GASTON TOGETHER
COMMUNITY, HEALTH, LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION

EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING:

A GUIDE FOR ENGAGING GASTON COUNTY COMMUNITIES

Version 1.0

This document was created and distributed by the Transportation Equity Strategy Team (TEST), a subcommittee of the Gaston Together: Health in All Policies (HiAP) Committee.

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SECTION 1

This guide was developed through a participatory process involving community advocates, nonprofit leaders, municipal planners, public health professionals, business leaders, and others. Together, these individuals formed the Transportation Equity Strategy Team (TEST), a subcommittee of Gaston Together Health in All Policies (HiAP) Committee.

Starting in October 2022, the committee held 17 meetings and six Community of Practice sessions where the group reviewed best practices for public engagement, used scenario testing to gain input from local community members, and received targeted feedback through a survey of underserved individuals. Using this information, TEST prepared this guide to help local governments effectively engage traditionally underserved communities in transportation planning.

The goal of transportation equity is to ensure all people have equal access to transportation, regardless of their income, race, ethnicity, disability, or other factors. In other words, every person is able to get to where they need to go, when they want to be there, without facing significant barriers.

> Our focus are underserved communities, or "populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality." – Executive Order 14020, On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

For many underserved individuals and communities, the lack of vehicle ownership or access to transportation, creates barriers to employment, shopping, clinical appointments, visiting friends, and other critical activities. By building equitable transportation systems, we can help these individuals live healthier lives, secure better-paying jobs, obtain education, and enhance their upward economic mobility.

Ensuring equitable access to transportation options includes investing in public transportation infrastructure, improving transportation services in marginalized communities, and engaging communities in decision-making processes. By recognizing and addressing transportation as a key factor within the larger picture of equity, it becomes possible to mitigate the systemic barriers that disproportionately affect marginalized communities and promote more inclusive and equitable societies.

This guide recognizes underserved communities are most qualified to describe their transportation needs and help build creative solutions; thus increasing the likelihood that local transportation systems will be effective and transformative in the lives of people who struggle to get to where they are going and enhance their **quality of life (QOL).**

Additionally, this guide will help local governments and community stakeholders explore how to move toward a practice of equity where power is shared and collaboration with communities is present throughout planning, to co-create solutions that work for all

Quality of Life (QOL)-
 This concept aims to capture the well-being, whether of a population or individual, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence at a specific point in time. Primary indicators of quality of life include income and job, housing, education, life-work balance, interpersonal relationships, infrastructure and services, and access to cultural and leisure activities.

Health Care and Quality

Neighborhood and Built Environment

Social and Community Context

Education Access and Quality

Economic Stability

Transportation disparities among communities of color, low-income communities, and other underserved populations are significant issues that warrant attention. To comprehensively address these disparities, it is essential to examine the relationship between transportation and the following Social Determinants of Health (SDOH). By considering transportation within the context of SDOH, we can gain valuable insights into the multifaceted impact on health outcomes and well-being.

01 Economic Stability

Transportation plays a significant role in economic opportunities. Reliable transportation is crucial for individuals to access job opportunities, attend interviews, and participate in the workforce. Ultimately contributing to unequal access to employment, income, and economic mobility.

02 Education Access and Quality

Transportation is essential for individuals to secure quality education. Marginalized communities often face disparities in educational access, including transportation to schools, leading to educational inequities and perpetuating the opportunity gap.

03 Health Care Access and Quality

Access to healthcare services is vital for overall health outcomes. Underserved groups often face barriers to healthcare, including limited transportation options to reach medical facilities. This can result in delayed or inadequate access to healthcare services, exacerbating health disparities and contributing to poorer health outcomes.

04 Neighborhood and Built Environment

Transportation infrastructure and accessibility shape the built environment in communities. Historically marginalized neighborhoods, predominantly inhabited by racial and ethnic minorities, may experience inadequate transportation infrastructure, limited public transit options, and transportation deserts. These disparities in the built environment can contribute to unequal access to resources, services, and opportunities, impacting health and well-being.

05 Social and Community Context

Transportation connects individuals to social networks, community resources, and social opportunities. Limited transportation options can lead to social isolation, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities. Inequitable transportation systems can enhance social connections, community engagement, and empowerment.

SECTION 1.2: OBJECTIVES

The Transportation Equity Strategy Team's (TEST) objectives are to encourage local transportation planning to facilitate the following:

- Increasing accessibility and mobility throughout Gaston County
- Considering the needs of all communities and involving all stakeholders in making fair and inclusive transportation decisions
- Ensuring transportation decisions are made in a way that does not negatively impact underserved communities
- Increasing the number of people who have access to affordable and multimodal public transportation options
- Contributing to improved community health
- Increasing the number of people who have reliable transportation to healthy food options
- Increasing the number of people who can safely walk or bike to work
- Reducing the number of people who are exposed to air pollution from traffic
- Encouraging local governments to use this tool every time they engage in transportation planning

Above all, it embraces the accountability embodied in the phrase:

"Nothing for Us Without Us." - Unknown

SECTION 2

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Underserved populations encounter several different challenges that are rooted in systemic inequities that affect their daily lives.

Environment/Surroundings

In looking at how the built environment and its surroundings may impact health, one should consider that underserved populations are at a higher risk of being exposed to pollutants in the air, water, and soil. Many underserved populations live in areas close to highways or busy streets that lead to air pollution and/or noise pollution, which can have a direct impact on physical and mental health. Furthermore, homes in underserved communities are often located close to chemical plants and landfills that have the potential to impact the nearby soil and water with toxic waste.

Transportation, Mobility, & Housing

Underserved populations often live in areas where there is a lack of high-quality public transportation and mobility options. Those who live in rural areas are especially impacted by this inequity as their homes are typically located further away from places of employment, medical facilities, grocery stores and other resources that support their quality of life (QOL). Limited alternative mobility options and land use infrastructure are also barriers for underserved populations. The availability of transit options such as scooters, or even the availability of bike lanes, are mostly scarce for this population. Railroad crossings are additional mobility barriers in many neighborhoods.

Case Study: Highland Neighborhood, Gastonia, NC

The local case study focuses on Gastonia's African American community, which has historically revolved around the Highland area. Unfortunately, this area has been grappling with persistent poverty. A significant development occurred when 1.4 miles of the active rail corridor was buried in a large ditch that separated the Highland Neighborhood from Downtown Gastonia. This project resulted in the displacement of 67 businesses and 77 homes. As a consequence, the community witnessed a decline in property values, an increase in crime rates, and the relocation of residents and businesses to other parts of the city. Rather than fostering connectivity, the project only further divided the community.

