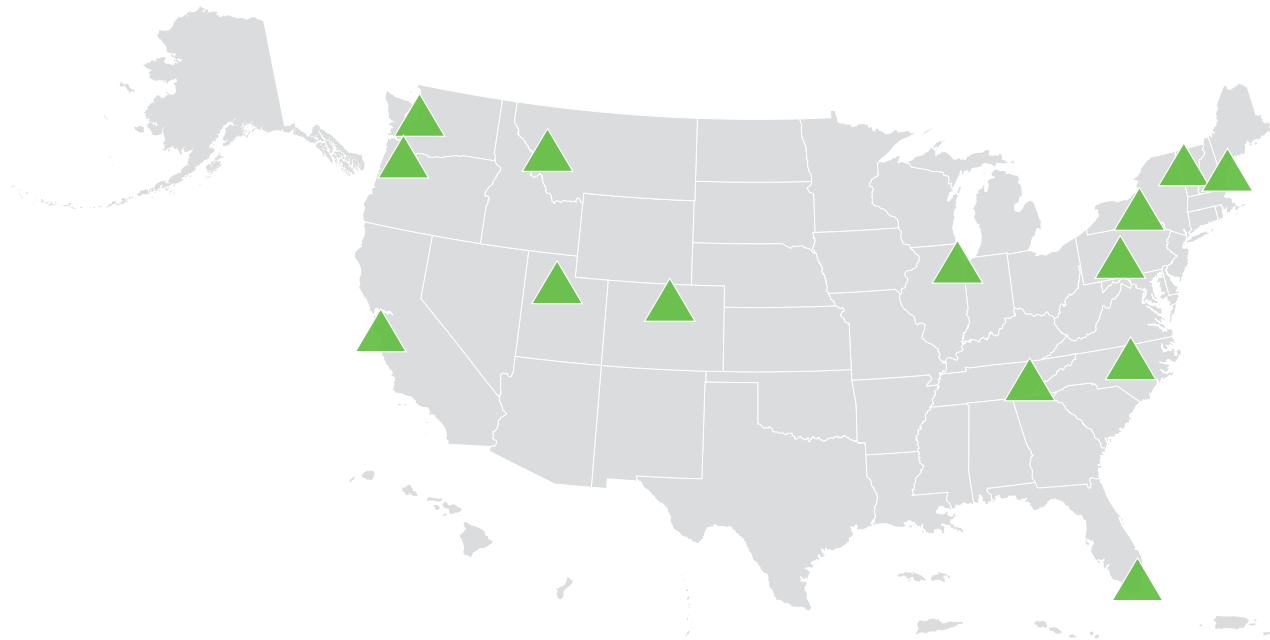


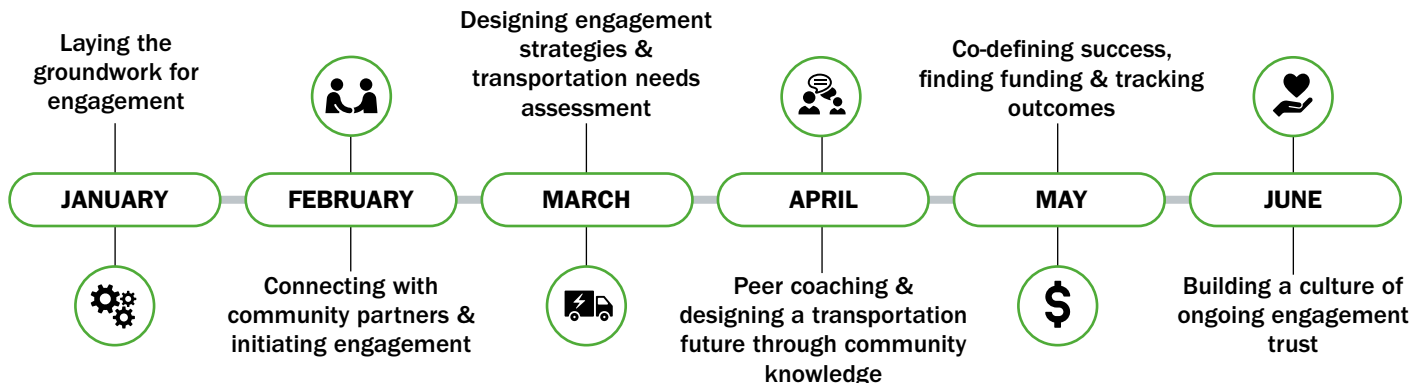


**LESSONS LEARNED** *from*  
**THE CLEAN ENERGY TO COMMUNITIES PEER-LEARNING COHORT ON  
Incorporating Community Priorities into Electric  
Vehicle Plans and Projects**



The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL), with support from World Resources Institute (WRI), designed and led a six-month peer-learning cohort from January through July 2024 on “Enhancing Resilience at Critical Facilities through Solar, Storage, and Microgrids” as part of the U.S Department of Energy’s **Clean Energy to Communities** ([nrel.gov/c2c](https://nrel.gov/c2c)) (C2C) program.

