



Building Trust and Collaboration in Clean Transportation Projects:

A Guide to Community Engagement Plans



NYSERDA
Clean Transportation

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Introduction

This Clean Transportation Playbook is created for project implementers and policymakers looking to introduce a new clean transportation service or project.

It is sponsored by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) under the [New York Clean Transportation Prizes](#) (NYCTP) program.

A key objective of the NYCTP program is to give all communities access to award-winning clean transportation solutions. This document outlines the key elements and best practices of a community engagement plan (CEP) for a clean transportation project.

Acknowledgements

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Sources

The material in this document came from several sources, including content from New York Clean Transportation Prize projects, Eastern Research Group (ERG), and the Hummingbird Firm. Additionally, it includes two case studies from the following CTP teams: (1) the Local Initiatives Support Corporation of Western New York [Clean Mobility Buffalo](#) project, and (2) the Volvo Technology of America, LLC, [Bronx is Breathing](#) project.

Playbook Toolkit

This playbook includes an appendix of additional resources called the “Playbook Toolkit.” The toolkit has materials that illustrate various steps and how to take them.

The Toolkit includes:

- A demographic analysis tool
- A template for a Community Engagement Plan
- Instructions for how to characterize a community, as an early step in completing a Community Engagement Plan
- A resource library with references to other tools and materials on this topic

Key Terms

Community: The people and organizations within a geographically defined area. It includes those directly involved in the shaping or implementation of the project, and those impacted who may not be involved in shaping the project. A community may also include project or transportation service users, individuals living in the area served by the project, government authorities, community-based organizations (CBOs), and other local stakeholders.

Community-Based Organization (CBO): A non-profit group or organization that represents local residents, businesses, and other stakeholders typically from a geographically defined community. CBOs may include individuals from a virtual community or a subgroup within a community that has the purpose of promoting solutions to local issues through advocacy and providing of services.

Community Engagement: Activities undertaken by the project team to connect the communities involved in or impacted by the project. The design of community engagement varies based on the desired outcome of engagement (for example, to identify community needs, participate in project design, receive feedback on project activities, or inform community members of project activities). Community engagement activities are avenues for active community participation in a project.

Community Engagement Plan (CEP): A document developed by a group of people involved in administering or implementing a transportation project and representatives of those impacted by the project. The CEP summarizes community engagement at each step in the project. The Toolkit includes a template for drafting a CEP.

Clean Transportation Project: A project using no- or low-emission technology providing a service that fills a transportation gap or meets a transportation need in a way that reduces air pollution and enhances accessibility and mobility.

New York State Disadvantaged Communities (DAC): Geographic areas that experience high levels of economic, health, and environmental burden. The New York State definition of DACs uses factors such as proximity to industrial sites or landfills, flood risk, air pollution levels, income and race information, and access to healthcare.¹ A map of NYS-designated DACs is located here: [Final Disadvantaged Communities \(DAC\) 2023](#).

Why Create a Community Engagement Plan?

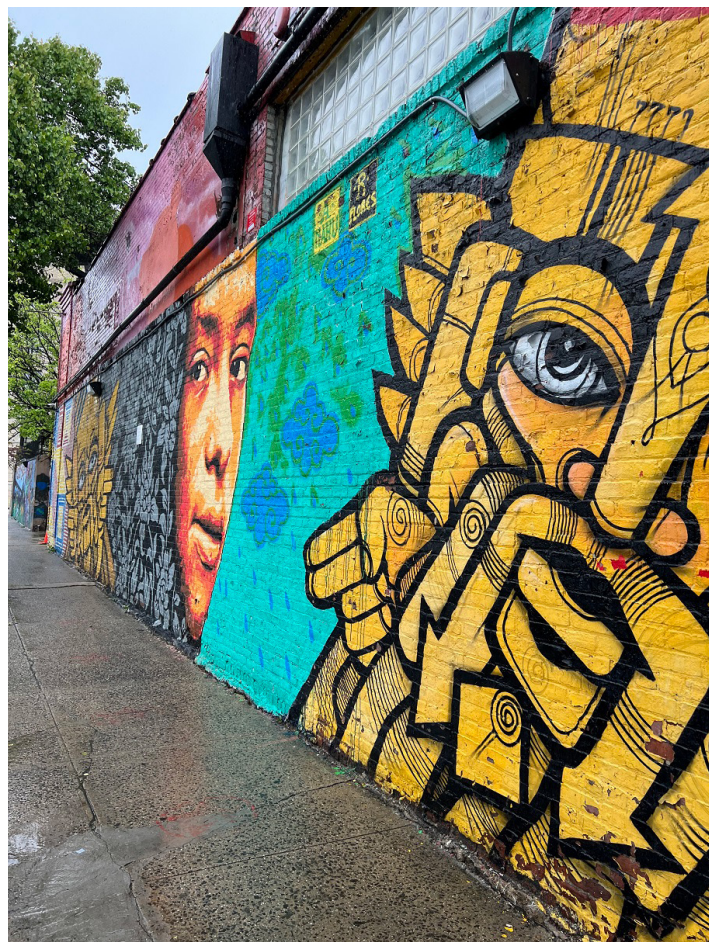
This document describes the “what, why, and how” of creating a Community Engagement Plan (CEP).

Before introducing a new service or technology, it’s vitally important to understand the community in which it is proposed to operate. What is the need for the service as expressed by the community members?

Starting a new service without engaging the community before, during, and after launch can result in problems. Teams that are great at logistics, engineering, and technology operation can fail due to problems coordinating with the community frustration.