A proposed project aims to cap the trench and reconnect Highland with Downtown Gastonia. This would facilitate neighborhood journeys by car, bicycle, and on foot, thus improving the safety for residents while ensuring efficient traffic movement. It is crucial to recognize that these public spaces serve as the "living rooms" of the community that foster a sense of belonging and togetherness.

Testimonial - Gaston County Employee

"I work for Gaston County. Most of my clients explain how difficult it is for them to attend their appointment. Transportation is the number one reason why they don't make the appointments. It's great that we offer free service, but if they can't make it then how can we keep the grants for the programs. One of the things I would like to see is offering bus schedules to the doctor's office. Let us teach and inform our clients how to take a bus so they can come to their appointment. A parent with kids was giving a token for a bus without a bus schedule or without any explanation of what it was. I couldn't help them because I didn't have any idea what the token was for. We have many Hispanic and Haitian people that don't speak English. I keep seeing free programs with no transportation."

Healthy Food Options & Physical Activity Access

Many underserved populations reside in areas with limited or no access to healthy and affordable food. Many of these individuals have unhealthy alternatives such as fast-food restaurants and processed foods from local convenience stores that have above-market prices. Moreover, underserved populations typically do not reside in areas with safe access to physical activity opportunities such as safe sidewalks, walking tracks, greenways, and bike lanes.

Income

Many underserved populations encounter lower wages and lack of essential employee benefits. Often they have limited opportunities to further their education and obtain careers with livable incomes. As a result they are unable to obtain the financial security to live comfortable and healthy lives. In addition, many underserved individuals have limited or no employee benefits such as health and life insurance, bereavement, sick, and vacation days.

Testimonial - Mt. Holly Resident (Gaston County)

"There's a lot to be said for having direct experience. Try to get from Mt. Holly to downtown Gastonia to go to court or a doctor's appointment without a car. There are no bus services or public transportation of any kind."

Access to Care

Access to healthcare poses a significant and distinctive challenge for underserved populations. This is particularly evident in rural areas where individuals often lack access to primary care providers and specialists. As it relates to transportation, residents may rely on unaffordable ambulance rides to the emergency room.

Transportation equity plays a pivotal role in addressing the healthcare disparities faced by underserved populations. For instance, residents who lack affordable and accessible transportation may resort to using expensive ambulance rides to reach the emergency room, placing a significant financial burden on them, which further exacerbates existing healthcare inequities.

Moreover, inadequate availability of quality healthcare options, combined with financial constraints like the absence of health insurance and high healthcare costs, compounds the issue for marginalized communities. As a result, underserved populations often struggle to afford essential expenses such as provider co-pays, medications, and specialized treatments, intensifying their healthcare disparities. By addressing transportation inequities, we can help remove barriers to affordable and timely healthcare access, thus working towards achieving more equitable health outcomes for these communities.

SECTION 3

USDOT defines meaningful public involvement as "a process that proactively seeks full representation from the community, considers public comments and feedback, and incorporates that feedback into a project, program, or plan when possible. The impact of community contributions encourages early and continuous public involvement and brings diverse viewpoints and values into the transportation decision-making process. This process enables the community and agencies to make better-informed decisions through collaborative efforts and improves the decision-making process."

Features of meaningful public involvement include:

- Understanding the demographics of the affected community
- Building durable relationships with diverse community members outside of the project lifecycle to understand their transportation wants and needs
- Proactively involving a broad representation of the community in the planning and project lifecycle
- Using engagement techniques preferred by, and responsive to the needs of, these communities, including techniques that reach the historically underserved
- Documenting how community input impacted the final projects, programs, or plans, and communicating with the affected communities how their input was used

Community engagement is an important part of the planning process and includes activities to gain input from community members to inform the development of plans and policies. Engagement may include a range of activities from administering surveys, hosting town hall type meetings, or interactive temporary streetscape improvement demonstrations. It is premised on the belief that everyone has the right to be involved in decisions that affect their lives and the best decisions are derived from people with diverse experiences because varied perspectives garner more innovative ideas.

However, community engagement activities often struggle to attract participants from underserved communities because of barriers and historical exclusion. For example, underserved communities may lack access to positions of power, influence, or representation in local government or planning bodies. As a result, their concerns and needs may not be adequately considered. Instead of assuming apathy as the reason people are not participating, it is important to examine the current structures and formats for giving input and the conflicts that might limit participation.

Equitable community engagement seeks to secure the full inclusion of all voices from the community, particularly those who have been, and continue to be, denied access to influence decisions. The practices that define equitable engagement involves a spectrum of actions and tools that enlists the community's understanding, thinking about, and most importantly co-creation of the actions or plans that impact them

Benefits of Public Engagement

Public engagement plays a pivotal role in shaping the success and sustainability of initiatives, policies, and projects in the public and private sectors. It serves as a powerful tool for fostering a collaborative environment between organizations and the communities they serve by actively involving the public in decision-making processes, promoting transparency, and harnessing collective wisdom. Public engagement not only enhances the quality of outcomes but also cultivates trust, inclusivity, and long-term stakeholder satisfaction. From informed decision-making and innovative solutions to increased public support and effective resource allocation. The advantages of public engagement are far-reaching and have the potential to transform the dynamics of governance and societal progress.

Benefits

For Transportation Planners:

- More informed decision-making and decreased potential to cause harm
- Better understanding of community needs and priorities
- Improved relationship with the community
- More adaptive and innovative problem solving
- Greater diversity of knowledge, ideas, and information
- Broader and more diverse networks for information gathering/sharing
- Greater support for agency initiatives

For the Community:

- Greater partnership in, and ability to influence, decisions that impact them
- Deeper understanding of issues and ability to effectively self-advocate
- Improved relationship with the organization/government
- More relevant and useful services and mobility in the community

Barriers to Public Engagement

Meaningful engagement ensures that individuals' voices are heard and have opportunities to share their needs and desires. To achieve this, planners must take into account all of the people who live, work, play, and learn in the community and their experiences. Engagement processes that fail to address barriers and systemic inequities may cause more harm than good. For instance, they may reinforce power imbalances, lead to poorer-quality decisions that do not serve the full needs of the community, and contribute to decreasing levels of trust in government institutions.

Barriers

Social norms, barriers for people with disabilities, and economic barriers, such as the costs of childcare or access to transportation, also hinder participation and may even reinforce historic barriers

Barriers include internal thought processes such as "we've always done it this way," reliance on one-size-fits-all methods, and a lack of organizational accountability.

