Program Summary

Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) is a new funding program that will establish and fund an outreach and engagement process focused on community-based planning for the region's six county jurisdictions and commuinity-based organizations (CBOs) to implement in their local communities, paired with technical resources and tools. EEI will include principles of community led planning and designing to identify communities' priorities and develop projects that meet their needs. Through this collaborative planning process with member cities and counties and CBOs, the region will be able to create and identify community-driven and equitable projects ready for funding from federal, state, and local sources.
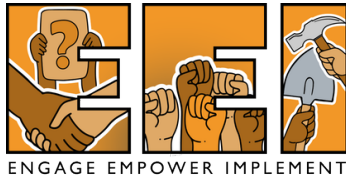
 EEI is focused on developing guidelines for a commmunity-based planning process through collaboration with community-based organizations and cities and counties in the Sacramento region. Working with both groups will help SACOG staff understand where there are current barriers and opportunities with collaborative partnerships, designing community-based projects, accessing funding, and investing in previously disinvested communities. The program is centered on working in systemically oppressed and marginalized communities that have largely been left out of traditional planning processes, including but not limited to Black, Indigenous, Asian and Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latinx and other communities of color, low-income communities, youth, seniors, LGBTQ+ and other marginalized groups.

Staff will collaborate with CBOs and cities and counties across the six counties to understand the barriers and challenges they face with community-based planning and project implementation. This discussion will inform the development of a co-created community engagement process that can transform community-identified issues and ideas into implementable projects. The adopted EEI funding program framework will include resources and guidelines for member-jurisdictions to use when partnering with CBOs and developing projects that meet the needs of their communities through a justice-based planning process.

Program Overview

Program Priorities

- **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 looked at the way to include equity in a project. EEI will develop a process focused on engagement first as a means to develop a project and a continued feedback loop through implementation.
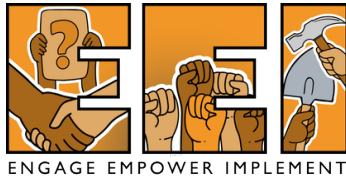
- **EEI is beyond transportation.** EEI is about community-based solutions, and that means going beyond transportation projects. Acknowledging that communities have needs beyond transportation is critical as well as acknowledging that many factors impact mobility for people. A community-based approach means listening to the needs being brought up and using tools, resources, and expertise to bring solutions.
- **EEI is for the region's six counties.** While the current allocated $3 million is from the region's four-county funding program, the EEI process and resources will be created and shared with partner agencies, including Placer County Transportation Planning Agency and El Dorado County Transportation Commission, for region wide implementation. The finalized framework will be shared as a planning tool and SACOG will find ways to expand the implementation funds across the region in future rounds.
- **Provide the tools, best practices, and incentivizes to make it possible for more public agencies to deliver equitable projects for the future.** Allow for project implementation in the future, creating 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 and EEI can advance these efforts and allow SACOG to be on the leading edge.
- **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.

Investing in a regional pipeline

Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) will invest in establishing a co-designing engagement process for the Sacramento region's systemically oppressed and disinvested communities. This updated approach to engagement will result in measurable outcomes that elevate community priorities through a collaborative process with community-based organizations (CBOs) and member cities/counties. SACOG will commit the approved $3 million program budget towards partnerships between CBOs and member jurisdictions. Through these partnerships, jurisdictions and CBOs can facilitate a community-led design process to identify projects and programs that address community needs and priorities. Jurisdictions and CBOs can then apply for regional, state, and federal funding sources to implement the community-identified projects and programs.

Key Objectives

1. Establish a regional process for CBO and jurisdictions to co-design projects that meet community priorities
2. Create a regional pipeline of projects that have equity imbedded from the design phase, going beyond the traditional approach of incorporating equity at the late stages of a project
3. Create a robust network with CBOs that can be leveraged across SACOG projects and beyond EEI

Outreach to Date & Key Findings

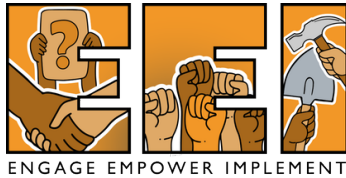## Racial Equity Action Plan CBO Listening Sessions (Spring 2022)

During the development of the racial equity action plan, SACOG staff and the consultants supporting the work hosted listening sessions with community-based organizations to learn and understand how SACOG is perceived from external community organizations and where we can begin to bridge gaps. The listening sessions brought to light critical aspects about how SACOG conducts work and makes decisions and the need for stronger relationships that impact the decision-making process and work.

