



Engage, Empower, Implement Update

Receive and File

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**Attachments:** Yes

**Approved by:** James Corless

**Referring Committee:** Transportation

**1. Issue:**

Staff are providing an update on the Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) funding program

**2. Recommendation:**

None; this item is for information only.

**3. Background/Analysis:**

The SACOG board has allocated \$3 million towards EEI to begin addressing disparities that result in limited healthy environments for the region's residents. EEI will strategically invest these funds in low-income communities with an emphasis on communities that have faced the largest inequities which include Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and other communities of color. Through this funding program, SACOG aims to establish a funding framework and planning process to create a pipeline of equitable, safe, and sustainable projects throughout the Sacramento region that are community-led and codesigned, starting from the identification of issues and needs, solution ideation, and project design.

As state and federal grant programs continue to place an emphasis on meaningful community engagement, EEI will strengthen our region's ability to secure future funding by laying the groundwork and establishing best practices that ensure all projects begin with the communities they will serve.

HR&A Advising and their sub-consultant, AIM Consulting, were brought on in December 2022, to assist staff with the development of this new funding program. Since then, staff and the consultants have engaged with 34 community-based organizations (CBOs) and 18 jurisdictions in preparation for the Framework development.

**4. Discussion/Analysis:**

SACOG staff, HR&A, and AIM Consulting have engaged with more than 30 community-based organizations across the six-county region in addition to city, county, and regional transportation planning agency staff. CBO engagement to-date has included a roundtable discussion, survey, and six focus group meetings focused on: perceived strengths and weaknesses of SACOG and other public agencies' approaches to CBO engagement; potential barriers to CBO participation in EEI; disinvested and rural communities' needs, and the types of projects that could address these needs; and government partnerships needed for successful project collaboration. Engagement with local cities and counties has included a survey, jurisdiction roundtable, and

one-on-one meetings so far.

### **Key Findings from CBO Engagement**

- Applying for & receiving funds
  - Several major barriers exist which make it difficult for CBOs to apply for and secure grant funding. Some of these challenges include: tedious and complicated grant applications; extensive forms and other requirements; lack of CBO staff capacity; delayed reimbursements; non-flexible funding opportunities; not enough time for grant application development.
- Creating Partnerships
  - There is a need to: reestablish trust between CBOs and public agencies; facilitate two-way communication; make CBOs feel heard in meetings, especially those in isolated communities and with disillusioned community members; engage with trusted community leaders; and ensure transparency of funding opportunities and projects as they begin.

### **Key Findings from Jurisdiction Engagement**

- Jurisdictions have a baseline comfort level with CBO partnerships, but there are several challenges that should be addressed to make these partnerships more successful. Some challenges include: lack of cooperation from both parties; scope changes; adequate time for community engagement; clear roles and responsibilities; trustworthiness; and payments.
- General consensus that the EEI program's grant application will need to be as simple as possible, and SACOG should plan to provide technical assistance to applicants.
- Highest-ranked interests for EEI and future funding programs include: Transportation & Mobility; Open Space & Parks; Beautification & Public Art; and Housing.
- When asked about how SACOG can measure and assess the success of an EEI-funded community engagement process, jurisdictions' most-selected response was:
  - More inclusive engagement opportunities that include groups that are traditionally left out of planning processes.
  - Increased government partnerships with community-based organizations.
- Suggested budgets for EEI projects ranged from \$15,000 to \$200,000.
- Evaluation metrics will be difficult to define but critical in determining how success is measured. Metrics should be in alignment with SACOG's Project Evaluation Process (PEP) effort.
- Implementation dollars are just as important as planning dollars, and there is a need for more funding that can help implement EEI projects in the future.

All feedback received from CBO and jurisdiction engagement will help inform the EEI funding framework. The framework will include information on the funding program guidelines, application process, and program evaluation. Staff expect to bring a draft framework to the September Transportation Committee meeting.

As discussed in the Transportation Committee, board members are encouraged to recommend additional community-based organizations to connect with SACOG staff regarding EEI.

### **5. Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:**

The implementation funds (\$3 million) for this program are allocated from the 2020 Funding Round. The framework development, along with the consultants, will be funded through a combination of REAP 2.0, SMUD grant, and SACOG's operating budget.