A strong community engagement plan (CEP) with an effective engagement strategy helps create better outcomes. It can:

- Build trust between the project team and the community
- Allocate benefits more precisely to NYS Disadvantaged Communities (DACs)
- Ensure better alignment with policies like the NY Climate Act, which requires a minimum of 35% of benefits from clean energy projects and programs to be directed to disadvantaged communities [Other states may have similar policies that should be consulted.]
- Ultimately lead to greater community support and use of the new service because community members are also co-designers



The Hunts Point neighborhood in the Bronx uses murals as wayfinding graphics to direct residents to The Point Community Development Corp. Murals also beautify and reinforce Hunts Point’s unique identity. Source: Eastern Research Group.

¹More information on New York State’s definition of DACs is located here: https://climate.ny.gov/-/media/Project/Climate/Files/Disadvantaged-Communities-Criteria/LMI-daccriteria-fs-1-v3_acc.pdf



Bike trail, Buffalo. Source: LISC

In the CEP, project teams will:

- Describe the type and level of engagement with key representatives of the community
- Describe how feedback will be integrated into the project

Look at different frameworks for examples of outreach strategies and activities to consider in developing your plan. The [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#) is a good reference document to check.

By using the tools included in this document, project teams can feel more confident that they are respecting the community's input. For example, an engagement spectrum tool (with a range from 'ignore,' 'inform,' 'consult,' 'involve,' and 'collaborate' to 'defer to') can be used to ensure that communities are not marginalized or ignored, and that all are included appropriately in the different aspects of project related decision-making.

Finally, an effective and authentic CEP will help develop long-term relationships that can support overall project success.

Steps for Developing a Community Engagement Plan

The six key steps to draft and implement a CEP are:

1. Describe the project and objectives
2. Characterize the community
3. Choose community engagement activities
4. Plan a schedule and budget for engagement activities
5. Implement the plan
6. Review and update the plan, as needed

Step 1: Describe the Project and Objectives

A CEP begins with an introduction. Key elements of an introduction are:

- Description of the intended project
- Description of the community being served
- Needs that the project will fulfill and its intended benefits
- Specific community engagement goals
- A brief outline of the intended community engagement activities at each stage of the project
- Ways the team will monitor and measure the success of these activities

Step 2: Characterize the Community

To characterize the community, identify it, map the stakeholders, and gather data.

Identify the community and map the stakeholders

Before developing an engagement strategy, the project team must first conduct a stakeholder mapping exercise. This exercise names the key constituencies that make up the stakeholders involved in a clean transportation project.

Project teams may start with larger groups of stakeholders who will be impacted by the project, like business owners, residents, and local government officials; however, it is important to understand the dynamics and characteristics of different subpopulations within these groups such as DACs and the subpopulations within this category. This can help the project team to better understand different needs, tailor its strategy to meet those needs.

Questions that help identify key constituencies within a community:

- What are the different sub-populations who live and work within the community?
- Who may be impacted by the project?
- What groups will be interested in the project? Who is a must-have, who are key opinion leaders whose buy-in will be important, and who or what organization might serve as a barrier?
- Who will be directly involved with implementing the project? For example, will there be drivers or mechanics hired in direct support of the project?
- Are there local businesses that will be suppliers for the project, promoters, or users of the service?
- Are there CBOs in the service area? Are there any groups that have an interest in clean transportation?

Different community and stakeholder groups will have unique engagement needs, which should be factored into the engagement strategy. Examples include translation of key information, or ensuring venue access for disabled residents. An engagement strategy that is too broad or poorly defined can be ineffective or lead to potential conflicts if community concerns are not captured and addressed. Early and personalized engagement with important community groups is key.

How to determine engagement considerations for key constituencies within a community? Questions to ask include:

- How knowledgeable is each group about the project concept and proposed technology?
- How does each group prefer to engage or communicate (for example time of day, language, online vs. in-person)?
- What barriers and potential solutions are there for sustained engagement (for example, addressing childcare needs or providing an incentive for participation in an advisory panel)?
- Would some stakeholders benefit from one-on-one engagement?



BEST PRACTICES

Do your homework to understand the community's historical, cultural, economic, environmental, and social context, as well as its structure, and its key stakeholders. This can help inform you about the local landscape, needs and issues, and help you understand factors that impact community decisions, which then will help inform the development of an effective engagement strategy.

For clean transportation projects, this can mean researching existing transportation/transit options and related issues in the neighborhood, transit user demographics, transportation-related goals (if any) in local comprehensive/sustainability plans, and existing and past work of transportation/active-transportation focused community groups.



Project stakeholders touring East Buffalo. Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) of Western New York is implementing the “Clean Mobility Buffalo” project here. Source: LISC

Case Study

Clean Mobility Buffalo

Clean Mobility Buffalo is a strong example of a project that centered the community at each step. Clean Mobility Buffalo is a collaboration among several organizations with decades of combined experience working in East Side neighborhoods. This deep understanding of the community guided the team’s approach to engagement and informed how they gathered input for their clean transportation initiatives.

Early in the process, the team established an advisory group called the Neighborhood Leadership Group, made up of well-connected local stakeholders. Members were compensated for their time and played a key role in advising on program activities, supporting engagement efforts, and contributing to education, outreach, and community organizing. Community meetings were thoughtfully designed and well attended, and featured music and activities for all ages.

On the Spectrum of Engagement scale, this leadership group represents a level 4 “Community Collaborate” approach. Community members take on leadership roles in co-designing the project and participating in the implementation of key decisions.

Gather demographic and on-the-ground data

Once a project has identified key stakeholders, the next step is to learn average/median income, access to broadband internet, and other demographics.

Using publicly available sources of demographic community information like the U.S. Census² can help provide information about a geographic area. This will give a broad understanding of the community, its potential transportation access issues, and what barriers to engagement may exist.

