

BOOST

Build • Organize • Optimize • Strengthen • Transform

Pilot Program: Best Practices & Lessons Learned

sustainability

climate action

resilience

equity



Program
developed by



Funded by



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Executive Summary

All Californians deserve to live in communities where they can have access to clean air and water, clean transportation, affordable housing and economic opportunity. Yet many communities across the state lack the staff capacity and resources to develop projects and secure funding to make this a reality for their residents. To help address this need, the Institute for Local Government (ILG) partnered with the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) to create a pilot program called BOOST, to help local governments across the state build capacity to address those needs. The pilot program was funded through the California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of cap-and-trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy and improving public health and the environment—particularly in disadvantaged communities.

The BOOST Pilot Program provided customized and tailored support to help communities:

- **B**uild awareness of funding opportunities to address climate action
- **O**rganize projects to be best positioned to meet their goals
- **O**ptimize existing resources and build more capacity
- **S**trengthen relationships with key stakeholders and identify new opportunities for regional engagement and collaboration; and
- **T**ransform their approach to addressing climate action

Over the course of 18 months, ILG worked with ten cities and two regions to achieve more authentic community engagement, secure grant funding, tackle affordable housing issues, embark on climate action planning and address a myriad of other challenges. Through this program, ILG identified a number of lessons learned and promising practices to help other under-resourced communities navigate similar challenging topics and inform future technical assistance programs.

A few key themes emerged during the pilot program:

Addressing equity is vital to planning for and ensuring a more promising and sustainable future. A focus on equity led to the City of San Diego developing a suite of initiatives to remove long-standing regulations and thwart traditional funding structures that have primarily benefitted more affluent neighborhoods and disproportionately impacted vulnerable populations.

Proactive collaboration and partnership development can help build local capacity, renew stakeholder commitment and improve grant applications.

Strategic partnerships were key factors in numerous BOOST community wins: the City of Arcata played a role in securing the first ever Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grant awarded to a Native American tribe; the City of East Palo Alto successfully tackled flood protection issues by partnering with county, regional and non-profit partners; and the City of Ventura worked with advocacy groups to pursue funding for active transportation projects to benefit farmworker communities.



Aerial view of Arcata Plaza in 2020. Photo courtesy of Britton Latham.

Authentic community engagement is key to building trust. A demonstrated commitment to inclusive and authentic community engagement is the cornerstone for all of the planning efforts in the City of Salinas. This has resulted in successful grant applications, like the Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation (SALC) Planning Grant, and award accommodations, such as the Robert Wood Johnson Culture of Health Prize. An inclusive and equitable approach with community input was critical for the City of Bakersfield to develop a community-driven proposal for the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) grant, which will fund a process for more equitable transportation planning in the Southeast Bakersfield.

Flexible technical assistance is necessary to respond to the rapidly changing needs of under-resourced communities. ILG's flexible approach to technical assistance and capacity building allowed the team to shift focus based on the evolving needs of the BOOST cohort both pre- and post-COVID. For example, ILG developed virtual strategic planning sessions for the City of El Centro, provided virtual peer learning for the full BOOST cohort and leveraged other ILG programs and expertise to meet the changing needs of the BOOST communities.

ILG appreciated the opportunity to provide technical assistance and capacity building for California communities. This report was prepared to provide insights and lessons learned from our experience to assist other communities and to provide best practices to inform other state-funded technical assistance programs.

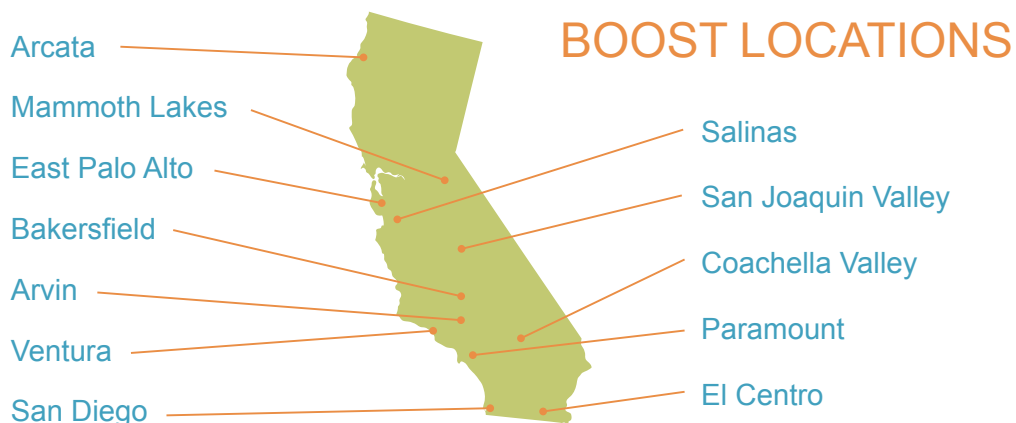
Background

The Budget Act of 2018 appropriated \$2 million from the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF), to provide technical assistance to disadvantaged communities. The appropriation specified that the Institute for Local Government (ILG) was eligible for up to \$1 million of that funding to provide technical assistance to cities and counties to help them take action on climate change. With this direction, ILG developed the BOOST Pilot Program in partnership with the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC).