Lack of Transportation
(Gaston County Resident)

There is also a digital divide to consider. Not all communities have the same access to reliable internet, cell phone coverage, or computer resources.

Cant' get buses to places - outside of current routes
(Gaston County Resident)

Cant' get buses to places - outside of current routes
(Gaston County Resident)

Bus routes end earlier than job shifts.
(Gaston County Resident).

Bus route times are too far apart.
(Gaston County Resident)

SECTION 4

Helpful Toolkit Guidance

- Use this tool as early in your planning process as possible, allowing time to work through the questions and incorporate key insights into your engagement plan.

- Review the entire tool first to ensure you have a high-level understanding of your project from beginning to end. This will help you to organize your work.

- Document your process as you go along, especially activities, types of people engaged, and key decision points. This will help you when you need to refer back to and/or explain your approach.

SECTION 4: STEPS TO EQUITABLE TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

Equitable community engagement seeks to ensure all voices in a community are heard and have an opportunity to shape outcomes. Using this this tool will help local governments develop the scope and framework for transportation planning by addressing the following:

Developing and sustaining relationships with communities

Identifying clear goals, objectives and outcomes for engagement

Identifying the priority populations/audiences for engagement

Ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the communities being engaged

Selecting the appropriate level of engagement

Developing an engagement plan

Measuring impact

Reporting the outcomes of your engagement process

Steps 1 thru 7

Identifying Purpose Goals and Outcomes

Identifying the Audience

Identifying Key Stakeholders

Mapping Out your Engagement Strategy

Evaluating your Engagement Process

Sharing the Results

Staying Connected

STEP 1: IDENTIFYING PURPOSE, GOALS, AND OUTCOMES

Identifying the purpose of engagement is important for everyone to have a clear and shared understanding of what information or expertise you're seeking from the public. For instance, would more people benefit from adding a service route on public transit or building new sidewalks? Understanding this will also help inform the type of engagement you should use.

Here are a few questions to help guide goal setting:

Why are you seeking to engage with the community?

How will you know if your strategy isn't yielding the results you desire?

What do you need from stakeholders and the community to be successful?

What specific measures will you use to track progress?

What indicators of success will you use?

What equity-related concerns have been identified?

How will the information collected from your outreach effort be used? Is it informing a particular decision or being used to evaluate the effectiveness of a product or service?

What specific goals or outcomes have you identified for this engagement?

What are the expected and perceived impacts on the community?

Think about the positive and/or negative impacts to both people and places. This includes homes, shelters, food banks and grocery stores, medical facilities, jobs, nonprofits/community-based organizations, parks, schools, religious institutions, small and minority-owned businesses, etc.

When considering impacts to people, be sure to emphasize underserved communities, which have been historically excluded from power and decision-making.

Use the links in the 'resource section' of the appendix to access third party interactive maps and interpreted census data for your community.

Identify the audience by collecting demographic and socioeconomic data on individuals residing in the target area: Consider the people and places that will be impacted by the transportation project.

Here are a few questions to help identify your audience:

What demographic populations may be most affected by the project?

Have the impacted populations previously experienced harm?

No one likes to be labeled so avoid negative labels at all costs.

When answering the questions, be intentional and specific, disaggregate the data, consider subpopulations within specific demographic groups with differing and unique experiences and needs. Consider how people may have different experiences within the community.

For example, how would the experiences of a limited English proficient (LEP) Hispanic man with a physical disability differ from a Hispanic man who speaks and reads English? They are both men, but they may interact with our transit system in completely ways.

STEP 3: IDENTIFYING KEY STAKEHOLDERS

Have the right people at the table brainstorming ideas to develop an engagement plan aimed at reaching everyone in the community. Asking the community how they would like to be engaged is a critical step in this process. To do this, first recognize that best efforts, even when guided by data and evidence, will not succeed without community members' experience, knowledge, relationships, skills, and participation. This is the expertise needed to co-create a successful plan or project.

Here are a few questions to help guide goal setting:

Why are you seeking to engage with the community?

How will you know if your strategy isn't yielding the results you desire?

What do you need from stakeholders and the community to be successful?

What specific measures will you use to track progress?

What indicators of success will you use?

What equity-related concerns have been identified?

How will the information collected from your outreach effort be used? Is it informing a particular decision or being used to evaluate the effectiveness of a product or service?

What specific goals or outcomes have you identified for this engagement?

STEP 4: MAPPING OUT YOUR ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY

Using answers from the aforementioned steps and your collected demographic/socioeconomic data, map out the most appropriate and meaningful level of engagement using the Spectrum of Community Engagement provided on the following page. This should be based on what is deemed the most appropriate engagement method; multiple methods may be required. Document and communicate the anticipated value of engagement to the stakeholders and the community so everyone understands the desired outcomes.

To map your strategy, answer the following questions:

On the Spectrum of Community of Engagement - What level will you use?

What is the promise to the public for each level?

What will it mean?

What will it look like in practice?

What is the anticipated value for the community?

How will the information be used?

What information or data would you like to receive during the activity? Collect voluntarily submitted participant demographic data when possible (race/ethnicity, gender, age, income range, primary spoken language, place of residence, renter/homeowner, etc.)..

How will you know if you are on track to meet the identified goals?

How will you document any feedback, questions, or concerns?

Example: If you are starting on the "Inform" level on the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, you could use door hangers and send brochures to residents along the planning corridor. This will help inform those residents that the town is seeking stakeholders to join the planning or steering committee.