For example, this analysis can reveal that a community or neighborhood has a high proportion of individuals who do not speak English, which should be addressed when producing engagement materials and hosting events.

Check the Playbook Toolkit, Appendix A, for more information on Step 2, including an example of how to organize this information.

Gathering demographic information about the community should be supplemented with on-the-ground learning. This can include walking or driving around the area to get a sense of the community and attending community events. Direct engagement with the community is needed to get a full picture of the community’s needs and perspectives.

These on-the-ground efforts help the project team understand the ‘story’ of the community, such as issues the community is facing. Visiting and meeting with the community also enables team members to gain credibility and build trust with stakeholders.

² For more information about how to use public databases for demographic analyses see Appendix B, “Conducting a Community Demographic Analysis.”

Step 3: Choose the Community Engagement Activities

Once a team has developed an understanding of the community stakeholders the next step is to develop community engagement activities.

Considerations include:

- What kinds of events make sense and when might they attract the most participation?
- Which print versus electronic materials should be developed and in which languages?
- What opinion leaders in the community should be tapped to amplify messaging?

It is important to keep in mind that a key objective of these activities is to allow the community to co-design the project and engagement plan because they understand their own transportation issues and needs.

The engagement activities should be chosen with input from the community early in the engagement planning process. This will help ensure that the project is appropriately designed and benefits to the community are maximized.

Define the project stakeholder groups

Based on the previous step of characterizing the community at large, it makes sense to consider what discrete groups of stakeholders have common needs for engaging with the project. The summary of community and stakeholder groups can be used and updated over the course of the project.

Table 1 was created by a Prize awardee. It identifies each key stakeholder group by type and explains why they are key to project success. This NY Clean Transportation overview can provide the foundation for deciding which activities to do based on what works best for each stakeholder.

Table 1. Summary of Community and Stakeholder Groups, The Bronx is Breathing NY Clean Transportation Prize Project

Stakeholder/ Event	Stakeholder Type	Key Contact(s)	Event Date	Why Key to Success	Key Meeting Takeaways	Letter of Endorsement
Mothers on the Move Conference call	Advocacy group		4/22	Pioneering environmental justice organization in Hunts Point/Longwood with deep roots in the neighborhood.	Project creates opportunities for training next gen mechanics to service and repair EVs.	Yes
South Bronx Unite Festival In-person festival	Advocacy group	Port Morris & Mott Haven residents	5/21	Neighboring communities are impacted by trucks from Hunts point; SBU is key to replication in Port Morris.	Respiratory problems are endemic in the South Bronx; the project should benefit all the communities in the area.	No
Bronx Council on Environmental Quality Conference Call	Advocacy group		5/11	Borough-wide advocacy group with strong relationships across the public sector.	Charging hub site should include large detention basins to prevent runoff into the Bronx and East Rivers.	Yes
Bascom Catering In-person meeting	Commissary kitchen & restaurant		4/6	Homegrown business; potential food & beverage operator for the charging hub.	Healthy food options are extremely limited inside the Food Distribution Center.	Yes

In this example, the stakeholders identified are actual CBOs and businesses that are deemed central to the case study project. However, the public at large is also important to consider – not just groups that represent specific constituencies – as well as segments within that population, such as the elderly or disabled.

Matching engagement activities with groups

There are numerous options for engagement activities, and some may be more relevant for a particular stage in the project. For example, community engagement during the planning stage may be different than during site construction. Choosing the right activities will be an important step in developing an engagement strategy. Table 2 shows examples of engagement activities, along with pros and cons of these activities, and the stakeholders that may be involved. Outreach is not a one-time event, so each of these activities will likely need to be repeated as the project develops. Outreach requires time and materials, and should be incorporated into the project budget.

Additional resources for best practices when using each community engagement type can be found in the Resources Library in the Toolkit.

Table 2. Types of Community Engagement Activities

Activity	Description and Purpose ³	Pros (+) and Cons (-)	Frequency	Relevant Stakeholders	Resource Needs & Allocation
Community Observational Visits/ Walkthroughs	Walk around the community to understand the landscape, observe local activities and conduct informal conversations Purpose: Inform	+Can help identify places and times when people gather, etc. +Gives the project street credibility to enhance secondary data +Can provide ideas for focus groups or surveys -Information obtained is situational and limited based on circumstances -Anecdotal information can be valuable but may not represent entire community	Ideally done during planning phase and should be done on different days and times (e.g., weekday, weekend, daytime, evening)	All community members and stakeholders	Needs staff time to conduct walkthrough visits
Community Meetings	Public meetings to confirm the needs, share project objectives and insight and gather feedback from more community groups in a common setting Purpose: Inform and consult	+Understand what does and does not work for the community as a whole +Could help identify future key events that could be leveraged -Everyone might not get a chance to speak	Ideally starts during the planning phase and can continue at regular cadence (for example, once every quarter, frequency can vary by project). Share how previous feedback has been addressed as a way to help build trust.	All community members and stakeholders	Needs staffing, logistical and outreach items to set up and run meetings. Between 60–90% of resources allocated to staff and admin, and 10–40% allocated to consultation and event promotions
Existing Community Events	Pre-existing events, such as town hall meetings and community festivals Purpose: Inform and consult	+ Less resources and time needed to organize a separate event + Meets people where they already are - May need more staffing for longer community events, might be difficult to get people's attention	Done as needed, can be bi-annual in the beginning and less frequent as the project wraps up	All community members and stakeholders	Staff and resources for tabling at events; 60–90% of resources allocated to staff and admin, and 10–40% allocated to consultation and event promotions

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³ The purpose refers to the project implementor's approach with the community and is based on Facilitating Power's Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership tool. The purpose can be to ignore, inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and defer to. A detailed explanation can be found on page 2 of the tool.