The BOOST Pilot Program launched in spring 2019 and focused on 10 cities and two regions in California. The jurisdictions in this cohort varied in size, geography and demographics. The participants were selected based on a variety of factors including being designated as under-resourced, disadvantaged or particularly vulnerable to climate risks. All BOOST participants demonstrated a clear desire to work on climate-related issues and a willingness to learn and grow through this program. The BOOST communities included the cities of **Arcata, Arvin, Bakersfield, East Palo Alto, El Centro, Mammoth Lakes, Paramount, Salinas, San Diego** and **Ventura**, and regions in the **San Joaquin Valley** and the **Coachella Valley**.

The premise of this program was to provide flexible technical assistance to address the varied and evolving capacity challenges of local governments, while also sharing best practices and lessons learned to help inform state programs. ILG developed customized work plans with each community based on their self-identified needs including:

- Grant writing assistance
- Project development guidance
- Direct connections to existing state technical assistance and funding programs
- Resource procurement and partnership development (e.g. securing program fellows and identifying non-profit partners)
- Climate action and resilience planning
- Training, consultation and facilitation services (including strategic planning and public engagement)
- Peer-to-peer learning opportunities
- Communications support



Key accomplishments of the BOOST Program:

- ILG provided grant writing assistance or support on 59 grants totaling almost \$50 million including \$42,918,714 in California Climate Investment (CCI) funding opportunities and \$6,630,000 in SB2/LEAP grants to support planning, affordable housing, equitable transportation and climate mitigation and resilience projects.
- ILG obtained funding or support to assist six BOOST communities with developing or updating Climate Action and/or Climate Resilience Plans.
- ILG provided customized community engagement trainings/services for more than half of the BOOST-partners in an effort to facilitate meaningful, inclusive and authentic public engagement.
- ILG facilitated partnerships between BOOST communities and state agencies.



Aerial view of the City of Arcata. Photo courtesy of Humboldt State University

Tackling **Social Equity** to Create a More Sustainable Future

California is known for its natural beauty, economic opportunity and unprecedented efforts to address climate change. Just like all communities in California are very different, the opportunities to address climate impacts can be different too. The BOOST Program set out to explore those differences and provide technical assistance to varying types of communities in California to demonstrate the variety of possible approaches to address climate change so that it advances health, economic prosperity, environmental quality and social equity.

Social equity is distinct from equality in that it does not seek to offer the same services to everyone, but instead prioritizes the most under-resourced and disadvantaged communities. While this concept is relatively simple, complexities arise as local governments try to balance their core function of providing essential services to their entire community, while addressing past injustices and creating sound policies, plans and programs that prevent future inequities from occurring.

Obtaining the support of leadership and employing a holistic approach to addressing the needs of the most marginalized groups in a community are both crucial elements to achieve social equity for the long-term. In many cases, both can be achieved through inclusive and authentic public engagement, which often leads to a deeper understanding of the inequities that exist.

San Diego: **Creating “Complete Communities” Fosters Social Equity**

Since 2018, the City of San Diego has been working on a package of “Complete Communities” initiatives aimed at improving neighborhoods all across the city, with a particular focus on neighborhoods that have been underserved and neglected.

The four initiatives that comprise the “Complete Communities” Program address housing, transportation, parks and infrastructure. Together, the initiatives aim to create incentives to build homes near transit, provide more mobility choices and enhance opportunities for residents to walk, bike and play. While many cities throughout the state share similar goals, San Diego’s Complete Communities initiatives are unique in that they seek to remove long-standing regulations and thwart traditional funding structures that have primarily benefitted more affluent neighborhoods.

Many in the San Diego region support the principle of investing in what the city calls “Communities of Concern,” but some objected to key elements of the plan expressing concerns and wanting to ensure that there was a robust engagement effort that incorporated public input.



Staff from ILG, the California Strategic Growth Council and City of San Diego at the kick off meeting in September 2019

To help the city address these concerns, ILG worked with the city’s planning department staff and leadership to develop an online workshop. The workshop provided an opportunity to hear an overview of each of the initiatives, share input that was already provided and allow the participants to provide real-time virtual feedback in a public setting.

Substantial promotion helped attract more than 400 registrants. Because the group was so large, the technology could not accommodate breakout groups or live discussion, so ILG developed polling questions that ascertained the attendees’ demographic information and their general perspectives about housing, parks, transit and equity. Through this online polling during the meeting, it was clear that even though participants came from different areas within the city, they had a similar definition of equity.

In the months after the workshop, city staff incorporated the new public input into the initiatives. This resulted in the city proposing its strongest ever affordable housing program for mixed-income projects and the city’s most protective anti-displacement and tenant protection policies; the mobility initiative was designed with an even greater focus on delivering infrastructure improvements in communities of concern; and the parks program placed greater emphasis on land acquisition for new parks and included a new urban watershed park typology. The city is now more focused than ever on equitable decision making and community engagement. ILG is administering the city’s first ever community-driven engagement effort that focuses on communities of concern to inform the city’s update to its Climate Action Plan and development of its first Climate Resilience Plan.



“The BOOST Program provided invaluable training to our staff in facilitating public outreach and developing external capacity building within the community,”

- Heidi VonBlum, Deputy Director of Environmental Policy and Public Spaces, City of San Diego

Paramount: Planning for a More Equitable Future

Under-resourced communities such as the City of Paramount face staff capacity challenges and limited resources to invest in climate planning. Though the city had been taking consistent steps to build a more vibrant and resilient community, they lacked a cohesive plan and expert guidance to prioritize climate programming. Starting a plan from scratch during a global pandemic was not ideal, but was critical to ensuring the

long term sustainability and resilience of each community. To overcome barriers of limited staff time and funding, the city utilized an existing regional framework as a template for their climate action plan (CAP), and customized it to meet the needs and priorities of their communities.