Representatives from 15 local and regional governments, municipal utilities, and community-based organizations from across the United States participated in monthly workshops covering best practices for planning and deploying local resilience projects. This document shares key takeaways, lessons learned, and resources from the cohort.





The transportation sector emits more greenhouse gases than any other sector in the United States, reaching 28% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, according to the **Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks 1990–2021** ([epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions](https://epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions)). There are multiple technologies and strategies available to decarbonize transportation, including transitioning to electric vehicles, electric micro-mobility, zero-emissions buses, improved and electrified public transit, and active transportation.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act have provided an influx of funding for a variety of transportation projects across the country. Working with communities to co-design clean transportation projects helps to ensure that all communities, especially those historically marginalized or disproportionately affected by the energy transition, benefit from clean transportation initiatives. Not only does this maximize the impact of the funding, but it also fosters community engagement and support, leading to more successful outcomes.

Participants in the C2C cohort on “Integrating Community Priorities into EV Plans and Projects” explored tools, case studies, and best practices, and were encouraged to develop their own unique approaches to engagement. The six cohort workshops outlined strategies that can help entities design effective community engagement processes around clean transportation.

**The following lessons and best practices arose from six sessions of expert presentations, discussions between cohort participants, and direct technical assistance sessions that took place during the cohort**

### Lay the groundwork for engagement:

- **Defining the “why” for your engagement**
- **Conduct a landscape assessment**
- **Research past engagement efforts by your organization.**

#### Questions to ask:

- What’s your reason for wanting to solicit community input and how will you integrate takeaways into planning efforts?
- Who would be impacted by the plan or project? Who are you looking to engage?

- Do your colleagues have any lessons learned from past engagement processes?
  - Have your colleagues or other agencies and departments already asked the questions you intend to ask? Is there any past data or work you can build from?
  - Has your team successfully delivered on promises made to the community during past engagement efforts? Was community trust established in past engagement efforts?



*This cohort provided a terrific foundation for me to be prepared with best practices for community engagement. I have a better appreciation for the importance of relationships and devoting time to engagement since it is crucial to the success of a project.*

– Pam Adams, Centre Region Council of Governments, Centre County, Pennsylvania

### Determine the goals of your engagement process and connect with key community partners that can help you reach those goals.

#### Questions to ask:

- Who do you plan to engage with based on the landscape assessment and project goals?
- How will resident and stakeholder input be used to identify transportation priorities and/or shape a plan or upcoming project?
- How can you best engage historically underserved residents? Do you need specific materials to communicate with communities who have not been effectively reached in the past?
- Who should you connect with first? Do you need to build relationships with local nonprofits or community-based organizations to reach residents? Are there existing trusted community partners?
- Are there compensation mechanisms for people involved in the process?

1 Learn more about electric vehicle charging infrastructure ([afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-stations](https://afdc.energy.gov/fuels/electricity-stations)).



## With trusted community partners, develop strategies to engage with residents and stakeholders in a representative way.

### Questions to ask:

- How can you best connect with communities of interest (via your website, phone calls, written surveys, in-person events)? What combination of these methods will allow you to reach all intended audiences?
- What do you want to learn from participants? What questions do you want to ask? How should you frame any in-person discussions?
- Are outreach and engagement strategies reflective of the input of trusted community partners?

## Engage residents to collect information on clean transportation preferences. Collect and collate results and analyze input.

### Questions to ask:

- How many people participated? Who were the participants – was it a representative sample of the communities of interest? Who was missing (for example – were businesses, disadvantaged community members, and workers present at one or more of the events)?
- What were the most common things you heard? Any key themes that arose?
- Did you receive enough input to meet your goals, or do you need to identify additional engagement strategies?