Table 2. Types of Community Engagement Activities (continued)

Activity	Description and Purpose	Pros (+) and Cons (-)	Frequency	Relevant Stakeholders	Resource Needs & Allocation
One-on-one meetings	<p>One-on-one meetings with community groups and/or opinion leaders</p> <p>Purpose: Ranges from consult, involve, to collaborate</p>	<p>+ Allows for detailed conversations and insights from diverse groups, learn about community priorities directly, can help obtain buy-in</p> <p>+Participants more likely to be honest when with their peers than with a larger group</p> <p>+Important for addressing potential detractors to understand their issues</p> <p>- Can be more time-consuming to ensure capturing diverse perspectives</p>	<p>Starts early and can be ongoing as needed</p> <p>Coordinate with existing meetings (such as Chamber, Rotary or other civic organization events)</p>	<p>Specific CBOs and other community groups, local government stakeholders and others e.g., civic, business or faith-based organizations</p>	<p>Depending on purpose, resource allocation ranges from 20–90% for staff and admin and 10–80% for community activities/promotions</p>
Focus Groups Group Interviews, and Workshops	<p>A facilitated discussion or interview with a group of selected individuals, with a pre-set topic that may or may not involve interactive activities</p> <p>Purpose: Consult and involve</p>	<p>+Can learn about key insights into barriers and challenges around deploying the technology</p> <p>+Ensure participation from everyone in the group</p> <p>- Might take longer if multiple stakeholder groups involved</p> <p>-May require funding for participation incentives</p>	<p>Can be concentrated toward the beginning or ongoing</p>	<p>Group of selected individuals such as truck company operators (as done by one CTP winner, Freight Electrification as a Service for Transformation), van/shuttle/bus drivers and potential charging station site owners</p>	<p>Staff to facilitate conversations, plan discussion guide, plan and conduct workshop refreshments, venue logistics.</p> <p>50–80% of resources allocated to staff and admin and 20–50% allocated to focus group activities and community involvement</p>
Test- drives & Showcases	<p>Public events (demonstrations and workshops) where the clean transportation technology is showcased and tested</p> <p>Purpose: Inform and Involve</p>	<p>+Potential users get first-hand experience using technology</p> <p>+Opportunity to provide information in different languages</p> <p>+Can help identify areas for clarification or potential pitfalls to be address before service launch</p> <p>-Might need more staffing and resources</p> <p>-Must address safety considerations</p>	<p>Can be bi-annual starting in Year 1 of the project</p>	<p>Potential users of the service, workforce development programs, general public</p>	<p>Knowledgeable staff to lead demos, access to technology, transportation, refreshments, handouts; 50–60% of resources allocated to staff and admin, and 40–50% allocated to community involvement</p>

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Table 2. Types of Community Engagement Activities (continued)

Activity	Description and Purpose	Pros (+) and Cons (-)	Frequency	Relevant Stakeholders	Resource Needs & Allocation
Advisory Groups	<p>Formed for projects that need significant public engagement</p> <p>Purpose: Collaborate</p>	<p>+Allows community opinion to be represented without participation fatigue, helps build trust between community and project implementor, helps resolve differences in ways that community is likely to accept,</p> <p>+Can help secure cooperation to elevate messaging and promote services</p> <p>-Advisors may not act in the best interest of the group they're representing, one person might take up more space, limits involvement of general public</p>	<p>Set up early, during the planning phase or Year 1 of the project with regular meetings</p>	<p>Representatives from different stakeholder groups (e.g., bike groups, community EJ groups local businesses and employers, faith organizations, local government, vehicle operators)</p>	<p>Staff time to establish advisory group, logistical resources to conduct meetings; 20–50% of resources allocated to staff and admin, and 50–70% to community advisors If significant commitment of time is required, should consider including compensation (meals or stipends)</p>
Surveys	<p>In-person and/or digital outreach to collect feedback during project planning (for example, siting e-bike stations, on-demand shuttle routes, etc.) and for post-event feedback</p> <p>Purpose: Consult</p>	<p>+Input regarding e-mobility services can ensure that project services match the community's needs</p> <p>+Can gather constructive feedback to improve community engagement events</p> <p>+Can be done anonymously</p> <p>-Too many (and too long) surveys can lead to participation fatigue</p> <p>-Can be limited in scope and close-ended depending on how the questions are designed</p>	<p>Can be set up early, during the planning phase, Frequency can be as needed including after community engagement events</p>	<p>All community members and stakeholders but can also be done for targeted community groups</p> <p>Consider and allow for dominant languages of respondent groups</p>	<p>Staff time and resources to design and distribute surveys (in-person and/or online), Monetary resources for survey participation incentives.</p> <p>60–80% allocated to staff and admin and 20–40% allocated to survey promotion/ publicity</p>

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Table 2. Types of Community Engagement Activities (continued)

Activity	Description and Purpose	Pros (+) and Cons (-)	Frequency	Relevant Stakeholders	Resource Needs & Allocation
Emails, Social Media, and Webinars	Digital/online outreach to provide project-related updates and educational presentations, information about workforce training opportunities for EV drivers and demonstration workshops, recruit for advisory and/or focus groups, inform community of opportunities to provide feedback, post-event surveys Purpose: Inform	+Reaches people on platforms they already use -Only reaches people with access to social media, email accounts and the internet	Can be set up during the initial years of the project, and should be ongoing	All community members and stakeholders	Requires email and social media accounts, Staff time and logistical resources to design, run, and promote the webinar. 70–90% of resources dedicated to staff and admin and 10–30% allocated to publicity/promotions



BEST PRACTICES

Engagement strategies and activities should speak to the needs of disadvantaged and marginalized communities. While the benefits of the project – including the transportation services being developed – should reach the whole of the community, understanding how to engage, involve, and benefit disadvantaged segments of communities (e.g., the disabled) is particularly important. Spending time to target engagement activities to these groups and understand their unique history and concerns is key. Involving them in the program design and implementation process can help address concerns that the project ‘isn’t for them’. This may require smaller sessions with representative organizations early in the process to build trust.