THE SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP

Facilitating Power

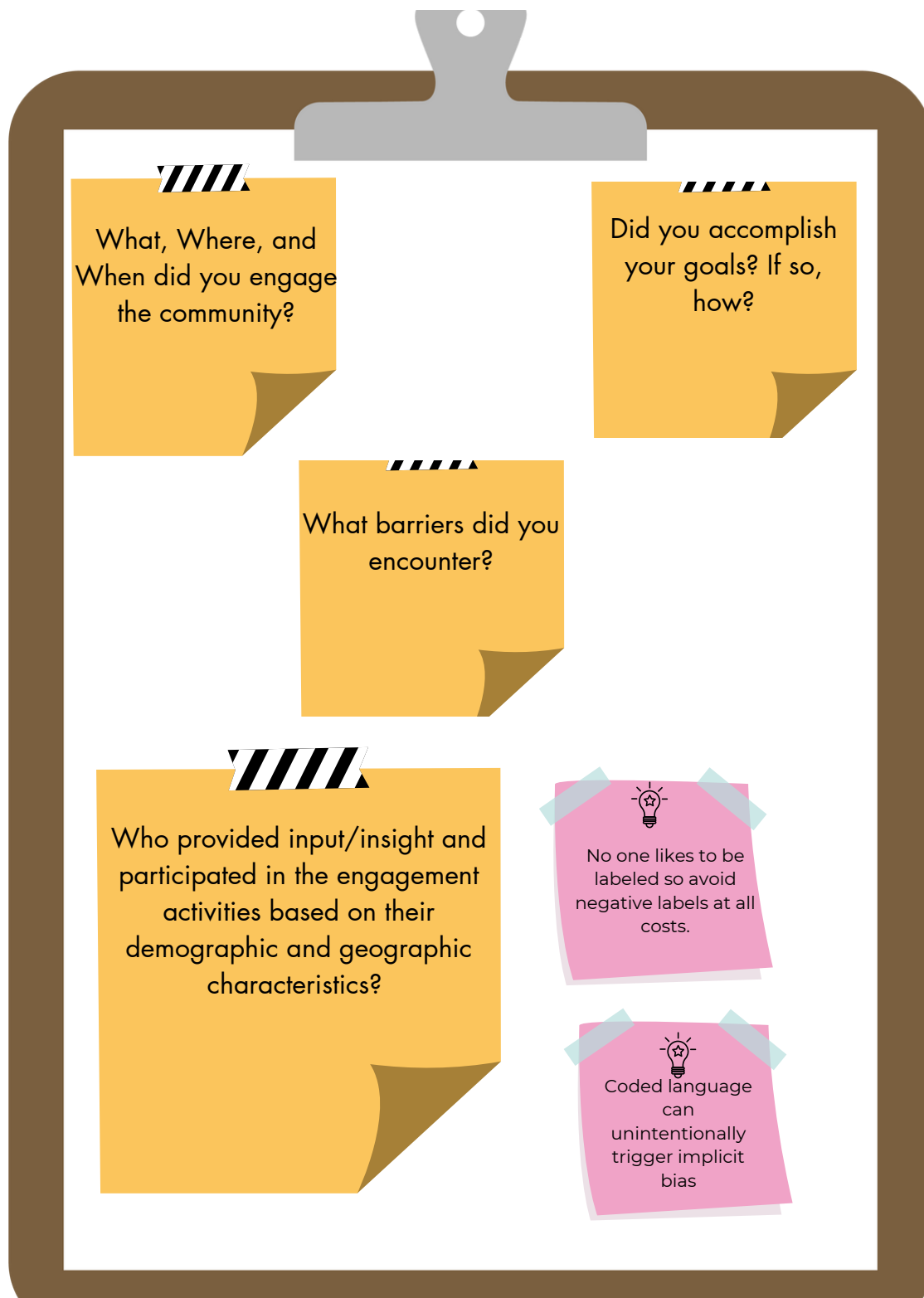| STANCE TOWARDS COMMUNITY	IGNORE 0	INFORM 1	CONSULT 2	INVOLVE 3	COLLABORATE 4	DEFER TO 5
IMPACT	Marginalization	Placation	Tokenization	Voice	Delegated Power	Community Ownership
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT GOALS	Deny access to decision-making processes	Provide the community with relevant information	Gather input from the community	Ensure community needs and assets are integrated into process & inform planning	Ensure community capacity to play a leadership role in implementation of decisions	Foster democratic participation and equity through community-driven decision-making; Bridge divide between community & governance
MESSAGE TO COMMUNITY	*Your voice, needs & interests do not matter*	*We will keep you informed*	*We care what you think*	*You are making us think, (and therefore act) differently about the issue*	*Your leadership and expertise are critical to how we address the issue*	*It's time to unlock collective power and capacity for transformative solutions*
ACTIVITIES	Closed door meeting · Misinformation · Systematic	Fact sheets · Open Houses · Presentations · Billboards · Videos	Public Comment · Focus Groups · Community Forums · Surveys	Community organizing & advocacy · House meetings · Interactive workshops · Polling · Community forums	MOU's with Community-based organizations · Community organizing · Citizen advisory committees · Open Planning Forums with Citizen Polling	Community-driven planning · Consensus building · Participatory action research · Participatory budgeting · Cooperatives
RESOURCE ALLOCATION RATIOS	100% Systems Admin	70-90% Systems Admin / 10-30% Promotions and Publicity	60-80% Systems Admin / 20-40% Consultation Activities	50-60% Systems Admin / 40-50% Community Involvement	20-50% Systems Admin / 50-70% Community Partners	80-100% Community partners and community-driven processes ideally generate new value and resources that can be invested in solutions

STEP 5: EVALUATING YOUR ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

After you've completed your engagement activities, you'll likely have a wealth of information to inform decision-making. Now is the time to revisit your public engagement goals to determine if you reached the engagement plan goals.

The following questions can help you with the evaluation process:

What, Where, and When did you engage the community?

Did you accomplish your goals? If so, how?

What barriers did you encounter?

Who provided input/insight and participated in the engagement activities based on their demographic and geographic characteristics?

No one likes to be labeled so avoid negative labels at all costs.

Coded language can unintentionally trigger implicit bias

STEP 6: SHARING THE RESULTS

In developing trust, it is critical for the community to understand how their input and participation affected the final outcome. Using insight gained from your evaluation, craft a presentation or communication to the community sharing with them what occurred and what the next steps are in the planning process and beyond.

The following questions can help build a foundation for future engagement with your community:

Did you meet the goals of your engagement plan? Why or why not?

What were the key findings or takeaways from your engagement?

What went well?

What format will your report(s) take, such as presentation, narrative document, or video?

How will you share the results of your engagement in your organization and with the individuals and/or organizations you engaged?

What, if anything, did you hear that was not directly related to your topic?

STEP 7: STAYING CONNECTED

Identifying the purpose of engagement is important for everyone to have a clear and shared understanding of what information or expertise you're seeking from the public. For instance, would more people benefit from adding a service route on public transit or building new sidewalks? Understanding this will also help inform the type of engagement you should use.

Here are a few questions to help guide goal setting:

Why are you seeking to engage with the community?

How will you know if your strategy isn't yielding the results you desire?

What do you need from stakeholders and the community to be successful?

What specific measures will you use to track progress?

What indicators of success will you use?

What equity-related concerns have been identified?

How will the information collected from your outreach effort be used? Is it informing a particular decision or being used to evaluate the effectiveness of a product or service?

What specific goals or outcomes have you identified for this engagement?

