



November 2023

Engage, Empower, Implement Program Framework

Program Overview

Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) is a new funding program that resulted from the SACOG 2020 Regional Funding Round Framework. **The \$3.8 million program is intended to support community-based planning and pre-construction project development activities in the region.** This investment has a specific focus on meaningful community engagement in disinvested communities and is a significant component of SACOG's commitment to its Race, Equity and Inclusion initiative. Through the program narrative and in its implementation, meaningful engagement refers to the intent; community engagement will be done with the intention of listening first and then acting on what has been shared. EEI will provide funding for and support community-based planning processes that bring together community-based organizations, cities, and counties in the six-county SACOG Region. The investment in community-led planning processes is a strategy that will result in the development of projects that positively impact the region's most disinvested communities and can help implement the 2025 Blueprint's triple bottom line initiatives of Equity, Environment, and Economy.

SACOG intends to financially support community-led planning and provide technical assistance through capacity building for staff at community-based organizations (CBOs), cities, and counties. **EEI will establish community-led planning and design principles to guide the identification of communities' priorities and development of projects that meet their needs. Through this collaborative planning process with CBOs and SACOG member cities and counties, the region will be able to create and identify community-driven and equitable projects that can more readily qualify for federal and state funding sources.** Increasingly, these funding programs are favoring more meaningful engagement processes that benefit historically underserved and disinvested communities.

The desired outcomes of EEI are twofold:

1. The development of projects or plans with and for historically disinvested communities, as will be defined in the application process. These can include community or neighborhood specific plans, playbooks with policy recommendations, corridor study plans, etc.
2. Investment in meaningful community engagement processes leading to reestablished trust and restored relationships between cities, counties, and community organizations that are closely connected to the region's residents.

Funding

EEI has \$3.8 million available for the six-county region with the largest share of \$3 million coming from federal Surface Transportation Block Grant (STBG) funds. The remaining balance is funded through a federal earmark and SACOG local funds. Efforts funded through EEI will need to meet the eligibility requirements of these funding sources, which are among the most flexible funds SACOG administers and can be used for a wide variety of uses including community engagement and planning. General eligibility under RSTP guidelines include surface transportation planning programs, highway and transit research and development and technology transfer programs, workforce

development, training, and education. Specifically, the STBG program as amended by the latest federal transportation bill (the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) creates a priority for “consideration of the unique circumstances affecting community members’ mobility needs and the allocation of resources consistent with those needs, enabling the transportation network to effectively serve all community members.” The Federal Highway Administration guidance for the use of STBG funds includes allowance for “projects and inclusion of project elements that proactively address racial equity, workforce development, economic development, and remove barriers to opportunity, including automobile dependence in both rural and urban communities as a barrier to opportunity or to redress prior inequities and barriers to opportunity.”

SACOG staff will also work with the specific local jurisdiction and CBO partnerships through the pre-application period to ensure that activities meet eligibility requirements and are prepared for programming in the federal MTIP to assure timely access to funds for awardees.

Nexus to Transportation

EI is an investment in authentic and meaningful community engagement processes. This work requires public agencies to leave behind pre-conceived ideas of specific projects or solutions and instead listen to community needs and wants first. Categorizing EI engagement efforts as “transportation focused” from the beginning would be counterproductive to the program goals and preclude many community members from engaging in the process. However, it is important to acknowledge that transportation is inherently embedded in almost every planning decision that is made. The built environment is interconnected by some form of transportation network, and access to community destinations are critical to a person’s mobility and quality of life – whether that be access to a school, grocery store, transit stop, health facility, recreational opportunity, or beyond.

Because most of the program is funded with STBG dollars, this allows for efforts around: surface transportation planning programs; highway and transit research and development and technology transfer programs; workforce development; training; and education. This funding source also states a prioritization for considering unique issues affecting mobility needs.

For example: An EI community-led engagement process could identify a disinvested community’s most-pressing need to be a lack of access to adequate resources. Through a series of further engagement activities and technical assistance from the partner jurisdiction, the disinvested community could determine their top project ideas to address this need include a community center and food access points. This process and its findings would be connected to transportation because the creation of such establishments would increase the community’s mobility and access to those resources.

EI follows the lead of programs such as [Green Means Go](#), which invest in the infrastructure of housing and not transportation directly. By investing early in the planning process and supporting a foundation of strong community engagement, SACOG can contribute to the creation of better transportation systems throughout our region.

Program Goals

- **Focus on partnerships with community-based organizations.** Working closely with community-based organizations is critical to improving overall planning practices and creating more equitable outcomes. This program will help establish lasting meaningful relationships and partnerships with CBOs that will go beyond the program.

- **Establish authentic and meaningful engagement as the first step in the planning process.** Engagement in disinvested communities for well-established projects has often been seen as an easy way to include equity in a project. EEI will develop an authentic process focused on engagement first as a means to develop a project and a continued feedback loop through implementation.
- **Provide the tools, best practices, and incentives to make it possible for more public agencies to deliver equitable projects for the future.** Support future project implementation and create a pipeline of equity-based projects.
- **Integrate racial equity considerations more fully into regional investment priorities.** Starting and focusing on engagement for community-led project designs will create projects aligned with community priorities, build community trust and support at every step of a project’s development process, and result in projects that can be implemented with federal and state dollars. Integration of racial equity will also include developing metrics that measure racial equity benefits and taking the learnings and metrics and integrating with broader SACOG projects, programs, and funding strategies.
- **Meet federal and state performance objectives and policy goals that align with equity initiatives.** Following federal and state equity performance targets is a critical requirement SACOG has always met. EEI can advance USDOT’s efforts to expand access and opportunity to all communities while focusing on underserved, overburdened, and disadvantaged communities.
- **Position the Sacramento region for competitive federal and state funding.** Federal and state competitive programs are increasingly looking for equity-focused investments, informed by data collected through community engagement.

