

San Francisco Bay Area Regional Prosperity Plan

“Rules of the Road: How to Engage Public Agencies in Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality Decisions to Promote Equity and Public Health”

Final Report
December, 2014

A. Project Profile (1 page max)

Project Name: “Rules of the Road: How to Engage Public Agencies in Land Use, Transportation and Air Quality Decisions to Promote Equity and Public Health”

Lead and Partner

Organizations: Lead: Public Health Institute (Regional Asthma Management and Prevention -- RAMP); Partners: Pacific Institute (PI), Ditching Dirty Diesel Collaborative (DDDC), and First Five of Contra Costa County (FFCCC)

Sub-Grant Program: Equity

Project Type: Capacity-Building Sub-Grant

Total Grant Amount: \$50,000

Total Match (if any): N/A

Geographic Coverage of Project:

Sub- Region (Alameda and Contra Costa Counties)

Brief Description:

One of the barriers to meaningful community involvement in land use and transportation issues – particularly as they relate to public health and equity issues – is a lack of knowledge about how various agencies make decisions, and how members of the public can influence the process. This project helped bridge that engagement gap by providing targeted trainings and follow-up technical assistance to under-represented communities. Helping to build their capacity to better navigate political processes, build relationships with policymakers, and testify and submit comments makes agencies’ process and outcomes more dynamic, useful and reflective of community concerns.

Images: N/A

B. Project Description (1 page max)

1. Goals and Objectives

Low-income communities and communities of color have traditionally been under-represented in land use and transportation decisions in the Bay Area. As a result communities that stand to be most affected by public agency decisions have less influence on these decisions, leading to plans and projects that deepen inequities or public health disparities across neighborhoods. The project helped bridge that engagement gap by providing trainings and follow-up technical assistance to under-represented communities that want to engage more effectively with local and regional agencies to advance community priorities and solutions for healthier and more equitable development. The project was designed to foster more engaged communities that can effectively articulate equity and public health priorities in land use and transportation planning decision-making at the local and regional levels.

2. Work Plan

There were two key project elements. The first was a series of three trainings on how under-represented communities can engage more effectively with agency decision-makers in Contra Costa and Alameda counties. Each training series was developed and conducted in partnership with a community-based organization in each county. The focus of each series was to increase the ability of community leaders to understand how to engage effectively with land use and planning agencies. Deliverables included training design materials, participant information (e.g., agendas, presentation materials, etc.), sign-in sheets, completed evaluations, and revised training materials.

The second key project element was targeted technical assistance (TA) to a sub-set of participants to help them better engage in a total of three specific land use, transportation or air quality processes. The TA ranged from strategic campaign planning to messaging to support for community organizing. RAMP also provided TA on addressing the equity and public health implications of the specific process. Deliverables included a needs assessment summary and technical assistance plan.

Outreach and engagement activities were grounded in the grantee's extensive experience in building productive relationships with community-based organizations and working successfully with government agencies and environmental and public health networks. RAMP and PI staff reached out to their extensive networks to identify groups interested in trainings and TA. Additional engagement occurred by working with groups to tailor trainings to best fit their needs. RAMP and PI were also available to share project progress with the MTC Equity Collaborative.

3. Role of Leads and Partners

RAMP staff served as the liaison with MTC and as the co-manager of the grant with PI staff. Both RAMP and PI staff were responsible for planning and executing the trainings. PI provided evaluation support. RAMP staff also lead the technical assistance assessment and provision. PI's role in the project concluded in August, 2014, when its equity program was unexpectedly shuttered. The DDDC was the community partner for the training series in Alameda County. The FFCCC was the community partners for the trainings in Contra Costa.

C. Challenges and Outcomes (1 page max)

4. Challenges

One challenge is in trying to condense an immense amount of information into three workshops. In order to equip community residents to engage effectively with local and regional agencies, the residents need to attain knowledge of numerous topics including land use, transportation, public health, and agency roles, responsibilities, and practices. Ideally, this would include more than three workshops in order to cover all topics and allow time for building skills. However, RAMP and PI were able to address this challenge by working closely with the community-based organization in each community to assess the needs and priorities of each community. This allowed the staff to tailor workshop materials to focus on the specific needs of each community and would be an essential aspect of replicating the workshops in other communities.

It is important to note that all of the trainings were conducted in Spanish and English. We also provided materials in Spanish and English. The significance of this is time management. It actually took much longer to facilitate the trainings and develop training materials for each one of the workshops because of the time involved in getting proper translation and interpretation. However, because we took that extra time, we were able to provide the highest level of access and understanding of the complicated subject matter to the audience and clients.