1. SACOG's positioning as a regional leader brings a lot of opportunity for doing equity work across the region
   a. Intentionality of decisions when it comes to projects, programs, and funding
2. True equity is beyond occasional and project-based engagement
   a. Going to community when making decisions
   b. See community as partners and know when to pause, listen, and learn
3. Building strong relationships with community partners and leveraging their expertise
   a. Engagement opportunities between SACOG and CBOs have been positively increasing
   b. It is important to be brought in early on and be part of the decision-making process
   c. Encourage coalition building
4. Improving engagement processes for meaningful outcomes
   a. Appropriate funding for all elements of engagement
   b. Appropriate timelines for meaningful input and feedback loops
   c. Engagement is where equity comes from, if done at the right time, not just going to a community after the fact to check a box

SACOG Project Working Groups (February – April 2022)

Early in 2022, SACOG hosted working groups for the Performance Evaluation Process (PEP) and Green Means Go that resulted in great feedback for overall SACOG efforts:

1. Think about the planning process more holistically
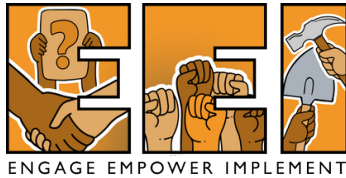   a. The region should work closely and meaningfully with community organizations

b. Develop processes and pipelines for planning dollars to result in meaningful projects for communities
2. Including CBOs at the table and decision-making
   a. Invest in capacity of CBOs by reducing barriers to work with SACOG
   b. Be honest and upfront about losses to build trust
3. Project development as a partnership can result in equitable results
   a. Creating processes that emphasize the need of CBO and local government partnerships to prevent isolated projects
4. Quality engagement is critical
   a. Quality engagement as an evaluation criterion
   b. Engagement before an idea or project is worth more than the reaction of 100 people to something already established
   c. Partner with trusted organizations, people do not trust government led outreach
   d. Not starting with a plan, but looking at what communities need and what their priorities are to
   e. Change the mindset of how we get information from people, not consultants, but community experts
   f. Education is key not just for the community but for decision makers - education doesn't just come from one direction, it comes from all directions, and people will educate us, and we need to be open to that

Funding Round Jurisdiction Outreach (August – September 2022)

As preparation for the 22/23 funding program, SACOG staff have been meeting with cities and counties to discuss the upcoming funding opportunities and introducing the EEI program.

- Various efforts across the region could use help with engaging in disinvested communities.
- Rural communities have unique needs and members want to explore how this program could help.
- Members are interested in the resources that will come out of the process to assist with consultant help, identification of disinvested communities, and assisting with identification of different funding sources focused on disinvested communities that they can apply for.
- Members already have grass-roots efforts underway that this program can help support and augment.
- Members are interested in going beyond traditional definitions of "disadvantaged communities."
- Interest in looking at diverse populations residing in communities, workers, and being a welcoming community for future residents that may not currently have a voice.
- Smaller and rural communities have specific needs that can benefit from and hands-on approach to engagement to identify community priorities and needs.
- Historically disinvested communities across the region are the ones that have the worst environments, interest in aligning with fix-it-first initiatives and this outreach methodology

Next Steps

Timeline

November 2022: Consultant & SACOG Planning

December: Begin CBO & City/County outreach

January – May 2023: Guidelines, application, resources development, with continued feedback from CBOs and member jurisdictions

June 2023: Final EEI Program adoption & call for applications

EEI Guidelines and Application

EEI guidelines and application are critical elements of the program. They will be developed by working with CBOs, member cities and counties, and the EEI consultant in the coming months.

Consultation with both CBOs and jurisdictions will be available for discussion on communities identified. The EEI application process will look to the 22/23 Regional funding round to identify best practices and possible improvements.

Selection Process & Eligibility

The selection criteria and eligibility will be created through the collaboration with member jurisdictions, CBOs, and the EEI consultant. These key elements will be brought into the final version:

- Broaden the current "disadvantaged communities" and "environmental justice" definition that SACOG currently uses to be more encompassing of various needs across the region
- Understand the region's difference across communities, including but not limited to rural, urban, and suburban
- Focus on uplifting the region's most systemically oppressed and disinvested communities
- The final review committee will represent member jurisdictions, CBOs, and communities
- Advance the program priorities and objectives