



Principles of Equitable Engagement

May 31, 2023

This document was developed by the Ecology Center in collaboration with the City of Berkeley and the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN). The principles below articulate an equitable process for the City of Berkeley and other local governments to use in climate policy and program development and implementation, elevating the voices of frontline communities and shifting power to BIPOC people and organizations. These principles have emerged from lessons from community engagement conducted by the Ecology Center thus during a 10-month USDN grant project (August 2022 – May 2023). The Principles are a living document that will continue to evolve with learnings from future engagement.

Equitable engagement should strive to accomplish the following goals:

- 1. To Build Authentic Community Relationships**
- 2. To Increase Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusivity**
- 3. To Build Community Power**

1. To Build Authentic Community Relationships

- a. Develop authentic relationships with community members based on mutual respect, trust, and understanding. This requires listening deeply to community concerns and being transparent about government actions and decision-making processes.
- b. Address past harm directly and early on, calling out historical harmful government-led policies, engagement, etc. and their impacts, especially on BIPOC and marginalized communities.
 - i. Prepare in advance for potential triggering of past trauma in community members, especially elders. Have a plan/strategy to address triggers and to move forward to healing.
 - ii. Explore trauma-informed community engagement and outreach strategies.¹
- c. Be responsive and accountable.
 - i. Respond to community concerns and feedback in a timely and respectful manner. Be transparent about the decision-making process and hold government officials accountable for their actions and decisions.

¹ Oly Aloziem, "[Trauma-Informed Community Engagement](#)"

- d. Commit to continuous learning and improvement.
 - i. Engage in ongoing learning and reflection to improve engagement strategies and practices, and seek feedback from the community on how engagement efforts can be improved.
- e. Be transparent about the decision-making process and hold government officials accountable for their actions and decisions.
 - i. Government decision-makers (i.e. policymakers and other government officials with the authority to institute change) should attend community forums to hear community feedback directly. If this is not possible, government staff should clearly communicate to the community who the decision-makers are and how feedback will be collected and relayed to decision-makers. Government staff should then follow through with collecting and relaying this feedback.
- f. Be aware of potentially harmful language when soliciting community feedback, as insensitive language can shut down community dialogue.
 - i. The naming of projects, places, or communities can cause unintentional harm through the erasure of a community's identity or history. Where possible, defer to the language to describe places or communities used by the communities themselves.
 - 1. For example, a Berkeley community member at Healthy Black Families' People's Assembly expressed disappointment in the project being titled "Adeline *Corridor* Project" instead of "Adeline *Community* Project" as the term corridor doesn't seem to acknowledge the people who live there.
- g. Data collection should be guided by the concept of data equity, a framework that JLI Consulting defines as "the consideration, through an equity lens, of the ways in which data is collected, analyzed, interpreted, and distributed."²
 - i. Recognize that data can and, in many cases, has been used to justify decisions that have been harmful to marginalized communities. Also recognize that the practice of collecting personal data about community members (income, race, etc.) can be invasive and inappropriate for projects for which this data is not necessary.
 - ii. Consult with community members to determine what data to collect and how to collect it in order to fully and accurately demonstrate the impact of a project, while respecting community members' privacy and dignity.

² JLI Consulting Hawaii, ["Data Equity: What Is It, and Why Does It Matter?"](#)

- h. Protect the privacy and data security of community members.
 - i. Employ a proxy for direct income data collection such as participation in an income-qualified program (e.g. SNAP, Medicaid, etc.) or services from an organization that serves income-qualified households.
 - ii. Share individuals' quotes, anecdotes, photos, meeting recordings, etc. only with written or verbal permission.

2. To Increase Equity, Accessibility, and Inclusivity

- a. Provide accommodations such as language interpretation, transportation, and childcare.
- b. Involve community members in the planning and design of engagement events to ensure that they are accessible and welcoming.
- c. Ensure that presentations and discussions are accessible.³
 - i. Send presentation slides to those who use screen readers ahead of time when possible. Presenters should read slide information out loud. Ensure that online platforms are compatible with screen readers.⁴
- d. Be flexible and adaptable.
 - i. Recognize that community needs and priorities can change over time. Be willing to adapt engagement strategies and approaches to meet evolving community needs.
- e. Provide clear and accessible information about government actions, policies, and programs. Seek input and feedback from the community before making decisions that will impact them.
- f. Use clear and plain language.
 - i. Use language that is easy to understand and free from jargon, acronyms, and technical terms. This is particularly important when engaging with non-English speakers and those with limited formal education.
- g. Facilitate group discussions to interactively define terms that may be broad or abstract (e.g. "climate justice") to anchor all members of the group in a collective understanding of terms. For example, a facilitator may present a working definition for a term and invite meeting participants to ask questions and add to the definition.

³ Sins Invalid, "[Access Suggestions for Public Events](#)".

⁴ WebAIM, [Web Accessibility in Mind](#)

- h. Recognize that different community members have different preferences and comfort levels with different engagement methods. Use a variety of methods, including in-person and virtual meetings, surveys, focus groups, and community forums to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate.

3. To Build Community Power

- a. Work toward shifting power to community members, especially those of marginalized communities who have historically been excluded from government decision-making processes.
- b. Recognize and address power imbalances.
 - i. Recognize that power imbalances exist between government officials and community members, and take steps to address these imbalances by sharing power and decision-making authority with the community.
 - ii. Recognize that community-based organizations facilitating or leading government-funded projects hold an extension of government power. Facilitating organizations should address this power dynamic with other community-based organizations and community members through engagement to ownership-based programming.