To fill gaps in data needed to inform their CAP, ILG helped Paramount conduct an online survey and phone interview. The survey was available in multiple languages, and the city worked with community-based organization partners to develop the questions and ensure the language was understandable and distributed to a wide variety of community members.

Paramount learned from the interviews and survey responses that equity and public health should be overarching principles in their CAP. Simply including transportation and recycling measures as mitigation strategies was not going to be enough. Incorporating mitigation and greenhouse gas emissions reductions as a co-benefit of taking actions to promote equity and health resonated more with community members.



“For disadvantaged communities, like Paramount, resources are limited. Through the BOOST Program, not only were we able to receive financial assistance for the development of our Climate Action Plan, but we received significant resources in the form of expertise. In essence, BOOST was more like an extension of our staff, but with significant knowledge in climate adaptation and environmental resources that is helping us guide our path forward and making our CAP attainable.”

- Adriana Figueroa, Public Works Director, City of Paramount



BEST PRACTICE TIP

In the face of a global pandemic, economic uncertainty and limited capacity, local agencies need to be intentional and creative before embarking on yet another engagement. Review existing community feedback, seek out data from recent engagement efforts and leverage existing frameworks and resources before starting an entirely new process.

Strategies for resilience and adaptation must be front and center in the climate planning efforts of communities where many are hurt first and worst by the impacts of climate change. While some strategies could yield more significant greenhouse gas emissions reductions, Paramount found it was important to include measures that were also directly meaningful to the community's everyday lives. Measures such as free transit vouchers would reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions from personal vehicles, but it was even more important to the community to focus on promoting ridership of public transit and ensuring adequate access to key destinations. Including resilience in the CAP was not just about critical infrastructure and funding plans, but also about incorporating ways to conduct specific outreach and education, or offer incentives for the most vulnerable residents.



Staff from ILG, the California Strategic Growth Council and City of Paramount at the kick off meeting in October 2019



Youth volunteers pitching in at the City of Paramount's 2019 Earth Day Event



Spane Park, City of Paramount

Facilitating Authentic Community Engagement to Build Trust

Authentic and inclusive public engagement is key to understanding the needs, values and concerns of a community's residents. All too often, local governments engage their residents and community-based organizations on specific initiatives, and only when required. To be most effective, engagement should be continuous to develop meaningful relationships that maximize benefits and build trust. This proactive and consistent approach will also be beneficial when applying for grants that require engagement on shortened timelines. Leveraging past efforts can not only preserve staff time and capacity and help expedite projects, it can build trust and demonstrate a true respect for the time and input of community residents.

Bakersfield: **Building Community Trust through Shared Leadership**

In the Southeast Bakersfield neighborhood known as the MLKcommUNITY, poor air quality combined with decades of inadequate transportation, bad land use policies and underinvestment have resulted in significant mobility obstacles for low-income residents. These conditions caused residents to harbor a severe lack of trust for their

local government. This is not uncommon in many under-resourced communities across California that face limited access to safe and affordable transportation to medical care, healthy food, pharmacies or local amenities. To break the cycle of underinvestment and rebuild trust between local agencies and the community, it is critical to implement shared leadership strategies that are born directly from the needs and priorities of the community and to build community capacity to envision, plan and implement the projects.

In Bakersfield, community-based organization, local government and nonprofit partners all collaborated to build the capacity of the MLKcommUNITY to address historic disparities and foster trust between residents and the city. The partners understood the importance of

developing a shared community vision so they compiled a collaborative grant application for the Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) around transportation equity. Each partner contributed resources ranging from subject matter expertise, to staff time, community engagement expertise and project management skills. While the grant proposal took months to develop and many coordination meetings, each partner built new capacity and deepened their bench of expertise.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Community driven-processes can foster trust and increased buy-in for new projects, programs and plans. By serving as supporters and partners of community-based organizations (CBOs) on grant applications or project proposals rather than serving as the lead, local governments can help to facilitate long-term community capacity to turn vision into implementation.

This effort will culminate in an action-based Transportation Equity Roadmap that the community and City of Bakersfield will implement together, even beyond the life of the grant. The Roadmap will chart a clear course for the development, funding and implementation of mobility improvements and community-identified solutions that will significantly improve access to critical destinations and support workforce development.

Salinas: **Community Engagement Increases Cultural Awareness**

Any local jurisdiction that wants to build trust with its residents, particularly its marginalized communities, should seek to understand and uplift the cultural legacy of that community. That includes acknowledging historical injustice and the current social and political climate. Not doing so may lead to further distrust or perceived as a lack of respect for the time, expertise and resources of the community members who need support the most.

Government agencies and non-profit organizations often request information from vulnerable communities with the admirable intent to obtain information to better assist them. But these communities often experience engagement fatigue. Before contacting the key stakeholders, local governments should do as much research as possible, like reviewing local news articles, websites, blogs and social media to gain familiarity with the community before approaching them. This preliminary research will help ensure city staff has a basic understanding of key issues, players and opportunities even before the first meeting. Once a foundation is established, it is important to obtain additional insights about the cultural history and landscape from various sources to truly understand how best to support the community.