If the project territory includes rural areas, a different engagement strategy may be needed. Rural residents may be harder to reach with traditional means, including with virtual meetings given possibly insufficient broadband access, and it may be more important to identify key local leaders and secure their support.⁴ Schedule and co-locate meetings where target groups are already gathering in person - such as school events or Chamber of Commerce meetings. It is important to be able to address common (mis) perceptions about the limitations of EV technology, such as range issues with electric vehicles, that are often raised in rural areas.



Circuit’s Rockaway Rides EV sedans and transport vans some of which are wheelchair accessible. Vehicle wraps echo artwork from the local library for a visual connection to the community. Source: Circuit

⁴“Community Engagement in Rural Communities,” Uddin, Foster& Bright; 2021. https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/tdot/research/final-reports/2020-final-reports-and-summaries/RES2020-17_Final_Report_Approved.pdf

Step 4: Plan a Schedule and Budget for Activities

Develop a schedule

Once engagement activities are chosen, it is important to set out a schedule or timeline for when activities are to take place (Table 3). This will also help identify resource needs and what has to happen before each event, like development of messaging, creation of print materials, ordering food, identifying staff, and making sure language needs are covered.

A more complex and detailed way to visualize all the activities that are needed for a community engagement strategy and how they relate to the overall project timeline is

with a Gantt chart. Gantt charts identify a sequence of steps that need to take place in relation to subsequent steps.

Gantt charts and timelines that tie engagement activities to specific calendar dates or periods (Q1, Q2, etc. such as in Table 3) can become out of date quickly if project deadlines are missed. Instead, tying engagement activities to major project milestones can help ensure the longevity of the plan and speaks to how the engagement strategy supports the overall project strategy.

It's important to consider the potential for delays in the timeline such that expectations can be set appropriately with enough opportunity to adjust schedules if needed. If a launch date is set, but the e-bikes have not arrived, for example, the event may need to be altered or delayed. It is critical, however, to send out a communication in a timely manner to all parties impacted to maintain credibility. Another critical timeline consideration is to inform residents of planned construction before it starts so alternate routing can be identified.

Table 3. Example Schedule

Task #	Task Name	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2	Q 3	Q 4	Q 1	Q 2
1	Outreach										
1.1	Community listening meetings										
1.2	Community festival tabling										
1.3	Drafting Community Benefits Agreement										
1.4	Informational panels										
1.5	Small group sessions explaining how to use service										
1.6	Construction notifications										
1.7	Launch event										
1.8	First stage community feedback										



TIPS

*Tie engagement activities to **major project milestones** instead of dates. For example, setting up meetings with the Chamber of Commerce the week before the service is launched or scheduling ride-and-drive events to help potential users test out the service once the vehicle model choice has been made. Engagement activities should relate to the project milestones and how the community will be involved at different stages of the project. Project milestone dates can slip as the project progresses so tying engagement activities to these milestones and not specific dates can futureproof the engagement strategy. This prevents having to spend time continually revising the CEP schedule rather than engaging with the community.*



A local bike shop hosting a meeting with stakeholders for the Clean Mobility Buffalo project. Source: LISC

Develop a budget

Costs are an important consideration in developing a CEP and a community engagement budget should be developed. Different activities will have different costs given that they will require different levels of project staff involvement, may require renting space or providing refreshments or compensation to attendees, or may even involve hiring an external partner with expertise or connection to the community. When the engagement activities are chosen, it is important to consider the potential costs and outline them in the overall project budget to ensure the level of engagement is appropriate and expenses are being tracked.

Compensation for participation and input during and after meetings and possibly for travel are all budget items to consider. If surveys or focus group discussions are to be held, participants are typically provided with some form of compensation for their time.

Significant staff time and resources should be dedicated to engagement activities but there are ways to limit the cost including:

- Partnering with an important stakeholder like the local utility or faith-based organizations
- Co-locating events with an already-planned activity that a target audience will be attending
- Holding fundraising as part of an event, like a bake sale or raffle
- Receiving cooperation from a local group for translation services
- Taking advantage of local government or other publications to amplify messaging



TIPS

Consider reaching out to stakeholders such as nearby businesses or local philanthropic organizations to help cover some community engagement costs, such as hosting a meeting at their facility, making copies of flyers, or providing food for events. Engagement events can also be an opportunity to partner with local entities with shared interests, for example, police departments on bike safety or local organizations to translate print materials.

Step 5: Implement the Plan

Gathering input, providing feedback

Community input should have been included when designing the project as well as when drafting a CEP, but it is important to continue this engagement to ensure that the CEP is continually refined and co-created with the community of the project. Circumstances change, external events can impact schedules and project features and must be accounted for in engagement plans. At the same time, it is important not to spend excessive time rewriting the plan at the cost of doing the engagement activities.



Volvo's "Bronx is Breathing" team soliciting input from community members at THE POINT Community Development Corporation's center in the Hunts Point neighborhood of the Bronx, NY. Source: Volvo North America

Meetings should be used to share how community input and feedback has been incorporated into the project. The support and input from these groups can be instrumental in a smooth community engagement process and in overall project execution.

