videos. Interpreters should be available at meetings when it is clear that non–English speaking members of the community will be present.
Local History	Certain communities may have participated in previous engagement efforts that did not result in change. Over time, either not being included or participating and/or not feeling utilized may affect future participation. Understanding the local context is helpful prior to beginning engagement. Engaging with local CBOs that understand local history may help advance community participation in engagement activities. We strongly recommend ongoing information sharing to ensure transparency, help maintain community relationships and build trust in the process.

Competing Interests and Limited Time	Community members have many competing interests and limited time. Allowing different levels and types of involvement in the process can help foster participation. • Going to places where people already gather to allow community members to give input without a large time commitment at a time that is convenient for them. Meeting stakeholders in locations they are familiar and comfortable with can also help to bridge cultural and trust gaps. These can include: a community health center, a street fair, a cultural event, a public event at a local religious or community center, or a community event at a local school or library • Other more time–intensive activities, such as focus groups, charrettes, and workshops, can be made available for stakeholders who are interested in providing more in–depth input.

In completing your application, you must describe how Project Area residents and CBOs have been meaningfully involved in visioning and development, at what stages residents and CBOs have been engaged, and how you engaged and made engagement accessible particularly to disadvantaged and low-income residents. You must draw a direct line between community input and Project elements, and specifically how residents and CBOs were involved in the development and selection of Project components.

In describing your community engagement process in the AHSC Application, you must describe how Project Area residents and CBOs have been meaningfully involved in visioning and development, at what stages residents and CBOs have been engaged, and how you engaged and made engagement accessible particularly to disadvantaged and low-income residents. You must draw a direct line between community input and Project elements, and specifically how residents and CBOs were involved in the development and selection of Project components. To assess if you've developed a successful community engagement strategy, ask these questions:
- Were community residents or CBOs involved from initial visioning of the Project, and in the development and selection of Project components included in application?
- Did you make efforts to inform stakeholders about Project development process in order to solicit their input?
- Were opportunities for resident involvement marketed and made accessible to multiple constituencies, particularly low-income and disadvantaged groups?

Most importantly, for the most points, you will have to state how you will engage with residents and CBOs in the future and how you will ensure broad CBO or resident participation in a clear, detailed plan.

SELECTING COMMUNITY BENEFITS FOR AN AHSC APPLICATION

Frontline communities currently experience numerous inequities such as poor quality of jobs and housing, lack of public transportation systems, and insufficient access to health care. How will the Project meet a broad spectrum of community-identified needs, beyond housing or transportation? For example, communities highly impacted by poverty and pollution often require an increase in good job and education opportunities, better health outcomes and more ownership over decisions that impact them. What will be felt, experienced and/or realized because of the Project? How will you select and implement strategies that result in equitable outcomes for frontline communities, grounded by community perspectives and input?

After learning about community-identified needs, identified through a robust and participatory community engagement process, the next step is to find ways for the Project to deliver benefits that are relevant and useful for the impacted community:

Generate Direct and Meaningful Benefits
• <u>Direct</u> - the benefits must directly reach the community, and not in the form of trickle-down benefits that may reach communities long after the policy has passed. • <u>Meaningful</u> - the benefits must be relevant and useful for the community and should be informed by community-identified needs.

In addition to generating direct and meaningful benefits, it is also important to generate shared and multiple benefits. Projects that provide multiple benefits to communities offer more comprehensive solutions to the multitude of issues a community may be facing.

Thus, you should design activities and strategies that deliver shared and multiple benefits to low-income communities of color. In doing so, your application should consider health, economic and quality-of-life benefits. Think through the following questions to determine how the Project can deliver multiple benefits that meet community-identified needs:

Generate Shared and Multiple Benefits
• What are the environmental benefits beyond GHG emission reductions that will be achieved with this Project (i.e. improved air quality, heat island resiliency)? • How will your proposal improve public health outcomes for Project Area residents and vulnerable populations? • How does the Project improve the resilience of the social fabric of the community and lead to more social cohesion, resident ownership, and connections to services and programs that support residents' long-term well-being and success? For example, incorporate the AHSC requirement for resident and business anti-displacement. • Are the benefits of the Project broadly accessible to households throughout the community, particularly communities of color, low-income populations, Tribal and indigenous communities and immigrant communities?

In completing your application, you must demonstrate how the Project meets one or more identified community needs (identified through your community engagement process and plan), as well as how the Project addresses needs beyond just housing or transportation. By developing a clear community engagement plan that details how all Project Area residents and CBOs have been involved in every stage of the project, and directly tying Project elements to a broad spectrum of community-identified needs, you will have stronger narrative and maximize points.

SELECTED RESOURCES

Making Equity Real in Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience Policies and Grant Programs: A Guidebook
The Greenlining Institute

SB 1000 Toolkit: Planning for Healthy Communities
California Environmental Justice Alliance

Community-Driven Climate Resilience Planning: A Framework
Movement Strategy Center

From Community Engagement to Ownership: Tools for the Field with Case Studies of Four Municipal Community-Driven Environmental & Racial Equity Committees
Urban Sustainability Directors Network, Facilitating Power, Movement Strategy Center, National Association of Climate Resilience Planners

IAP2's Public Participation Spectrum

Participatory Budgeting Project

[i] Office of Planning and Research, *Partnering Agreement.* Retrieved from http://opr.ca.gov/docs/20180312-Partnering_Agreement.pdf on June 26, 2019.

[ii] The Transformative Climate Communities program allows for community engagement costs up to 8% of awarded funds. Under this program, community engagement costs may include, but are not limited to: preparation of outreach materials, staff time dedicated for community outreach and education, and educational events and training program. California Strategic Growth Council. *Transformative Climate Communities Program: Final Guidelines.* Retrieved from http://sgc.ca.gov/programs/tcc/docs/20180815-TCC_Final_GUIDELINES_07-31-2018.pdf on April 30, 2019.

[iii] California Strategic Growth Council. *Transformative Climate Communities Program: Final Guidelines.*

[iv] California Environmental Justice Alliance, *SB 1000 Toolkit: Planning for Healthy Communities*. Retrieved from https://caleja.org/2017/09/sb-1000-toolkit-release/ on June 21, 2019.

[v] California Strategic Growth Council, *Transformative Climate Communities Program: Final Guidelines.* California Department of Transportation, *FY 2019-20 Sustainable Communities Grant Application Guide.* Retrieved from http://www.dot.ca.gov/hq/tpp/grant_files/FY_19-20/03_Final_5OCT18_STPGrantGuideFY2019-20.pdf on June 24, 2019.

[vi] Participatory budgeting is a democratic approach to public spending that meaningfully and deeply engages people in government and the community. During PB, community members democratically decide how to spend part of a public budget, enabling them to make the fiscal decisions that affect their lives and the health of their communities. *Participatory Budgeting Process.* Retrieved from https://www.participatorybudgeting.org/ on July 25, 2019.

[vii] Governor's Office of Planning and Research. *Community Engagement and Outreach: Designing Healthy, Equitable, Resilient, and Economically Vibrant Places.* Retrieved from http://opr.ca.gov/docs/OPR_C3_final.pdf on April 30, 2019.

[viii] California Strategic Growth Council, *Transformative Climate Communities Program: Final Guidelines.* California Department of Transportation, *FY 2019-20 Sustainable Communities Grant Application Guide.*