In the City of Salinas, farmworker discrimination, disparate health outcomes and distrust of local law enforcement motivated the Latino community to become more actively engaged in local decision-making processes. Over the past decade, the city embarked on an authentic and sustained public engagement campaign to improve trust and health outcomes for its residents. The city launched several bilingual community outreach and visioning plans that have unified residents to pursue common goals of social equity and sustainability to ensure the fundamental needs of every resident are met. The city has been careful to ensure that all of its efforts are coordinated so as not to disrespect the time and commitment of the residents that have participated in past efforts. The foundation for all planning and projects is *Visión Salinas*, a set of guiding principles aimed at improving the health, equity and wellbeing of the Salinas community as a whole.

Building off the success of the city's bilingual planning efforts and successful community engagement, ILG assisted Salinas with the submission of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) Culture of Health Prize grant application. Out of 90 Phase I



Staff from ILG, the City of Bakersfield and the MLKcommUNITY Initiative in February 2020



A father and son engage in a mapping exercise at the Alisal Community Design Workshop



Navidad Community Garden in the City of Salinas

applicants, Salinas was one of 21 communities selected to move forward to Phase II. The application highlights the city's commitment to deep and authentic engagement with its residents, despite language and access barriers that can typically pose as roadblocks. It also emphasizes Salinas' holistic approach to fostering a healthy community for all residents by developing individual neighborhood specific plans with projects and policies targeted to the unique needs of those communities.



“Salinas has embraced its unique and diverse community and used it as a stepping stone for creating a cohesive and vibrant place in which its residents can work, play and thrive.”

- Megan Hunter, Community Development Director, City of Salinas



Engagement in a Digital Environment

Many of the BOOST communities and local governments statewide struggled to navigate the transition to virtual engagement that was required due to safety concerns caused by COVID-19. While many tenets of in-person engagement remain true in a virtual world, designing and facilitating virtual public meetings and workshops was new and daunting to many local governments. In response to that need, the ILG team facilitated tailored trainings for the City of San Diego and the City of Arcata on virtual public engagement. ILG also provided two webinars, a BOOST Live session and individual coaching for BOOST communities on how to plan, design and implement public engagement processes in an online environment.

Below are a number of tips to consider when designing virtual meetings and workshops:

- Explain the Technology Platform
- No “Lectures” More Than 10-15 Minutes
- Consider Different Learning Styles
- Use Visuals
- Let the Audience Tell Their Stories
- Consider Language Access Needs
- Ensure Multiple Voices Present
- Solicit Comments and Questions
- Ask “Softball” Opening Questions
- Use a “Bike Rack”
- Pick the “Right” Platform

The sheer number of available virtual engagement platforms and digital tools can be overwhelming. The ILG team shared information about the pros and cons of different platforms and key considerations (cost, staff time, level of input needed) to help BOOST communities determine the “right” approach and meeting design.

“The BOOST Program has offered the City a framework to conduct engagement that reflects the whole community and helped the City develop strategies to reach traditionally marginalized people in our community.”

- David Loya, Community Development Director, City of Arcata

Next Level **Collaboration:** Beyond Checking the Box

Regional collaboration is the foundation for effective planning and operations. Building partnerships among cities, regional agencies, educational institutions, community members and non-profit and for-profit organizations within a region is not only vital to

address long-term issues like climate change and resilience, but it is necessary to address many other complex systems like housing and transportation. While building a true regional partnership takes time, it can be incredibly beneficial, especially for disadvantaged communities or those that do not have the capacity or financial resources to address such large issues on their own. Regional partnerships often result in efficiencies of service, reduced costs and expedited implementation of large-scale projects.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

True partnership occurs when all parties are clear on their roles, what they bring to the table, and are willing to make an investment and accept the risks associated with the effort.

Local governments can leverage partnerships to help establish trust within their communities and build their own capacities during a time when local resources were stretched to the limit.

Arcata: **Collaboration Leads to Historic Groundbreaking Award**

Located on the Northern California coast and in the heart of the redwood region, the City of Arcata struggles like many California communities to provide affordable housing opportunities while maintaining a high standard of living for all, such as students, seniors and other vulnerable populations, including its tribal populations.

The City of Arcata partnered with the Yurok Indian Housing Authority (YIHA), Yurok Tribe, Humboldt Transit Authority, Native Foods Council and others to submit a successful application for an Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grant to fund the 30th Street Commons Project. The project includes the development of 36 affordable housing units with biking and walking infrastructure as well as access to fresh produce in a low income, high unemployment neighborhood. The highlight of the collaborative approach is the project's unique features and design. It addresses a variety of tribal community needs, creates cultural preservation opportunities and advances local and regional planning efforts and equity goals. Not only does the proposed project greatly support the Yurok Tribe's mission by continuing the traditions of cultural and spiritual preservation, but it also supports the city's pro-housing programs to create a more sustainable and resilient community.



Aerial view of Arcata Plaza. Photo courtesy of Humboldt State University.

“This project represents the first time that Yurok citizens will have access to affordable housing in an area where there is a university, a Native American health clinic, transportation and all of the other quality-of-life improving amenities Arcata has to offer. We are extremely excited about this partnership with the City of Arcata. We are equally proud to be the first tribe to receive an Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities grant, which is going to create numerous positive opportunities for tribal and non-tribal citizens.”

- Richard “Dickie” Myers, Chairperson of YIHA’s Board of Commissioners

The tribe’s leaders acknowledge that this never would have been possible without the assistance of its many partners. The Tribe received technical assistance from the California Coalition for Rural Housing, SGC’s contract TA provider, and from the BOOST Program, which worked to strengthen ties between the tribe and city and to share valuable information the tribe didn’t have.