Protecting confidential information

People are always concerned when asked to share their personal information, so it's important to be transparent about how their data will be used. If you are hosting a table at a community fair, you may want to have a sign-up sheet for people wanting more information or interested in participating in a future event. If conducting a brief survey at the event itself, you may not need to collect or maintain this information. Whenever you are collecting personally identifiable information (PII), make sure to provide a statement about how information will and will not be used (e.g., it will not be shared with other groups and/or will only be used in aggregate with other responses, or for contact purposes.)

While you may not need someone's contact information if asking them a few questions with a clipboard at an event, it can be extremely valuable to provide opportunities for those interested in more involvement to volunteer their name and phone or email information so you can follow up. If possible, capture information on survey respondents – including whether they are a resident of the community, potential user of the service, or just generally interested. Regardless of their level of interest, it's still important to have a statement ready to address any concerns about protecting their confidentiality.



BEST PRACTICES

Respect community agency during the engagement process by co-developing solutions together, asking the communities to define and set the goals.

Find a champion or opinion leader within the community who will demonstrate the benefits of the project to the community. These champions help build trust between the project team and the community and show that this is 'for them.' Champions can be trusted individuals in the community who are all-in on the project as well as partner organizations, local celebrities or governmental agencies.

Conducting community engagement activities

There are several considerations to keep in mind when doing outreach and gathering input that will improve efforts and allow for widespread engagement. Community engagement should be approached with humility, be accessible, be mindful of competing interests, and take advantage of existing community events when possible. Make it easy for community members to engage by addressing pain points such as childcare, transportation to the event, or offering food. Provide compensation for participating in longer engagements such as focus groups, in recognition of the value of participant's time and knowledge.

It is important to meet the community where they are for more inclusive and active engagement. This means working with their existing knowledge of the topics to ensure that everyone has a baseline understanding and holding community engagement sessions at convenient, centralized locations accessible to most. Establishing a common baseline includes presenting basic information on the topic, highlighting project benefits and challenges using non-technical language and focusing the information on what matters to the community to ensure that it is relevant to community needs. Holding meetings at different times of the day, virtual meetings, and preparing materials and feedback opportunities that can be accessed on demand will provide more participation opportunities for community members with non-traditional schedules or conflicts.

Partnering with local organizations can also help one obtain specific input about the community, help amplify information about and promote the clean transportation project to the community directly from trusted groups, and ensure local interests are represented. Community members are likely to trust information from local organizations or agencies they are familiar with. These can include local churches, businesses, CBOs, schools and colleges, commerce agencies, etc.

Case Study

Bronx is Breathing

The [Bronx is Breathing project](#) demonstrates the power of collaborating with CBOs. The project team gave strong agency to these organizations, empowering them and deferring to their expertise on the community and how to reach them, and even held its kick-off at a community center run by a key CBO partner, The POINT. This center has been a hub for the community and the project benefited from meeting the community where it was already. The project team also worked closely with the Greater Hunts Point Economic Development Corporation which led engagement events and serves as a home base for the community by connecting residents to jobs and providing training opportunities.

When collaborating, the team presented a clear delineation of roles amongst itself and its community partners and had solid communication and follow-up after engagement activities. The team's engagement has also been consistent and from the beginning has been thought of as a core part of the project itself, not an afterthought. The team's engagement with the community is a good example of the highest level on the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, i.e., where the project team 'defers to' to the community so that the process is community-driven.



A community meeting where local residents discussed project features and posed questions to the team at an early stage of the Bronx is Breathing initiative. Source: Volvo North America



BEST PRACTICES

Be honest in interactions with community members. This also includes being open and honest about the engagement process and timeline and avoiding setting unrealistic expectations.



After presenting information to the entire group of attendees (Figure 9), the Volvo team used small breakout groups to workshop ideas around Volvo's plans for bringing EV trucks and job opportunities to Hunts Point in the Bronx. Source: Volvo North America

For communities new to e-mobility technology, familiarizing the community to the technology can be done through in-person demonstrations, by providing educational materials, and by listening to concerns and addressing common misconceptions about the technology (information related to charging, cold weather, safety, etc.). For example, the NY Clean Transportation Prize funded project [Clean Transit Access Program](#) plans to conduct hands-on interactive workshops and provide introductory information on EV infrastructure to potential users.

[Project MOVER](#) has developed both English and [Spanish language instructional videos](#) for the Village of Ossining to learn how to use their bikeshare application and bikes. The Bronx is Breathing project conducted at least half of its surveys in Spanish during one of its community engagement events.

Many engagement activities can capture information to improve delivery of information and services. Some examples include:

- Take notes on feedback from informal conversations and consider conducting a brief survey (e.g., clipboard or postcard) with participants or people who stop by at tabling events
- Hold a raffle to capture attendee information or have a sign-up sheet to get emails or phone numbers if people are willing to be contacted for more information later
- Have a QR code or other handout with a link to drive people to your website for more information
- Provide an opportunity to record questions that will take time to research and be sure to have a way to get back with answers



BEST PRACTICES

Provide outreach materials in multiple languages and translation services for in-person and virtual meetings.

Provide compensation or other support to community members and CBOs to show your appreciation of their time and feedback. This includes monetary compensation, gift cards, raffle tickets, childcare support, and travel support. For example, Clean Mobility Buffalo has a Neighborhood Leadership Group consisting of paid positions where selected members provide insight into community engagement activities for the project.

Evaluating community engagement activities

Collecting participant engagement data across activities can help project implementers keep track of whether their engagement strategy is working and determine the need for any changes.

