



Engage, Empower, Implement Framework Review

Information

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Attachments: Yes

Approved by: James Corless

Referring Committee: Not Applicable

1. Issue:

Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) staff have been working with consulting firm HR&A Advisors, and their subconsultant Aim Consulting, to conduct a month's long engagement process with community-based organizations, while at the same time connecting with city and county members through meetings, presentations, and surveys, to create a final framework for the program, a critical next step in the EEI implementation effort that will guide the guidelines, pre-application, application, and other needed materials of the program.

2. Recommendation:

None, this is for information only. This item will be brought to the board next month for adoption of the framework.

3. Background/Analysis:

In 2020 during the SACOG board's adoption of the Funding Round, the board created the Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) program, a new funding program focused on the region's most disinvested communities. The SACOG Board allocated \$3 million towards EEI to begin addressing disparities that result in limited-healthy environments for the region's residents. In September 2023, the board increased the amount to \$3.8 million.

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 planning process to create a pipeline of equitable, safe, and sustainable projects throughout the Sacramento region that are community-led and co-designed, starting from the identification of issues and needs, solution ideation, and project design. The EEI planning process will create projects ready for implementation through local, state, and/or federal funding.

This decision and commitment from the board was initiated as the agency began working on efforts around equity (Racial Equity Statement of Commitment and Change and the Racial Equity Action Plan). The board also recognized the need to align with state and federal grant programs, as they continue to place an emphasis on meaningful community engagement, including programs like Reconnecting Communities: Highways to Boulevards at the state level, and Thriving Communities Program and Reconnecting Communities and Neighborhoods Grant Program at the federal level. EEI will strengthen our region's ability to secure future

funding for projects communities support by laying the groundwork and establishing best practices that ensure all projects begin with the communities they will serve.

By bringing on HR&A Advisors and their subconsultant, AIM Consulting, about 40 community-based organizations represented from across the six counties participated in a month's long engagement process to better understand their needs and barriers. Staff also connected with city and county partners to understand their needs and concerns.

Engagement findings are summarized here and included in the Engagement Summary Attachment.

Key Findings from CBO Engagement

- Applying for & receiving funds
 - Several major barriers exist which make it difficult for community based organizations (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.
- General consensus that the EEI program's grant application will need to be as simple as possible, and SACOG should provide technical assistance to applicants.
- Evaluation metrics are critical in determining how success is measured.
- 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.

From the findings and best practices HR&A created the attached framework. The draft recommendations were reviewed by the Transportation Committee and the Board in September 2023. The draft framework was also shared with community-based organizations and city and county partners in mid-September that resulted in great comments and feedback that have been incorporated into this Final Framework presented for review today. There was also a lot of feedback and comments from cities and counties that will be incorporated in the next step of EEI, when developing the guidelines, application, and other materials.

4. Discussion/Analysis:

Working with the findings of the CBO focus groups and roundtables and the consultation meetings with SACOG jurisdictions, HR&A Advisors, the project consultant, has developed a Final EEI Framework that is attached. Below are the highlights of the framework:

Project Funding Guidelines: Ensure funding opportunities are aligned with community needs and encourage diverse and inclusive participation.

- Fund CBO priority topic projects
- Allow CBOs to work and be funded independently
- Grant funding amounts & allocations

Pre-Application Process: Establish a pre-application process that fosters partnership development between CBOs and cities/counties and capacity building for both entities.

- Design and host pre-application workshops, meetings, and trainings and develop needed materials as support

Project Application Process: Promote accessibility and distributional equity by removing burdensome application requirements and increasing transparency.

- Distribute grant opportunity broadly
- Have dedicated staff to provide technical support
- Create a simple application process and provide support along the way with adequate application time

Project Funding & Invoicing Process: Establish a clear and timely funding and invoicing process that reduces financial and administrative burden on CBOs.

- Create clear and concise application materials
- Host bi-annual workshops on contract and finance requirements for CBOs
- Streamline contract execution
- Provide an upfront payment of up to 10 percent to alleviate reimbursement burdens

Project Execution: Define the parameters and provide adequate support for an engagement process that ensures community representation and buy-in.

- Dedicate SACOG staff for technical support, ongoing assistance, and to help support new relationships

Program Evaluation: Developing quantifiable metrics that track impact and promote ongoing growth and evaluation of the EEI program.

- Create an EEI Review Board that has diverse and balanced representation
- Develop metrics that illustrate community representation, ability to shape the project outcomes, and ultimate buy-in from targeted stakeholders.
- Measure share of funds serving historically marginalized and/or environmentally vulnerable communities

5. Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

The implementation funds include \$3.8 million. The framework development, along with the consultants, will be funded through a combination of REAP 2.0, SMUD grant, and SACOG's operating budget.