“We were able to provide maps and other important data sets that the tribe simply didn’t have. We look forward to continued collaboration with the tribe to create a better community for all.”

- David Loya, Community Development Director, City of Arcata

East Palo Alto: Broad Partnership Tackles Flood Protection

In the City of East Palo Alto, a comprehensive partnership is helping to address flood protection needs. The city, along with the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, the San Mateo County Flood and Sea Level Rise Resiliency District, the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority, ILG, Acterra and Nuestra Casa worked together to prepare an application for an Urban Flood Protection grant. The call for proposals could not have been a more timely opportunity for the SAFER Bay Project, a multiphase project that required several funding sources to remove flood burdens and protect the community of East Palo Alto from impending sea level rise. The SAFER Bay Project is part of the ongoing efforts to fund critical flood protection and ecosystem support while at the same time addressing equity and environmental justice issues.



Historic flooding in East Palo Alto illustrating the need for comprehensive flood protection

The collaborative partnership was initially formed to apply for the \$6 million Urban Flood Protection grant, but the group was struggling to maintain momentum because of the pandemic. The stakeholders agreed to pause the planning to ensure they could submit a competitive application and implement the project if awarded. When they reconvened, the group considered how to address shrinking staff capacities and rapidly shifting priorities. Thanks to the strong partnerships formed before the outbreak, the project team was able to reassign application workloads and re-delegate implementation. The San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority took the lead on the development of the application, Nuestra Casa stepped up to co-lead community engagement efforts and Acterra, committed to providing language access and outreach support. Delegating power to the community to shape the outreach process also proved to be a critical step in fostering democratic participation and community-driven civic leadership.

Ventura: Capacity Building in the Wake of Disaster

Collaboration provided much-needed capacity for the City of Ventura as well. The Cabrillo Village Multi-Use Path Gap Project was not necessarily a top priority for a city that was still dealing with the aftermath of the 2017 Thomas Fire that caused more than \$2.2 billion in damages and took a massive toll on the city's residents and staff. The passion and motivation of community champions and advocates convinced the city to make it a priority. By forming a partnership, the City of Ventura, Ventura Health Care Agency, Ventura County Public Works, Sierra Club, Friends of the Santa Clara River, Bike Ventura and ILG were able to combine resources to seek and apply for funding. With added partner capacity and strong community support, suddenly, the Cabrillo Village Multi-Use Path Gap Project was a viable possibility.



Kellogg Park, City of Ventura

Community leaders were the ultimate catalysts for the idea behind a grant application that aimed to connect a community of farmworker families to an existing biking and walking trail to help improve activity and access to key destinations such as schools, grocery stores, and parks. Community champions brought the project to city staff and ILG, thinking it might be a good fit for the STEP Program. After reviewing the STEP guidelines, ILG determined that the project was better suited for Cycle 5 Active Transportation Program (ATP) funding. Several non-profit organizations including The Sierra Club, Friends of the Santa Clara River, Bike Ventura and ILG wrote sections of the grant. City of Ventura staff and a consultant led the technical aspects and project coordination. Ongoing engagement ensured that the project included features that actually addressed community needs. The result of this unique collaboration was a winning application! The “Cabrillo Segment Multi-Use Path Gap Completion” project scored 90 points, the highest scoring ATP application ever for the City of Ventura. The grant application was the second highest scored for the county, which means that it is first in line for ATP funds.

Coachella Valley: Regional Partnership Addresses Housing Crisis

A key component of successful collaboration is having the infrastructure for stakeholders to connect, share issues of importance and discuss solutions. In the Coachella Valley, the Coachella Valley Association of Governments (CVAG) and their partner Lift to Rise provide that space for collaborative conversations. Lift to Rise, is a collective impact organization that has helped organize community and institutional leaders to collaboratively solve the underlying causes of poverty and inequality to create a more resilient region.

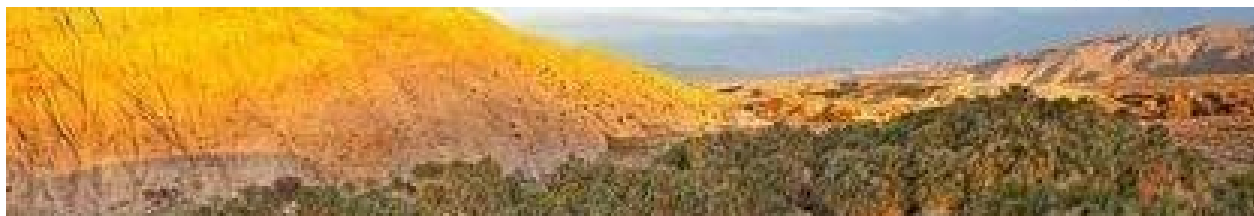
The group has created a Collective Action Network (CAN) for each of its focus areas to promote change by creating and testing pilot interventions, and then scaling what works towards broader interventions that create impacts across the region. This process of continuous, evidence-based evaluation helps constantly refine strategies and ensure that the group is achieving its intended results.

Their Housing Stability CAN has been focusing on creating long-term systems change by advancing a regional vision for safe and affordable housing by encouraging the construction of new housing units. To support this, ILG leveraged its partnership with California's Department of Housing and Community Development to provide trainings and grant-writing expertise to help local agencies within the region understand and apply for grants to support planning efforts to facilitate and expedite local housing production. In addition, ILG supplied trainings to assist cities within the region on how to engage their residents in updating local housing elements in a virtual-environment to comply with the COVID-19 protocols.