Table 4 has examples of sample metrics for community engagement that can be applied across multiple activities. While metrics can quantitatively track the number of activities, impacts related to the quality and post-activity results of the engagement should also be tracked when possible. For maximum insight, measurement should go beyond counts of activities and people to capturing the impacts of the engagement in order to understand its effectiveness. How many people moved from intent to action in actually using the transportation services? How many people who were reached actually took an intended action, or improved their understanding or opinion? Capturing this detail, either formally through a survey or anecdotally in conversations, allows one to track feedback so outreach and services can be improved.

Table 4: Sample Metrics for Measuring the Success of Community Engagement

Category	Sample Metric
Outreach Activities	Number of outreach activities conducted
	Total number of people reached by outreach activity
Level of Participation or Power Given to Community Members	Number of activities with each of the following goals for participation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inform • Consult • Involve • Collaborate • Defer to
	Community member perceptions of the organization’s receptiveness to feedback
	Number of ideas or comments that were provided by community members
	Number of ideas or comments that were considered by organizations
	Number of ideas or comments that were included in the final decision.
Accessibility	The proportion of engagement activities and materials that were tailored to the literacy, age, language, and culture of a target audience
	Number of individuals actively participating vs. passively participating at meetings, events, or other social activities
	Number of ideas and comments provided by community members
	Location and format of engagement activity (e.g., online, in-person, centrally located)
	The number of different stakeholder types present at the engagement activity
Organizational Trust and Credibility	Community Member satisfaction with stages of the process (e.g., communication, design, integration of feedback)
	Community Member rating of the organization’s commitment to equity
	Community Member rating of trust with organization partners (e.g., CBOs)
Impact on Desired Outcomes	Community Member satisfaction with the outcome
	Likelihood for community members to participate in community engagement or decision-making in the future

Source: California Public Utilities Commission Third-Party (3P) Equity Programs Process and Effectiveness Evaluation Report. Opinion Dynamics. 2024. https://www.calmac.org/%5C%5Cpublications/3P_Equity_FINAL_Report_09.12.24_CALMAC.pdf



Getting feedback from attendees at a community meeting in Buffalo. Source: LISC

Step 6: Review and Update the Plan

A good CEP will provide a strong blueprint for rolling out various communications, listening and feedback opportunities, and instructions for users of a clean transportation service. The last section of a CEP can be dedicated to discussing how the CEP may be updated as the project progresses. Projects are not static and may need to change their engagement strategy as a result of feedback from the community or major unanticipated events that may impact the community and the project.

Managing expectations and responding to concerns

The Achilles heel of a project can be overpromising or miscommunicating project outcome expectations. Many communities have been promised significant benefits in the past and may be skeptical of new projects. To help build trust, it is critical to create a report-back feedback loop in which the project team regularly shares updates about how feedback was addressed during the project planning process. Figure 1 is an example of a report back feedback table that can help organize information received and how it was factored in.

Figure 1. Reporting Back Feedback

Theme	What We Heard	Project Team's Response
<p><i>Group your comments into key themes based on the topics covered in the engagement</i></p>	<p><i>Select 1–2 quotes or a summary of specific comments that speaks to the theme</i></p>	<p><i>Note the potential obstacles & potential workarounds. Be sure to include clear next steps in your response to show you are taking feedback into consideration</i></p>
	<p><i>Can include who said what for internal use, but remove that information when sharing externally</i></p>	

Managing conflict

Good community engagement should also address potential community opposition to the project that can arise during engagement activities. Hopefully, the following CEP best practices will head off any major issues, but it's important to anticipate that conflict may arise. It's important to have a conflict resolution strategy to help diffuse situations quickly and effectively.

Some strategies to address conflict include:

- Acknowledge the conflict and take concerns seriously
- Meet one-on-one with the opinion leaders or groups opposing plans
- Look for solutions that address concerns without undermining goals of the project

Managing expectations and informing the community of changes, especially when key deadlines are missed, is important to maintain credibility and trust. Delays in complex projects are common and informing the community of these changes and why they are happening should be factored into any engagement and communication strategy. Regular communication through a newsletter, for example, can make it easier to keep the community informed of changes and limit concerns.

When to update a CEP

A CEP should outline the process for updating communications and what degree of changes in the engagement strategy or project would warrant an update. Typically, the engagement strategy stays about the same, but dates and details can change. Updates can be made to the calendar, in a posted notice, or in a newsletter, and don't require a full CEP update.

Updating a CEP can be a timely and costly endeavor, so it should only be done when there is a significant rethinking of the engagement strategy, community, or project design.

These are some key changes that may require a CEP update:

- Change in service location of the project
- Change in beneficiaries
- Delays in launch dates caused by supply chain delays
- Better sense of community or community groups impacted by the project
- Change in the type of services or technology
- Change in a main partner, especially engagement partner
- Major changes to the cadence or form of community engagement based on community feedback
- Unforeseen tragedies or setbacks for the community such as natural disasters or economic hardships

Conclusion

Community Engagement Best Practices

Here is a summary of best practices to keep in mind:

- Do community research to understand the local landscape and the community needs and issues
- Be honest in your interactions with community members. Set realistic expectations about the community engagement process
- Respect community agency by co-developing solutions
- Meet the community where they are by working with their knowledge of the issues at hand, by providing necessary information, and by creating multiple engagement opportunities
- Work with local organizations and CBOs. They are likely to be more familiar with the community. It may be possible to conduct engagement at an existing event hosted by a local organization or CBO that already has regular attendance
- Provide outreach materials and conduct engagement in multiple languages
- Provide compensation for participation and other support that people might need to attend the events, such as travel compensation, childcare and meals, or holding meetings at convenient times and days
- Find a community champion or opinion leader who can help advocate for the benefits of the clean transportation project to the community
- Target engagement strategies and activities to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities and understand their unique concerns

Further details on community engagement activities best practices and our sources are available in the [Resources Library](#).