## Translate community priorities into a list of potential clean transportation strategies.

### Questions to ask:

- Which clean transportation strategies are residents most interested in (e.g., electric vehicles, electric micro-mobility, zero-emissions buses, improved and/or electrified public transit, and active transportation)?
- Were specific locations suggested for clean transportation projects? Were there specific locations where residents noted that there is an absence of available or affordable transportation options?

- What project ideas have been considered in the past? What new ideas were generated?

## Match resulting clean transportation strategies with available funding opportunities.

### Questions to ask:

- What funding is currently available for the types of projects residents are interested in?

Explore funding announcement pages and state and local sources of funding:

- **U.S. Department of Transportation** ([transportation.gov/grants](https://www.transportation.gov/grants)): Grants
- **U.S. Joint Office of Energy and Transportation** ([driveelectric.gov/funding-opportunities](https://driveelectric.gov/funding-opportunities)): Funding Opportunities
- **Federal Highway Administration** ([transportation.gov/rural/grant-toolkit/usdot-discretionary-grants-by-agency/fhwa](https://www.transportation.gov/rural/grant-toolkit/usdot-discretionary-grants-by-agency/fhwa)): Key Grant Programs
- **Your State Department of Transportation** ([fhwa.dot.gov/about/webstate.cfm](https://www.fhwa.dot.gov/about/webstate.cfm))
- **Your State Energy Office** ([energy.gov/scep/state-energy-offices-and-organizations](https://www.energy.gov/scep/state-energy-offices-and-organizations))
- Municipal bonds
- Municipal budget
- Is there someone on your team who can track funding opportunities on an ongoing basis?
- What type of information do you need to develop funding applications?



*This cohort has exposed me to so many great stories that show the positive outcomes that come from engaging your community from the beginning in planning for a clean transportation future. I feel more equipped to start an equitable engagement plan after hearing so many amazing guest speakers talk about their work, best practices, and lessons learned. There are so many possibilities to explore!”*

– Savannah Vega, City of Ithaca, New York



## Conduct additional engagement for input from residents on priority strategies and projects you have developed from the initial set of community-identified priorities.

### Questions to ask:

- Which of the identified strategies or projects is most appealing to community members?
- How feasible is each strategy or project in the near term? Can participants help you rank strategies on an impact vs. effort matrix?
- Do planned projects directly align with community-identified priorities? If not, how can those priorities be further addressed?

## Take action on both near-term and long-term community-identified strategies.

### Questions to ask:

- How can you bring to fruition those strategies that are near term and long term? What steps can you take?
- Is funding available for all projects envisioned by community members, either from grants or in capital budgets?
- Could funding be secured in the future for all identified priorities? If not, how could you communicate out about which priorities are most immediately achievable?

## Build a culture of ongoing engagement and trust by tracking and communicating progress on the priorities identified and actions taken.

### Questions to ask:

- How will you communicate with residents about how your planned projects address the issues they raised during the engagement processes?
- What information do residents need about your upcoming clean transportation plans and projects? What information do they need about access to clean transportation?
- How can you communicate information to various audiences (e.g., your website, public announcements or press releases, a tracker, or public meetings)?

## Evaluate your efforts and continue to integrate and coordinate community engagement into planning and projects across your organization.

### Questions to ask:

- How effectively are we integrating community engagement into our planning and project development processes?
- What strategies have we implemented to ensure that community input is consistently incorporated into decision-making?
- What feedback mechanisms are in place to capture and respond to community concerns and suggestions?
- How do we measure the impact of community engagement on project outcomes and local buy-in?

**Clean Energy to Communities (C2C)** is a U.S. Department of Energy-funded program that aims to significantly accelerate the speed and scale of commitments, plans, and actions to increase clean energy, resiliency, and environmental justice by providing direct support to local communities to achieve their own goals. C2C provides three types of technical assistance to communities across the country: in-depth partnerships, expert match, and peer-learning cohorts.

Peer-learning cohorts are multi-community engagements that convene regularly for approximately six months to exchange strategies and best practices, learn in a collaborative environment, and workshop policy or program proposals, action plans, or strategies to overcome challenges around a common clean energy transition topic.

Three new peer-learning cohorts run every six months and are managed by NREL with support from WRI. For more information on upcoming topics and how to apply, please visit [nrel.gov/c2c/cohorts](https://nrel.gov/c2c/cohorts).

For more information, visit: [nrel.gov/c2c](https://nrel.gov/c2c)



**C2C: Clean Energy  
to Communities**

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

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