SECTION 4.1: STRATEGIES TO INVOLVE UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS

Effective engagement often takes the form of storytelling. Think about the narrative and the images that can help you tell the story of what occurred during your engagement process. Continued involvement and interactions with community stakeholders will help to strengthen community relations and trust for any future planning engagement efforts. It is important to work to identify strategies to stay connected.

Identify Populations

- Develop social and economic profile
- Define the project and study area
- Utilize GIS to engage communities
- Conduct a community characteristic inventory
- Identify "affected populations" using a community attribute index
- Conduct periodic field visits

Build Relationships

- Form advisory boards, committees, task forces, and working groups
- Foster understanding of communities through relationships with community organizations and other local experts
- Recruit and mobilize community ambassadors, "beacons," or "trusted advocates"
- Provide technical training to citizen groups

Develop a Public Involvement Plan (PIP)

- Upfront site visits to establish scope of PIP
- Develop and maintain community contacts database
- Prepare a limited English proficiency(LEP) plan
- Use "I speak" cards to ensure communications with LEP populations
- Offer assistance for hearing impaired, sight impaired, and low-literacy populations
- Treat people courteously and respectfully
- Assess PIP effectiveness

Provide Information

- Use videos to convey information
- Distribute flyers
- Advertise on billboards, marquees, and message signs
- Publicize through local and ethnic media outlets
- Employ visualization techniques
- Conduct periodic field visits

Gather Feedback

- Conduct outreach at non-traditional locations
- Go to "their" meetings, schools, and faith-based institutions
- Apply social media appropriately
- Conduct market research interviews and
- Create focus groups
- Undertake surveys to understand needs, preferences, and impacts

Overcome Institutional Barriers

- Train community members to be transportation advocates
- Establish public involvement training programs

Adapted from Practical Approaches for Involving Traditionally Underserved Populations in Transportation Decision Making, Aimen et al., 2014
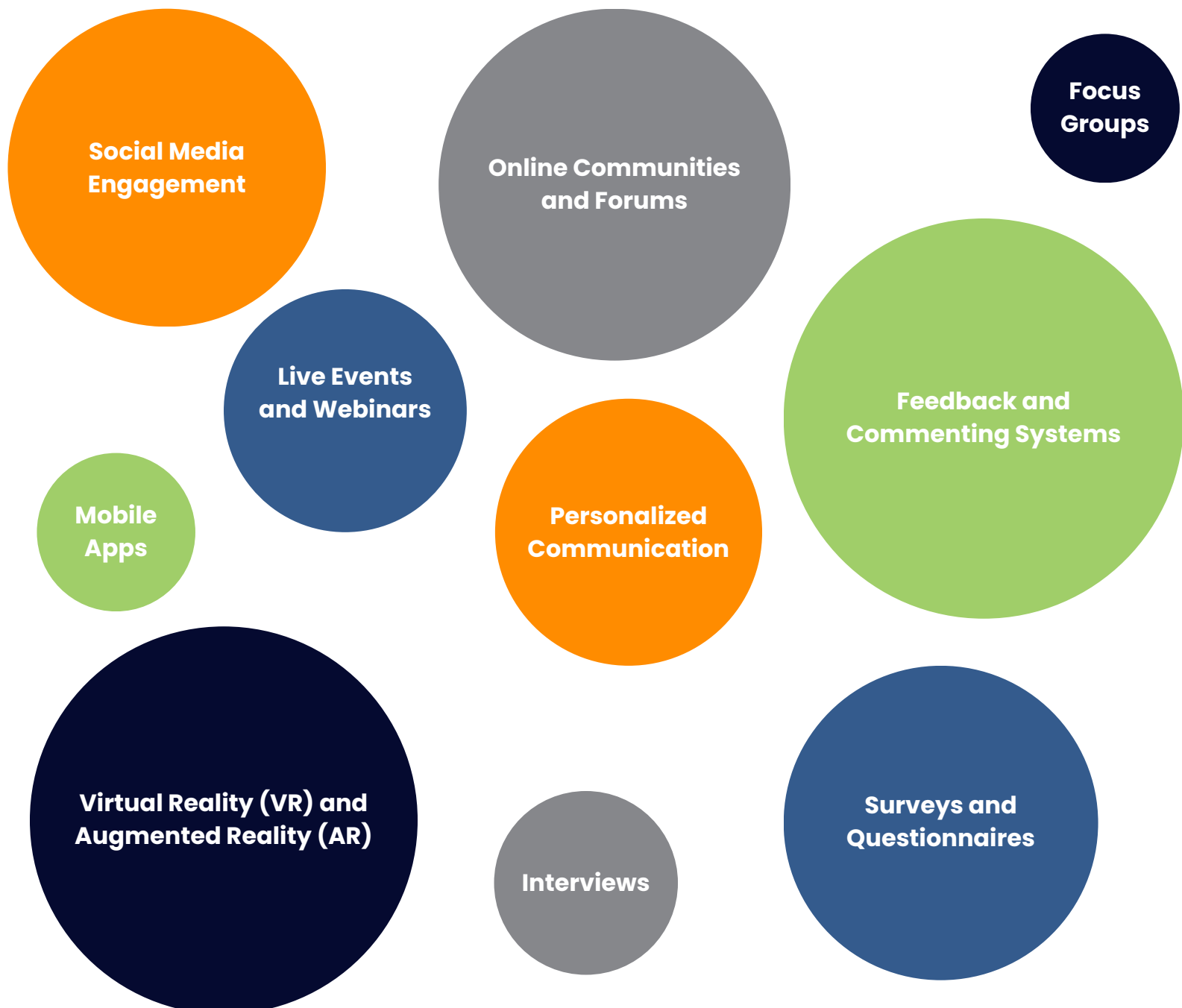
The APA Statement of Ethical Principles in Planning (1992) provides many ethical standards for professional planners, resident planners, as well as elected and appointed officials. The planning process exists to "serve the public interest" and in order to serve the public interest, planning participants must "strive to expand choice and opportunity for all persons, recognizing a special responsibility to plan for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons."

SECTION 5

SECTION 5: TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

A diverse array of tools and techniques are available to facilitate meaningful and inclusive interactions between organizations and the public. They are invaluable resources to foster dialogue, gather input, and collaborate with stakeholders, ensuring their voices are heard and incorporated into decision-making processes.