Lift to Rise works closely with local governments, regional agencies and service providers to ensure that all families have equal access to information and community resources, while simultaneously providing emergency relief to families and residents in the region. During this time, Lift to Rise disbursed more than \$12 million in the form of direct cash and rental assistance, helping nearly 8,000 households in eastern Riverside County stay housed and pay for food, utilities, childcare and other vital expenses.

“It’s crucial for a regional initiative like Lift to Rise to have strong relationships with actors outside and inside of the local ecosystem. These partnerships provide vital support and context as we work to realize our community priorities by navigating broader institutions and systems. We’re grateful for the bridges that the ILG BOOST Program extends for us and the conscious, cooperative network it provides.”

Heather Vaikona, Lift to Rise, President & CEO



Arvin: Partnership Builds Community Capacity

With limited staff, many staff members at the City of Arvin already wear many hats. The COVID-19 pandemic just compounded the problem. Even though capacity at the city was low, there was significant opportunity to address a number of systemic problems that the city has been facing for years, such as a lack of affordable housing and struggling local businesses. Self Help Enterprises, a community development organization, offered a much-needed solution to a longstanding problem. The city knew of this regional assistance, but did not take them up on their first offer to partner.

Too often state organizations and others offer one-time assistance or opportunities to local governments. However, because of dynamic conditions and shifting priorities, ongoing and recurring assistance is vital for grant programs to help communities address their most pressing needs. In addition, it helps to present funding and program opportunities to both staff and elected officials. Doing so can increase the likelihood of success as they may not share the same appetite or ability to digest the information and connect it to current needs.



ILG and Arvin staff with one of Arvin's zero emission buses

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Too often state organizations and others offer one-time assistance or opportunities to local governments. However, because of dynamic conditions and shifting priorities, ongoing and recurring assistance is vital for grant programs to help communities address their most pressing needs. In addition, it helps to present funding and program opportunities to both staff and elected officials. Doing so can increase the likelihood of success as they may not share the same appetite or ability to digest the information and connect it to current needs.

Through the BOOST partnership, ILG reconnected the City of Arvin with Self Help Enterprises to form a capacity building partnership. As a result of this partnership, the City of Arvin was able to access approximately \$200,000 in CARES Act funding from Kern County and more than \$100,000 in new federal funds from the Community Development Block Grant Coronavirus Response Round 1 (CDBG-CV1) Fund. As of early 2021, Self Help Enterprises and Arvin also have an application pending for CV2 funds, and applied jointly for Permanent Local Housing Allocation (PLHA) funding through the Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD).

The PLHA funding will help develop a revolving loan program over the next four years, which will help Arvin residents bring garage conversions up to code. This will, in turn, count towards the city's Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) goals.

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“We didn’t have the ability to process loans for rental assistance or to administer programs to assist businesses that were affected by COVID. We couldn’t access this funding without Self Help’s partnership. We just don’t have the people with the specialization that was needed.”

- Christine Viterelli, Grants Manager, City of Arvin

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Authentic partnerships that extend beyond “checking the box” can promote a culture of dialogue and collaboration while building trust and lasting relationships within a community. Diverse and inclusive partnerships can generate a flow of ideas and equitable solutions and result in meaningful public projects. The benefits of collaboration are endless. One may not even recognize all the benefits right away. After talking, exploring and working together, projects that truly serve the community often emerge. Ultimately, engaging local and state partners in a way that establishes trust and builds long-term relationships is imperative to the future resilience of every community.



Surfer’s Point Managed Retreat Project, City of Ventura. Damaged bike trail due to erosion.

Providing **Flexible Technical** Assistance for Under-Resourced Communities

A key component of the success of the BOOST Program was ILG's ability to pivot and adjust to changing circumstances. In addition to the varied needs, capacities and resource constraints of the BOOST communities, the COVID-19 pandemic underscored how critical flexibility and nimbleness is to the success of technical assistance programs like BOOST.

ILG kicked off the BOOST Program by developing collaborative work plans and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with each of the twelve communities. When the nation shut down in March of 2020, the ILG team had to quickly evaluate and adapt to the changing circumstances. Not only was the ILG team unable to travel to conduct technical assistance and workshops in person, the BOOST communities themselves faced considerable barriers to continuing to serve their communities. Each community experienced unique challenges, like transitioning city operations to a remote environment, and redesigning city council and public meetings to virtual. This was particularly challenging considering many community members lacked access to reliable technology and adequate training. ILG pivoted our technical assistance and capacity building approach to meet the communities where they were and help them to address changing priorities while working toward shared goals of moving the needle on climate action.

EI Centro: **Strategic Planning - Zoom Style**

In early 2020, ILG developed an intensive in-person strategic planning process to guide the City of EI Centro through development of new goals for the next five years. Then COVID-19 overwhelmed the Imperial Valley. With the city's rapid shift to mobilizing its Emergency Operations Center, strategic planning fell dormant for months.

In the meantime, ILG transitioned to helping the city design and implement virtual public participation opportunities, which emerged as a high priority for maintaining community relationships and adhering to project timelines. The strategic planning effort was re-

imagined in the fall, with a new set of priorities and challenges



BEST PRACTICE TIP

The flexibility to adjust course to accommodate new factors and priorities helped the city address its current reality, while also planning for a sustainable and vibrant future.

at its center. Because of the flexible technical assistance partnership, ILG and the city were able to redesign the strategic planning sessions for a virtual and socially-distanced environment that accomplished strategic planning and staff engagement goals. The flexibility to adjust course to accommodate new factors and priorities helped the city address its current reality, while also planning for a sustainable and vibrant future.