Another challenge was the administrative management of this sub-grant. RAMP staff, Joel Ervice, Associate Director, and Farzana Fakhry, Program Administrator, agreed to provide in-kind contributions to manage this award. The number of hours required to fulfill contractual obligations and meet other administrative demands far exceeded what we had anticipated.

5. Outcomes

The community residents who participated in the workshops felt more empowered to engage with local and regional agencies as a result of these workshops. Community residents completed the workshops feeling that they have more resources available to them (for example, community-based organizations that can help with community organizing; public health departments that can help with data; and organizations like RAMP that can make highly technical information more accessible). They also felt an increase in their enthusiasm about this work when given the opportunity to meet with and hear from communities that are further along in the process of agency engagement—training participants saw that it is possible and learned about the steps for getting there.

Another outcome was that residents had the opportunity to work together to identify and characterize priorities in order to serve as the basis for a strategic plan and initial action. For example, since the East County Planning School was completed last June, resident leaders finalized a park assessment of over 60 parks across East County that evaluated the safety, conditions, and accessibility of each park. The assessment revealed four priority areas: safety, play structures, water fountains, and bathrooms. Two parks in Antioch were identified as those most in need of improvement. The resident leaders are in the process of compiling their final report. They plan to present their findings and recommendations to Antioch city staff, the Parks and Recreation Commission, and Antioch City Council in the next few months. This process was supported by the increased level of empowerment created by the workshops as well as technical assistance that helped articulate the role of accessible, safe parks as a health-promoting component of land use policies.

D. Replicability and Dissemination (1 page max)

6. Replicability

The approach that RAMP and PI used for this project had replicability built into it. We created the model for Contra Costa County and then adapted and replicated it for Alameda County. The model included:

- Partnering with a community-based organization to conduct outreach and assess needs and priorities;
- Conducting three workshops focused on land use, transportation, public health, and engaging with agencies, tailored to the specific priorities of the community;
- Developing participant materials in multiple languages;
- Conducting evaluations after each session to ensure ongoing improvements in the development of the next session; and
- Assessing needs and providing technical assistance;

The model could be replicated in any county in the Bay Area; however, the importance of adapting the curriculum to meet the needs of the specific community cannot be overemphasized. As stated before, the amount of information that could be provided through a much longer series of workshops is enormous. Therefore, it is important to work with the community to identify workshop topics that will directly address their priorities.

7. Tools and Resources

Deliverables included training design materials, participant information (e.g., agendas, presentation materials, etc.), sign-in sheets, completed evaluations, and revised training materials. The training materials included: participant agenda, facilitator agenda, maps, and historical timelines.

8. Sharing and Dissemination

With additional resources, RAMP would be interested in developing a video as the most effective method of dissemination. Without those additional resources, however, there are many ways that RAMP has and can continue to disseminate information. RAMP participates in numerous coalitions—such as the Bay Area Environmental Health Collaborative and the 6 Wins Collaborative—through which we share information and disseminate tools. Additionally, the community groups of FFCC and DDDC can continue to share the tools and information with their constituents and partners.

E. Recommendations and Next Steps (1 page max)

9. Recommendations

The investment made in this project was an important step toward the desired outcome of increased community engagement with local and regional agencies to advance community priorities related to land use, transportation, and public health. The communities engaged in this project developed their skills, knowledge, and level of empowerment. In order to leverage the investment, RAMP recommends resources to support additional work in this area. Now that these communities have increased their level of empowerment, additional resources could support the development of stakeholder strategic plans, and their active, ongoing engagement in specific planning processes. Additionally, with more resources, this model could be adapted and replicated in communities across the Bay Area.

We also have recommendations for additional ways in which MTC can continue to support community engagement. One approach would be to hire a public liaison to engage directly with communities and/or to proactively facilitate ongoing dialogues with communities in which their input is sought and incorporated into decision-making. Another is to make more accessible to the community some of MTC's resources like GIS mapping, data mining, and policy analysis. A final way would be to bring community members into the process of guiding investments from funds that MTC receives from ARB, DOT, and/or Cap and Trade revenues.

10. Next steps

As RAMP wraps up this sub-grant, we will seek additional funds to continue our efforts to build community capacity and engagement in planning processes. We will also support FFCCC and DDDC in continuing to work with community residents as they engage in planning processes.