This section discusses the types of tools and techniques that can be employed to enhance public engagement. From traditional methods such as public hearings and town hall meetings to innovative digital platforms, social media, and participatory workshops, each approach brings its own unique advantages and caters to different contexts and objectives. By exploring these tools and techniques, organizations can select the most suitable approaches to engage the public, leading to more informed decision-making, increased public participation, and ultimately, stronger relationships with stakeholders.

Social Media Engagement

Online Communities and Forums

Focus Groups

Live Events and Webinars

Feedback and Commenting Systems

Mobile Apps

Personalized Communication

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

Interviews

Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys and Questionnaires

Surveys are a common tool for engagement, allowing organizations to collect feedback, opinions, and demographic information from participants. Online survey platforms like SurveyMonkey, Google Forms, and Typeform provide user-friendly interfaces for creating and distributing surveys.

Affordability:

$

Focus Groups / Charettes

Focus groups / Charrettes bring together small groups of individuals to discuss a specific topic or product. These interactive discussions generate ideas, in-depth insights and can be conducted in person or remotely using video conferencing tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams.

Affordability:

$

Interviews

Interviews are one-on-one conversations with participants to gather detailed information and insights. They can be conducted in person, over the phone, or via video conferencing tools.

Affordability:

$

Social Media Engagement

Social media platforms provide opportunities for organizations to engage with their audience. Techniques include responding to comments and messages, running polls or contests, sharing relevant content, and hosting live Q&A sessions.

Affordability:

$

SECTION 5: TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Mobile Apps

Mobile apps offer a convenient and personalized way to engage with users. They can include features like push notifications, in-app messaging, gamification elements, and social sharing to encourage active participation.

Affordability:

$ $ $

Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR)

VR and AR technologies provide immersive and interactive experiences that can enhance engagement. They can be used for virtual tours, product demonstrations, and interactive training.

Affordability:

$ $ $ $ $

Personalized Communication

Personalized communication involves tailoring messages or content to individual users based on their preferences or behavior. This can include personalized emails, recommendations, or notifications to increase engagement.

Affordability:

$ $ $

Feedback and Commenting Systems

Feedback and commenting systems enable users to provide input and share their thoughts on specific content or products. These can be implemented on websites, blogs, or online platforms to encourage engagement and gather user insights.

Affordability:

$ $

SECTION 5: TYPES OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

Online Communities and Forums

Online communities and forums provide a platform for users with shared interests to engage with each other. Platforms like Reddit, Quora, and Stack Exchange allow users to ask questions, share knowledge, and engage in discussions.

Affordability:

$

Live Events and Webinars

Hosting live events or webinars allows organizations to interact with their audiences in real-time. These events can include presentations, panel discussions, interactive Q&A sessions, and live polls. Platforms like Zoom, Webex, or YouTube Live can be used to host and manage these events.

Affordability:

$ $

Public Meetings

These are in-person gatherings where members of the public can express their views, ask questions, and provide input on specific topics. They often involve presentations, panel discussions, and open forums.

Affordability:

$

Printed Media

Physical publications, such as newspapers, magazines, or brochures, are designed to convey information, raise awareness, and encourage participation by providing clear and concise content to communicate and involve the public in various issues, projects, or initiatives.

Affordability:

$ $ $

SECTION 6

SECTION 6:
APPENDIX

This section provides a comprehensive collection of supplementary information and resources to further support your engagement activities.

Community Engagement

Encompasses activities that meaningfully involve community members and/or stakeholders to inform decisions for planning, policies, programs, and services that will impact them. An essential difference for government between engagement and communication, marketing, and advertising, is the opportunity for the community to have a say and contribute to the decisions and actions of the town/city council or policy making body.
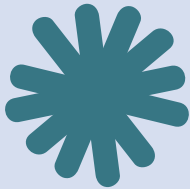
Diversity

Engaging people with different backgrounds, beliefs, experiences, and recognizing the differences as assets to learning and innovation.

Equality

Each individual or group of people is given the same resources or opportunities. On the other hand, equity recognizes each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.

Equity

Recognizing that everyone does not start at the same place and doesn't have the same lived experiences, so some people may need different resources or support. Equity in community engagement is present when resources and opportunities for participation are provided in a fair and just manner that responds to historic and ongoing disadvantages faced by marginalized groups or underserved communities.

SECTION 6.1:
GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Inclusion

Inclusion in community engagement means to involve people who reflect the demographic, attitudinal and experiential diversity of the communities that may be impacted by a decision. Inclusive community engagement nurtures a sense of welcome and belonging as well as recognition and safety for all people, where diverse perspectives and lived experiences are valued and respected.

Marginalized

Communities that are excluded from mainstream social, economic, educational, and/or cultural life. Examples of marginalized populations include, but are not limited to, groups excluded due to race, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, language, and/or immigration status. Marginalization occurs due to unequal power relationships between social groups.

Quality of Life (QOL)

This concept aims to capture the well-being, whether of a population or individual, regarding both positive and negative elements within the entirety of their existence at a specific point in time. Primary indicators of quality of life include income and job, housing, education, life-work balance, interpersonal relationships, infrastructure and services, and access to cultural and leisure activities.

Underserved Communities

Refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life such as Black, Latino, and Indigenous and Native American persons, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and other persons of color; members of religious minorities; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) persons; persons with disabilities; persons who live in rural areas; and persons otherwise adversely affected by persistent poverty or inequality. – Executive Order 14020, On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government

One Gaston 2040

One Gaston 2040 is a plan for making Gaston County "A place where everyone thrives". It recognizes Gaston County is part of a powerhouse economic region, and people are attracted to the County's quality of life, small-town character, and natural beauty. It further notes our population is growing, our diversity is increasing, economic development is affecting our housing trends and changing our local character, and issues of equity and inclusion are natural outgrowths of change.

Gaston MPO – Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (gclmpo.org)

Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (GCLMPO): The mission of the Gaston-Cleveland-Lincoln Metropolitan Planning Organization (GCLMPO) is to plan for a system of transportation modes that are consistent with the development and growth desired for the jurisdictions that comprise the MPO. The system of roadway, transit, freight, aviation, bicycle, and pedestrian travel modes will deliver safe and efficient movement of people and goods. The GCLMPO will strive to implement mobility options that positively coexist with the natural and built environments and strengthen the economic prosperity of the region while promoting community health and wellness.

The White House: Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities through the Federal Government.

The term "underserved communities" refers to populations sharing a particular characteristic, as well as geographic communities, that have been systematically denied a full opportunity to participate in aspects of economic, social, and civic life, as exemplified by the list in the preceding definition of "equity."