“With the technical assistance provided by the ILG staff we were able to transform our approach to addressing climate action efforts. In addition, we are grateful to the ILG team for facilitating a strategic planning effort with our elected officials and management team. Our City truly benefited from the tools and resources provided by ILG and their expertise assisted and empowered us to focus on our community needs.”

- Marcela Piedra, City Manager, City of El Centro



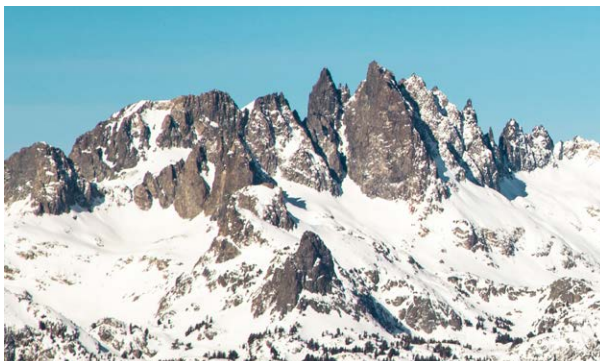
San Joaquin Valley: Adjusting Projects to Meet Evolving Needs

In response to the COVID pandemic, ILG worked with the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG) to pivot from an initial focus on homelessness to a new focus on securing additional funding for the region. ILG partnered with the COG to submit a successful \$7 million Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) implementation grant application. The funds will be used to add electric bikes, electric cars, EV chargers, mobile ticketing technology and workforce development to the City of Stockton with the aim to improve air quality and address community transportation needs.



Mammoth Lakes: Tailoring Assistance to Unique Circumstances

When it comes to technical assistance there is no one-size-fits-all approach. Under-resourced and rural communities face a variety of obstacles that make it harder to obtain funding for projects that align with their unique circumstances. While climate and equity projects are sorely needed in these communities, they often struggle to compete in state



Mammoth Mountain covered in fresh snow



The site of Mammoth Lakes' future affordable housing development, The Parcel

grant programs due to their inability to net significant greenhouse gas reductions due to their size, remote location or special circumstances. For this reason, it is imperative that grant programs offer designated funding for these types of communities. In addition, it is imperative that technical assistance providers and non-profit organizations seek to support these communities in a way that honors their unique needs and that is respectful of the resources and capacities currently in place.

This is particularly true of small and rural communities like the Town of Mammoth Lakes. By taking the time to understand the unique circumstances of Mammoth Lakes and their resource constraints, the ILG team was able to recommend grant programs that met those needs and offered them a competitive advantage, like over-the-counter funding. Through BOOST, ILG helped Mammoth Lakes secure a \$20 million Infill Infrastructure Grant from the California Department of Housing and Community Development to fund broadband, snow storage capacity and other key infrastructure elements for development of the town’s affordable housing project, the “Parcel”.

Incorporating Frequent Peer Learning Opportunities

One solution ILG employed to meet the changing needs of its BOOST communities was facilitating mutual and peer learning among the BOOST cohort.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Consistent communication and collaboration offered through a peer network creates opportunities for new ideas, shared data and creative solutions to long-standing and new challenges.

Consistent communication and collaboration offered through a peer network helped create opportunities for new ideas, shared data and creative solutions to long-standing and new challenges. It also makes efficient use of limited resources by helping local governments more easily replicate promising practices and advance past known challenges so each agency doesn’t need to “recreate the wheel.”



To facilitate peer learning and reduce duplication of efforts, the ILG team activated the BOOST communities as a cohort. ILG published a monthly e-newsletter and also hosted monthly virtual meetings, called “BOOST Live.” During these meetings, local agency staff and nonprofit partners shared promising practices and lessons learned on a variety of subjects ranging from climate action planning during a pandemic to developing local housing solutions and prioritizing sustainable transportation. These virtual gatherings served not only as a peer information exchange to speed up the diffusion of innovation across BOOST communities, they also provided a support system to talk through local challenges and workshop them in real-time. They also uncovered additional opportunities for technical assistance and capacity building that the ILG team could provide through BOOST.

Based on post-program surveys, BOOST participants recommend integrating even more peer learning opportunities, peer exchanges and connections, especially toward the beginning of any future technical assistance programs. This adjustment will help participants imagine new program ideas and possibly find solutions they would not have considered otherwise.

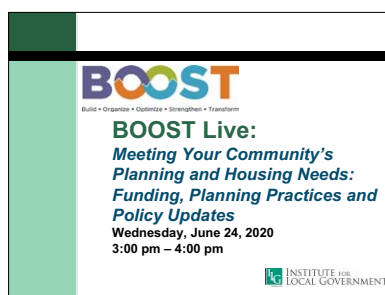
“**Not only did BOOST help our staff come together and stay focused when we had a lot of things going on, the program created a sense of fellowship by connecting us with neighbors and other small BOOST communities from across the state.**”

- Ruben Abrica, City Councilmember, City of East Palo Alto

In addition to hosting group calls with BOOST communities, ILG facilitated one-on-one exchanges with communities from across the state that have experience with everything from CCI funding to creative project approaches. For example, ILG organized a peer learning call with the Stockton Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) planning grant team to help the City of Bakersfield learn how to shape a successful TCC planning project of their own. ILG also connected Bakersfield with the City of Sacramento to discuss virtual engagement best practices for its General Plan update during COVID-19. In addition, ILG connected staff from the City of Arcata with staff from the City of Ventura to obtain information about and contacts for artist housing solutions.