Program Scope

Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) is an investment in the region’s planning processes by focusing on the Sacramento region’s disinvested communities to create community-led plans and projects. It will fund and partnerships between cities/counties and community-based organizations (CBOs) and cities/counties to identify a community, understand existing barriers and hardships, and co-develop solutions and strategies to alleviate these issues.

Eligible Project Concepts

City/county and community-based organization partnerships working in disinvested communities to identify barriers, challenges, and needs to co-design projects addressing the needs.

Community-based planning and pre-construction project development activities with a nexus to transportation can include but are not limited to: community specific plans; toolkits or playbooks; projects that relate to the built environment; projects that focus on improving access to transportation options or community destinations, reducing greenhouse gases, or increasing housing opportunities.

Examples of community-based planning efforts:

- [Franklin Boulevard Playbook](#), City of Sacramento & Franklin Boulevard District
 - Focus area(s): equitable housing and neighborhood development strategies; transportation and mobility strategies
 - Connection to transportation: increase density and reduce driving needs; streetscape, bike, pedestrian, and safety improvement strategies that make mobility safer and cleaner
- [Cambodia Town Thrives](#), City of Long Beach

- Focus area(s): youth education center and café, street trees and vertical gardens, community land trust
- Connection to transportation: increase resources in a community and reduce driving to similar destinations in other areas; improve active mode comfort and safety; increase climate resiliency
- [Community-based transportation plans](#), Metropolitan Transportation Commission
 - Focus area(s): participatory budgeting
 - Connection to transportation: prioritizing community-specific needs such as pedestrian safety
- [Stockton Mobility Collective](#), San Joaquin Council of Governments
 - Focus area(s): bike share, car share, active transportation modes
 - Connection to transportation: reduce individual car driving

Eligible Applicants

Cities and counties in the six counties of El Dorado, Placer, Sacramento, Sutter, Yolo and Yuba and cities within would be eligible to apply, in partnership with community-based organizations. Based on feedback from the community and best practices recommendations, staff will leave the opportunity for an individual CBO to apply, should that need arise during the pre-application window. An individual CBO award will be up to \$80,000.

Community-based organizations will be defined as a public or private nonprofit organization of demonstrated effectiveness that- (A) is representative of a community or significant segments of a community; and (B) provides educational or related services to individuals in the community.

Grant Awards

Project awards are anticipated to be between \$150,000 – \$300,000 with a maximum award amount of \$500,000. A minimum of 50% of each award will go directly to a community-based organization, with a goal of 70% - 80% going to the community-based organization if possible. A portion of funding (amount to be determined) will be dedicated to rural communities.

Using combined federal and local funds creatively, SACOG should ensure that EEI CBO grant recipients will receive 5–10% of their award as an advance to cover project startup costs. The remaining award amount will be provided as reimbursements via monthly invoices.

Pre–Application

SACOG staff will plan, coordinate, and facilitate pre-application meetings with cities, counties, and CBOs to clarify application expectations, answer applicant questions, and educate newer CBOs on the application process. SACOG will host trainings and workshops for both government agencies and CBOs on EEI projects. During these meetings, SACOG will ask that CBOs present initial project ideas and interests. During this pre-application process SACOG will also help CBOs make connections to potential city/county partners.

The pre-application time is estimated to be from January through April 2024, until applications are open. Consultants and trainers will be brought on board as needed to help build up capacity for both CBOs and cities/counties.

Application

SACOG staff will develop clear and concise application guidelines that are easily understandable for both city/county and CBO applicants. The application will intend to attract applicants from diverse backgrounds and create a simple

application process. Along with the application, SACOG will also develop and share pre-made application forms and templates that can expedite the application process and ensure the correct information is given. Application window will be about two to three months.

Metrics

SACOG staff will develop evaluation criteria that measure proposals against the EEI program goals. Metrics can include but are not limited to following:

- Emphasize benefits and opportunities to the communities.
- Clear partnership roles that elevate the CBO; who are the partners and what role do they play in the community.
- Community involvement – Identify how the community will be engaged; what participatory methods will be used; governance and partnership structure; types of stakeholders reached; attendance for focus groups and community meetings.
- Understanding and knowledge of the historical disinvestment in the community, including housing and transportation needs, education access, climate vulnerabilities, displacement concerns.
- Where community input was able to be applied and where it was not able to be applied, and why.
- Grant access - share of EEI grantees who serve communities that serve historically marginalized communities or who are disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens. Can include a goal to fund a percentage of grantees serving populations within Environmental Justice Areas, in high percentile categories under CalEnvironScreen indicators, and/or have Federal Justice40 designation.

Implementation Timeline

November 2023	Adoption of framework
December 2023 – January 2024	Guidelines and final application and scoring criteria development
January – April 2024	Pre-application
April – June 2024	Application window
June – July 2024	Review applications
August 2024	Grant recommendation
September – December	Procurement
January 2025	Implementation