- Executive Order on Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government | The White House
- Justice40 Initiative | Environmental Justice | The White House
- Federal Tools to Determine Disadvantaged Community Status | US Department of Transportation
- Equity Action Plan Summary: U.S. Department of Transportation (whitehouse.gov)
- Executive-Order-on-Establishment-of-the-White-House-Gender-Policy-Council

Center for Transportation Equity, Decisions & Dollars (uta.edu):

This branch of the University of Texas Arlington focuses on equity in transportation planning and policy to establish fairer and more productive transportation systems. It employs research, community engagement, industry-university ties, K-12 educational initiatives, and the promotion of leadership training among STEM students.

Harvard University:

The following reports address equity in transportation policy and include a report on the relationship of intergenerational social mobility of parents and their children.

- https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/c-change/subtopics/trechproject/
- https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/hendren/files/mobility_geo.pdf
- https://guides.library.harvard.edu/hks/transportation-policy/equity-justice

Colorado State Department of Transportation:

CDOT administers state government transportation responsibilities, with a mission "To provide the best multi-modal transportation system for Colorado that most effectively moves people, goods, and information."

- https://www.codot.gov/programs
- https://www.codot.gov/news/2021/december/cdot-welcomes-marsha-nelson-environmental-justice
- https://www.bicyclecolorado.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/BC_ReconnectingCommunities_2022_Report.pdf

The National Association of City Transportation Officials (NACTO) Equity Publications:
NACTO conducts research initiatives on surface transportation in urban areas including bicycling, bus rapid transit, light rail, bike share, and freight.

- https://nacto.org/references/evaluating-transportation-equity-guidance-for-incorporating-distributional-impacts-in-transportation-planning/

National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability:
The National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability (NCHPAD) is a public health practice and resource center on health promotion for people with disability based at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

- www.nchpad.org/Select~Resources

National League of Cities:
This advocacy organization represents the country's 19,495 cities, towns, and villages and 49 state municipal leagues.

- 3 Ways to Measure Your City's Transportation Equity Next Year - National League of Cities (nlc.org)

NC State University – Institute for Transportation Research and Education (ITRE):
ITRE works to make transportation safer, more equitable and more accessible for all through surface and air transportation research, technical services and workforce training.

- TRMG2 Planners Guidebook (ncsu.edu)
- Using-TRM-to-answer-transportation-health questions-2021
- North Carolina Student Transportation – Safely and efficiently transporting North Carolina's school children (ncsu.edu)

StreetLight Data – Big Data for Mobility:
This private company provides professionals with data and analytic services to improve transportation and built environments.

- Social Equity in Transportation Solutions - StreetLight Data

Transportation Research Board (TRB) Reports and Publications:
TRB produces reports and publications on transportation-related topics, including equity considerations in transportation planning, design, and policy.
- National Academy of Sciences - Search - Transportation Equity (nationalacademies.org)
- Transportation Equity Needs Assessment Toolkit (trb.org)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services:
The mission of HHS is to enhance the health and well-being of all Americans, by providing for effective health and human services and by fostering sound, sustained advances in the sciences underlying medicine, public health, and social services.
- https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/hhs-equity-action-plan.pdf
- https://smartgrowthamerica.org/resources/the-state-of-transportation-and-health-equity/
- https://www.healthaffairs.org/do/10.1377/hpb20210630.810356/
- https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/HHS-EO13985-equity-summary.pdf
- https://www.apha.org/Policies-and-Advocacy/Public-Health-Policy-Statements/Policy-Database/2022/01/10/Ensuring-Equity-in-Transportation

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency: The mission of the EPA is to protect human health and to safeguard the natural environment—air, water, and land—upon which life depends.

- Overview-of-the-Transportation-Equity-Act-for-the-21st-Century(TEA-21)

University of Minnesota Center for Transportation Studies: The Center collaborates with public-sector, industry, and academic partners, to shape sustainable transportation systems that serve the needs of all users, support a strong economy, and improve our collective quality of life.

- Equity in Transportation | Center for Transportation Studies (umn.edu)

At the Intersection of Active Transportation and Equity

- 2022 Strategic Plan FINAL.pdf (saferoutespartnership.org)

The Community Guide Physical Activity: Built Environment Approaches Combining Transportation System Interventions with Land Use and Environmental Design.

- www.thecommunityguide.org/findings/physical-activity-built-environment-approaches

Connecting Routes + Destinations: Implementing the Built Environment Recommendation to Increase Physical Activity

- www.cdc.gov/physicalactivity/community-strategies/beactive/index.html

The Importance of the Equity Lens in Transportation Planning and Design – Kittelson & Associates: This consulting firm provides transportation research, policy, planning, design, and operations services to government sectors and private organizations.

- The Importance of the Equity Lens in Transportation Planning and Design

The Planner's Playbook: A Community-Centered Approach to Health Equity

- https://www.changelabsolutions.org/product/planners-playbook

Meeting Transportation Goals with Equity. The following resources provide insights on a variety of transportation equity topics.

- https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/spring-2023/09
- https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7704855/
- https://health.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/Combined-508.pdf
- https://www.dph.ncdhhs.gov/chronicdiseaseandinjury/healthycommunities/docs/HealthyCommunitiesStrategy-7-Access-to-PhysicalActivitySFY22FINAL.pdf
- https://nitc.trec.pdx.edu/sites/default/files/Murphy%20%282019%29Transportation%20and%20Homelessness.pdf

Mobility Equity Framework – How to make Transportation Work for People:
This report from the Greenlining Institute, focuses on a future where communities of color can build wealth, live in healthy places filled with economic opportunity, and are ready to meet the challenges posed by climate change.

- **MobilityEquityFramework_8.5x11_v_GLI_Print_Endnotes-march-2018.pdf (greenlining.org)**

Moving to Equity: This report, published by the American Public Health Association explores the inequitable effects of transportation policies on minoritized communities and offers recommendations for achieving transportation equity.

- [Ensuring Equity in Transportation and Land Use Decisions to Promote Health and Well-Being in Metropolitan Areas (apha.org)](apha.org)

Policy Recommendations for Advancing Transportation Equity:
This report from PolicyLink, provides a comprehensive set of policy recommendations for advancing transportation equity.

- https://www.policylink.org/sites/default/files/pr-smart-ideas-at-the-intersection-of-transportation-health-and-equity.pdf

Pricing Options for Equitable Mobility (POEM):
The City of Portland's POEM project started with a question: Should we use pricing strategies more intentionally in Portland to create a more equitable and sustainable transportation system? This report provides their findings.

