Engage, Empower, Implement Overview

1. Issue:
SACOG staff seeks guidance from working group members on what it means for SACOG to listen and learn when developing the Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) program.

2. Recommendation:
That the working group provide feedback on approaches and questions being explored to develop the Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) program.

3. Background/Analysis:
In 2020 during the SACOG Board's adoption of the SACOG Funding Round, the agency created a new program - Engage, Empower, Implement (EEI) - to focus on the region's most disinvested communities.

The SACOG board allocated $3 million dollars to fund EEI to begin addressing disparities that have limited healthy environments for all region residents. EEI will strategically invest these funds in low-income communities with an emphasis on the communities that have faced the largest inequities which include Black, Indigenous, Asian, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latino and other communities of color. The program will be seed funding for member jurisdictions, in partnership with community partners, to develop projects that address community needs and provide solutions to their challenges.

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

The first step towards a successful EEI funding round is to develop a framework that outlines the program's goals, funding guidelines, process, and evaluation metrics. These framework components will directly inform the resulting EEI funding application requirements.

EEI is one of SACOG's first initiatives to operationalize our commitment to racial equity into our planning processes. The program will seek feedback throughout the process from the REI Working Group to ground strategies and approaches with racial equity.

At its February 25, meeting, the REI Working Group will hear from SACOG's Bay Area counterpart, Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC), with stories from their Community Based Transportation Planning program. This bay area program has some parallels with EEI's goals. MTC staff will share examples of how their community-based planning program has played out in communities in the Bay Area. Additionally,

staff will share some of the lessons learned, challenges they have faced within the program, and some changes they would like to explore as they update their program guidelines. These learnings are critical as SACOG works to stand up a similar program.

4. Discussion/Analysis:

EEI aims to provide the tools and support needed for in-depth community engagement and relationship building to understand community needs and create a process for identifying projects that meet these needs. Through identifying community needs and creating projects that address them, SACOG and its member jurisdictions can begin to invest in community-driven projects that create meaningful change. This program is focused on prioritizing authentic community engagement before a project is conceptualized so the project is created by and for the community. This is a strategic approach to equity- and justice-based planning that goes beyond simply sharing project information with disinvested communities, which has previously been described as equitable outreach.

The first phase of this program will include listening to and learning from community based organizations on how to bring them on for a fruitful and collaborative partnership. We will also convene a community-based organization working group to help create the program framework. A consultant with expertise in equity-based planning will guide the framework development process, and the SACOG team will also consult with member jurisdictions throughout the process.

Through engagement with the working group and collaboration with partners and stakeholders, we will develop a program framework that includes guidelines, tools, and resources for community-based and justice-based planning best practices. These best practices will outline how to engage with residents and communities that have been historically underserved, underinvested, and marginalized to build trust, understand their needs, empower a community-led process for identifying potential solutions, and take a collaborative approach with communities, cities, counties, and stakeholders to implement these solutions over time with future SACOG funding and other grant opportunities.

The second phase will be a call for applicants once the framework and all resources have been developed.

Outside of the two phases of EEI, the work from this program will also serve as a starting point for SACOG to build and maintain relationships with critical community-based organizations to continue to listen to and learn from them, plan with them, and most importantly act with them. Sustaining the relationships that are born through this effort will be critical for SACOG's overall practices and procedures. We will be leveraging the information gained and relationships built for long-term action.

Timeline:
Spring 2022: Procurement of CBO lead and consultant
Summer/Fall 2022: Framework development
Fall 2022: Board adoption of framework
Early 2023: Call for applications

Questions for the REI Working Group
- Do you have recommendations on what approach we should take to make good on our commitment to listen and learn as we embark with EEI?
- What resources do jurisdictions and CBOs alike need in order to do this work?

- How do we meaningfully engage these partners and leverage our experience with EEI to make it a long-lasting relationship?
- Which key organizations do you recommend we reach out to for their input and expertise?
- As we create the guidelines and resources, one important question we will discuss is the definition of communities – do you have a recommendation on how we approach the question of how communities will be defined?