Engage, Empower, Implement Awards

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Attachments: Yes   **Referring Committee:** Not Applicable

Issue:
Staff will present Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) award recommendations that were developed with the EEI Review Board.

Request:
Approve

Recommendation for Board:
That the board approve the projects recommended for funding and the contingency list for the six-county Engage, Empower, Implement Funding Program.

Recommendation for Committee:
That the Transportation Committee recommend that the board approve the projects recommended for funding and the contingency list for the six-county Engage, Empower, Implement Funding Program.

Background:
Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) is a board-led funding program from the 2020 Funding Round that is dedicated to investing regional funds into disinvested communities across the six counties of SACOG. The SACOG board allocated $3 million in 2020 towards EEI to begin addressing disparities and in September 2023, the board increased the amount to $3.8 million. Since 2020, staff have been working on developing the funding program to create a planning and project development process that encourages partnerships between cities and counties and local community based organizations (CBOs) to plan for more equitable projects together.

Staff have undergone an extensive process in the design of the EEI program that have resulted in the program adopted by the board as well as many lessons learned. Staff kicked off the program by setting up a formal request for proposals (RFP) to bring on a community organization to help design the program and engage other organizations across the region. The intent of bringing on a CBO partner was to have a community partner at every step of the way. The RFP failed to bring in a CBO partner and staff reissued the RFP geared towards consultants with reliable experience in community engagement and expertise in providing an equitable lens in the field of planning. SACOG hired HR&A Advisors and AIM Consulting as consultants to help

engage the region's community-based organizations, create a program that reflected the needs of CBOs, and create a process that would be most conducive to incubating strong partnerships.

From this engagement with CBOs and staff engagement with local jurisdictions, staff presented the final program framework and briefing book to the board in November 2023, for action and it was unanimously approved. The adopted program framework was a compilation of multiple workshops and outreach with community-based organizations that attempted to address the barriers of working with government entities and being part of the planning process. It was also a parallel effort with SACOG staff connecting with local agency planning staff in understanding their perspectives on a program like this. With the approved program framework, staff created the program guidelines and application process, which included a rubric for scoring projects.

The application was open from May 24, to August 9, a total of 11 weeks. This application window followed months of a pre-application time and technical assistance where staff circulated draft guidelines and provided CBOs and jurisdictions the opportunity to talk with staff and begin thinking about potential projects and application proposals. During the application process, staff made themselves available for on-going consultation and technical assistance for applicants preparing their proposals, including project concept reviews.

Staff organized an EEI Review Board, per the program framework recommendations, to review and score applications. The board included local city, county, and state agency staff; community partners; and SAOCG staff for a total of nine reviewers. The review process included four meetings to discuss the applications and provide a final recommendation for the board to consider.

Discussion/Analysis:
EEI will strategically invest $3.8 million in low-income communities across the region with an emphasis on communities that have faced the largest inequities including Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and other communities of color, as well as other marginalized groups. Through this funding program, SACOG aims to establish a funding program that supports a planning and project development process that creates a pipeline of equitable, safe, and sustainable projects throughout the Sacramento region. These funded projects are intended to be community-led and co-designed, from the identification of issues and needs, solution ideation, to project design. The EEI program will support planning processes that create projects ready for implementation through local, state, and/or federal funding.

The EEI program has been designed to highlight the narratives of the identified in-need communities and allow jurisdiction and community partners as co-applicants to share their own struggles that may not appear in existing tools typically used for assessing disadvantaged communities, such as SACOG's Environmental Justice Analysis or the state's Cal Enviroscreen. The application requirement and rubric are focused on giving the city or county applicant and their CBO partner the opportunity to describe why they need this seed funding and how it will help catalyze efforts that can bring real benefits to residents in the area. The process also recognizes the need to pay special attention to the region's rural communities. The program also opened up a unique opportunity for CBOs doing community engagement and projects related to land use and transportation to apply independently, with two awards being possible. The need for this style of planning and project development is noted with the 19 applications received, totaling over $5.2 million dollars and project descriptions that all showcase the desire and need for collaborative planning.

The EEI program is based on three considerations of equity: (1) structural equity that looks at underlying

factors and policies; (2) procedural equity that looks at designing decision-making process that are transparent and inclusive; and (3) distributional equity that looks ensuring the fair and diverse distribution of services and resources. The program also encompasses other goals that are reflected in the rubric, specifically calling out how the community was selected; acknowledging historical harms or significant community experiences that have continued to mark the community; how partnerships between jurisdictions and community partners can help lead to solutions; how together they will incorporate the community; and finally looking at how the the scope of work and budget reflects all those elements.

The conversation within the review committee brought up many valuable points that staff plans to incorporate in future iterations of the program in various ways. When looking at racial equity across the six-county region, approaches to addressing it will look different, it will not be a one size fits all approach. Measuring the impact of a project is critical, so understanding where each community is starting from is important to assess impact. The strategies for engagement will meet people where they are, and it will take thinking outside of some classic planning engagement strategies. Data and information are critical – we will need to reflect on whether we are doing the proper data collection to understand communities, disaggregating data, and really paying attention to small pockets of communities where needs can go unnoticed. These points of reflection resulted in many conversations with our review board that sprouted thoughtful consideration of each innovative project application and made the final decisions difficult; every project has merit, and every community is deserving of the efforts put forward.

The review committee used the rubric, program goals, equity considerations, and hours of deliberation to review and score applications. Their comments are summarized in the attachment, including the final recommendations. The recommendations before the board follow the numerical scores of each application that support the specific deliberations the review board had. All applications, including the highest rankings, have some feedback from the review board and additional scope clarifications that will be shared by staff via meetings.

Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:
Included in the Overall Work Program/Budget

List of Attachments:
EEI Project Descriptions and Discussions