Appendix: Playbook Toolkit

A. Community Engagement Plan Template

The following material was prepared by Eastern Research Group and can be used as a template to develop your Community Engagement Plan.

Community Engagement Plan Template

Overview and Objective

This section should include:

- A brief summary of the project and its goals
- A summary of the objectives of community engagement and how it will inform the project
- Identification of key stakeholders and community groups
- Brief summary of key community engagement strategies

Characterizing the Community

Community profile(s)

For the community/communities served by your project, collect and record information on demographics and other community characteristics and present it in a summary table.

Example Table

	[Community/neighborhood #1 name]	[Community/neighborhood #2 name]
Geographic boundaries		
Major community features (e.g., schools, churches, libraries, commercial districts, transportation hubs)		
Languages spoken		
Ethnicities		
Levels of education		
Income (median)		
Income (percent at or below poverty)		
Age breakdown		
...etc.		

Key stakeholders

Develop a summary table of key community groups and stakeholders, key contacts within each group, how each group will benefit (directly or indirectly) from the project solution, and their potential role in project implementation. Stakeholder groups could include municipal and other community leaders, NGOs, CBOs, and neighborhood associations.

Example Table

Organization/stakeholder Name	Key contacts within organization	How does the organization potentially benefit?	Potential role in project implementation?

Community Engagement Objectives, Strategies, and Activities

Summary of engagement objectives

Provide a narrative summary of what outcomes you hope to achieve through your outreach and engagement activities.

Strategies to overcome barriers to community engagement

Identify the most appropriate and effective outreach tools and methods to overcome barriers and support effective community engagement.

Example Table

Stakeholder group	Barriers to outreach	Outreach solutions

Community engagement implementation plan

Develop a table that identifies the specific outreach activities you will employ, the goal of each, and the implementation timeframe for each activity. Consider including a Gantt chart or table with the key points or milestones of community interaction against the project timeline.

Example Table

Outreach activity	Goal/desired outcome(s)	Timeframe/cadence

Conflict Resolution

Describe the process for identifying and appropriately addressing conflicts or concerns that may arise related to your project.

Community Engagement Evaluation

Summarize the qualitative and quantitative metrics you will use to assess the success of community engagement, as well as the method you will use to capture these metrics.

Example Table

Metric	Metric type	Method for collection

Updates to CEP

Describe the process you will use to update the CEP, and the anticipated schedule for and frequency of updates.

B. Demographic Analysis Tool

Conducting a Community Demographic Analysis

Gathering demographic information about the community impacted by the project is a critical step in the community engagement process. This toolkit gives a step-by-step guide to gathering and organizing key demographic information. It supplements the playbook, “Guide to Writing and Implementing a Community Engagement Plan for Clean Transportation Projects.” This toolkit is for any project implementor who wants a high-level understanding of the community and of their project.

This analysis consists of online data collection that can be done before any on-the-ground research or outreach happens. It lays the groundwork for engagement, and gives an understanding of the community and a glimpse into potential key groups to engage.

Step 1: Decide which geographic area(s) to examine

It can be the entire geographic area of the project or portions of it. For example, data can be collected for an entire town as well as neighborhoods of that town to get a sense of the town’s diversity.

Step 2: Chose the data source

One primary source for community demographic data is the [U.S. Census Bureau](#) where data can be downloaded by different geographic areas. Its data tool allows for filtering by state, county, place (generally cities or communities), zip code areas, and smaller geographies. To get finer data, such as a specific neighborhood within a town, it will be necessary to know the Census tracts that make up the area of interest.

Census tracts are a key geographic area of analysis for the Census Bureau and generally represent 1,200 to 8,000 people.⁵ Several tools exist to find the tracts for a particular area, including the Census’s [Demographic Data Map Viewer](#). Clicking on the tracts displayed on the map will give an identification number that can be used to find other data not displayed on the mapping tool itself.”

The Census Bureau has data on race, income, language, immigrant background, education, age, and employment. It can be used to look at a project’s entire community and potential geographic subdivisions within the project area. This data can come from the Decennial Census as well as its other surveys, notably the American Community Survey (ACS), that can be chosen when downloading data.

The Decennial Census is the official census undertaken every 10 years. It intends to gather information on all Americans. The ACS is an annual survey of a few million households that captures similar information to the Census. Because it is published annually, the ACS may have more up-to-date information. However, the data may not be as reliable at a neighborhood level due to the smaller sample size.

Other data sources include data tools such as:

- The national [EJScreen](#)
- The Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Housing and Transportation Index
- New York’s Disadvantaged Communities (DAC) [mapping tool](#)

[EJScreen](#) is a centralized place for environmental and socioeconomic information. It includes such things as exposure to ozone or proximity to industrial waste sites. Using EJScreen can make it easier to collect important information related to environmental justice concerns and reduce the need to sort and interpret Census data.

The [Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Housing and Transportation Index](#) has a mapping tool that can show key indicators of transportation affordability and access that can inform engagement and project services. The [NYS DAC](#) mapping tool provides visual representation of DAC-designated neighborhoods as of 2022,

Step 3: Collect and organize the data

Finally, once the geographic areas and data sources have been chosen, data collection can begin. This table template can be included in a Community Engagement Plan. It can help organize key demographic data on the community or communities impacted by the project.

⁵For more information on Census geographies: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/about/glossary.html>

C. Resources Library: References

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