- poem_final_report.pdf (portland.gov)

The State of Transportation and Health Equity:
This report is from Smart Growth America which empowers communities through technical assistance, advocacy, and thought leadership to realize their vision of livable places, healthy people, and shared prosperity.

- https://smartgrowthamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/The-State-of-Transportation-and-Health-Equity_FINAL-PUBLIC.pdf

Step it Up! The Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Walking and Walkable Communities
www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/call-to-action-walking-and-walkable-communites.pdf

A Practitioner's Guide for Advancing Health Equity

- www.cdc.gov/NCCDPHP/dch/pdf/health-equity-guide/Practitioners-Guide-section1.pdf

A Toolkit for Advocates: This toolkit from the Leadership Conference Education Fund, provides an overview of transportation equity issues and offers guidance on how to advocate for equitable transportation policies and investments. It includes case studies, sample messaging, and tips for engaging with policymakers.

- https://civilrights.org/edfund/?s=Transportation+Equity

Building Active Communities Through Activity-Friendly Routes Connecting Everyday Destinations: A Guide to Counting Bicyclists and Pedestrians

- https://movemorewalknownc.com/wp-content/themes/WalkNow/downloads/GuideToCountingBicyclistsAndPedestrians.pdf

Center for Urban Transportation Research at the University of South Florida:
This Transportation Equity Toolkit is a resource for MPOs, transportation agencies, and communities as they advance equity in traditionally underserved communities and more equitably distribute transportation investments.

- https://www.cutr.usf.edu/2021/09/transportation-equity-toolkit/
CTEDD_PolicyBrief_Equity-Toolkit-0621.pdf (usf.edu)

Centralina Regional Council

- https://centralina.org/focus-areas/transportation-mobility/
- https://connect-beyond-hdr.hub.arcgis.com/

County Physical Activity and Nutrition Data Profiles

- Data – Community and Clinical Connections for Prevention and Health (communityclinicalconnections.com)

Eat Smart, Move More NC, Programs and Tools, Local and State Government

- www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/resources/government/

Equity in Transportation Planning: This resource from the Federal Highway Administration offers guidance on incorporating equity considerations into transportation planning. It provides an overview of key equity principles, case studies, and practical tools for transportation planners.

- https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/spring-2023/07

Low-Income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) Tool

- Low-Income Energy Affordability Data (LEAD) Tool | Department of Energy

Move More Walk Now Engage Your Community

- https://movemorewalknownc.com/engage-your-community

NC OneMap

- NC OneMap

NC Vision Zero

- https://ncvisionzero.org

North Carolina Community Mapping System and Environmental Justice Tool

- DEQ-NC-CommunityMappingSystemEJ-Tool-1FINAL.pdf

North Carolina Guide to Incorporating Health Considerations into Comprehensive Plans

- https://www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com/resource/north-carolina-guide-to-incorporating-health-considerations-into-comprehensive-plans/

North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT):
NCDOT developed Environmental Justice (EJ) and Transportation Disadvantage Index (TDI) maps and interactive dashboards to help its staff and external partners understand and visualize transportation disadvantages and the disproportionate impact of transportation barriers on communities of color. They also help inform policies, planning, and project development decision making.

- Making Transportation Work for Everyone (arcgis.com)
- NCDOT: Safe Streets for All Grant Program
- https://gis11.services.ncdot.gov/arcgis/rest/services/
- https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/BikePed/Pages/Complete-Streets.aspx

North Carolina Metropolitan and Rural Planning Organizations

- https://connect.ncdot.gov/projects/planning/Pages/MPO-RPO.aspx

Oregon State Department of Transportation

- https://www.oregon.gov/odot/equity/Pages/About.aspx
- https://www.oregon.gov/odot/Planning/Pages/Guidance.aspx
- https://www.portlandoregon.gov/transportation/article/658506

PHRASES (Public Health Reaching Across Sectors) Toolkit:
This toolkit help public health leaders communicate the value of public health to potential partners and decision makers in other sectors

- https://www.phrases.org/tools/

Racial Equity and Social Justice

- Racial Equity and Social Justice | GIS Tools to Address Racial & Social Inequities (esri.com)

Social Determinants of Health by Regions

- https://nc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=def612b7025b44eaa1e0d7af43f4702b

The Transportation Equity Advocacy Toolkit (TEAT):
TEAT is a collection of resources for educating the public about transportation equity and to advocate for transportation equity policies. Is is a product of the National Complete Streets Coalition.

- Equity | US Department of Transportation

The Transportation Equity Data Tool (TEDT):
TEDT is a web-based tool for collecting and analyzing data on transportation equity from the U.S. Bureau of Transportation Statistics.

- Transportation Equity for All | Volpe National Transportation Systems Center (dot.gov)

The Transportation Equity Planning Tool (TPT):
TPT is a web-based tool for assessing the equity impacts of transportation projects and policies. It is a product of the Federal Transit Administration.

- Planning and Equity Tool (arcgis.com)

The Urban Institute

- Access to Opportunity through Equitable Transportation | Urban Institute
- Spatial Equity Data Tool (urban.org)

Washington State Department of Transportation

- https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/accountability/diversity-equity-and-inclusion
- https://transitequity.cs.washington.edu/
- https://transitequity.cs.washington.edu/index.php/tools-and-resources/

U.S. Census Bureau

- https://data.census.gov/cedsci/
- https://www.census.gov/geographies/mapping-files/time-series/geo/tiger-line-file.2019.html
- 2020 Census Demographic Data Map Viewer

U.S. Department of Transportation:
The Planning and Equity Tool enables transportation agency users to view their transportation improvement program (TIP) projects with national, equity-related data sets. It is primarily for transportation agencies with little to no geographic information systems capabilities or resources.

- Equity | US Department of Transportation
- https://plan-equity-tool-usdot.hub.arcgis.com/
- ETC Explorer - National Results | USDOT Equitable Transportation Community (ETC) Explorer (arcgis.com)
- https://www.transportation.gov/rural/ev/toolkit/planning-resources
- Transportation Equity - Transportation Planning Capacity Building Program (dot.gov)
- U.S. Department of Transportation Equity Action Plan | US Department of Transportation
- https://highways.dot.gov/public-roads/spring-2023

Planning for Equity Policy Guide
- https://planning-org-uploaded-media.s3.amazonaws.com/publication/download_pdf/Planning-for-Equity-Policy-Guide-rev.pdf

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GASTON TOGETHER
COMMUNITY, HEALTH, LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION

To bring people and resources together to tackle big community challenges using best practices of collaboration, facilitation, promotion, and anticipation of possibilities.