

MEMORANDUM

To: CMAP Board

From: CMAP Staff

Date: April 24, 2024

Subject: Community Outreach to Engage and Empower:
Community Alliance for Regional Equity

Action Requested: Information

The Agency is approaching the final year of a pilot program to make our engagement more equitable and inclusive of communities traditionally excluded from the planning process. The Community Alliance for Regional Equity (CARE) creates deeper partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs) from underserved communities. Staff will provide an overview of program design and execution to date.

Background

CMAP affirmed its commitment to equity by launching what was originally titled the Equitable Engagement Program in 2021. The program's goal is to increase participation of underrepresented groups in planning processes by removing administrative and cost barriers. CMAP received Statewide Planning and Research Funds to pilot a program co-designed with consultants to improve engagement with environmental justice communities – as defined by federal Title VI requirements. CMAP was awarded the total estimated project cost of \$560,000 for a 2-year pilot. An allocation of \$240,000 was budgeted to compensate community-based organizations (CBOs) for their participation.

Program Design and Implementation

In January 2022, CMAP recruited a community advisory committee to ensure the program reduced barriers to participation for community groups. Elevated Chicago, the Latino Policy Forum and others from local community-focused organizations advised on the program's pay structure, recruitment strategies, application, and selection process.

The Agency solicited CBO's from across the region to participate using the Local Government Network, newsletters, and social media. Over 50 community organizations applied for the inaugural year and were evaluated a competitive selection process. The selection process focused on:

Geography	Representation	Committment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participating groups span urban, suburban, and rural communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental Justice experience • References • Community involvement

After screening applications, interviews, and reference checks, 12 organizations spanning three counties were selected.

The first cohort launched in January of 2023 and provided feedback on CMAP projects and helped staff understand the intersections of transportation and community work. Over the course of 12 sessions, CMAP project managers from across the Agency collected in-depth feedback on complex projects. CMAP staff toured Access Living to see accessible infrastructure, visited Lucy Gonzalez Parsons Apartments to see Equitable Transit Oriented Development and held a retreat at Batavia City Hall where we met with local transit advocates.

The second year of the cohort has focused on incorporating feedback from program participants and empowering CBOs to coproduce meeting. Eleven out of 12 CBOs returned for the second year, and the Agency expanded the cohort to 14 groups through another competitive application process. Based on cohort feedback, staff has produced a monthly newsletter catered to the needs of participants; created excel templates to summarize Community Data Snapshot information and wrote planning histories of each community. CARE co-chairs helped plan the first three meetings of the year highlighting paratransit, vehicle electrification and corridor planning.

Achievements since kick-off:

- Received applications from **16 different municipalities and five different counties**
- **Conducted over 70 in-person interviews** with community-based organizations throughout the region
- **Engaged with the cohort on seven CMAP projects:**
 - Plan of Action for Regional Transit
 - Transportation Resilience Improvement Plan
 - Safe Travel for All Roadmap
 - Household Travel Survey
 - Community Characteristics for Equitable Reinvestment
 - Transportation Project Analysis Tool

- Participatory Budgeting Project
- **Built relationships** with 15 community-based organizations

Next steps

The CARE cohort will meet through calendar year 2024 to provide feedback on climate planning, co-lead workshops on the Household Travel Survey, participate in Long-Range Transportation plan engagement and get updates from the legislative affairs team.

The CARE program team is producing a training guide based on our experiences to further enhance equitable engagement at the Agency. The consultant team is leading an independent evaluation of the program.