“**Being connected to state agencies and to individual communities was huge. We got useful information as well as meaningful contact with other BOOST communities.**”

- Delo Freitas, Senior Planner, City of Arcata



Layering Funding Opportunities to Maximize Impact

Revenue shortfalls from the Coronavirus pandemic have decimated local agency budgets, threatening jobs, services and local economies. The League of California Cities estimates that cities statewide will face a \$7 billion revenue shortfall over the next two years with that number growing as the pandemic disrupts revenue flows to local economies. With diminishing local budgets and costs rapidly rising, it is necessary for local governments to think creatively about how to fund plans and projects related to sustainability and resilience. Rarely does one funding source cover an entire project. Looking holistically across available funding from various state programs and philanthropic sources proved successful in bringing together multiple pots of funding to address long-standing climate challenges in BOOST communities.

In an attempt to increase accountability and improve project effectiveness, many state funding programs have incorporated rigid funding provisions that do not account for some of the important costs that are needed to implement a project successfully from start to finish. These costs may include funding for planning, public engagement, maintenance or administration. Even in programs that allow funding for engagement efforts, costs for food, childcare, stipends or translation services -- which are vital to encouraging inclusive engagement -- are often not accepted. This gap often creates additional inequities as more disadvantaged communities are unable to bear these financial burdens, yet have an even greater need for such projects and outreach.

ILG was able to leverage some of the financial support it receives from the California Endowment and its affiliate organizations, the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association, to help fill some of the program funding gaps that were not covered by the BOOST contract with the Strategic Growth Council.



By layering funding sources, ILG was able to provide more robust public engagement trainings and facilitation for community workshops that emphasized outreach and translation to underrepresented populations in the cities of San Diego, Salinas and Bakersfield.

In addition, ILG was able to match various state funding sources to help support comprehensive planning efforts within individual BOOST communities. For example, with the City of Arcata, ILG assisted in writing grants for the

- Sustainable Agricultural Lands Conservation Planning Grant Program (funded by the Strategic Growth Council)
- SB2 Planning Grant Program (funded by the Department of Housing and Community Development)
- Local Early Action Planning Grant Program (funded by the Department of Housing Community Development) to help fund an update of the city's General Plan, which aims at facilitating infill development.

In addition, ILG helped write grants for an Affordable Housing Sustainable Communities Grant (funded by the Strategic Growth Council) and an Infill Infrastructure Grant (funded by the Department of Housing and Community Development) that will help implement affordable housing projects and the surrounding infrastructure. Similar efforts occurred in the cities of Ventura and Bakersfield where ILG helped each jurisdiction obtain over \$1 million for a comprehensive General Plan update and creation of a Climate Action and Resilience Plan using three separate grant sources.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

The fact that ILG has subject matter expertise beyond sustainability and climate action enabled the team to be responsive to the changing needs of BOOST communities before and after the pandemic; this broad-based and flexible approach allowed ILG to provide holistic technical assistance to the BOOST jurisdictions.

Leveraging ILG's Programs and Expertise

In addition to layering funding sources to increase the impact of the BOOST Program, ILG also drew upon the diverse expertise of the ILG team and expansive offerings of other ILG programs.

One of ILG's main program areas is public engagement, with a goal to imbed authentic, effective and inclusive public engagement practices that encourage greater public trust and confidence in local government, while also helping local jurisdictions achieve their goals. ILG's existing public engagement resources, trainings and expertise proved invaluable for the BOOST Program and participants. Over

the course of the BOOST Program, ILG provided in-person training, webinars, online workshops, and strategic council to BOOST communities on how to plan for, design and implement engagement processes and better navigate the transition to virtual engagement.

In September 2019, staff from Arcata, El Centro, SJCOG and San Diego, attended ILG's TIERS Public Engagement Training in San Diego. In this intensive two-day training, local government teams identify a public engagement case/project and work through each of the steps of the TIERS Framework – Think, Initiate, Engage, Review and Shift. The ILG team developed and provided customized public engagement training for staff from Arcata and San Diego focused on messaging, virtual engagement and cross-department collaboration and alignment. In July 2020 the ILG team hosted a webinar on general tips and strategies for virtual engagement and in September 2020 ILG hosted a webinar focused on virtual engagement for housing element updates. The July BOOST Live conversation was also focused on virtual engagement.

ILG also has a pillar of work focused on leadership and governance that helps local government leaders build a strong foundation of good government – trust, accountability, responsiveness and transparency. ILG's expertise in this area enabled the ILG team to provide strategic planning assistance to El Centro and a number of other resources and training opportunities for other BOOST communities. When the COVID crisis emerged, ILG provided a wide range of information on government operations, human resources, effective communications, budgeting and finance, labor negotiations and running an election in a pandemic. In all, the ILG team hosted over 15 webinars in 2020. All of which were offered free of charge to the BOOST communities and were recorded and distributed to those who were unable to attend in person.



Local government staff participate in ILG's TIERS public engagement training in San Diego 2019

Conclusion

The BOOST Program allowed the ILG team to work intensively with ten cities and two regions across the state to build capacity, seek funding, address equity concerns and plan for a more promising future. Although each BOOST community and each local government in California is unique, they share the same goal of wanting to improve their communities and the lives of their residents. To that end, the ILG team hopes the best practices and lessons learned here can help other jurisdictions address the myriad of challenges they face and better serve their communities.



The City of Arcata's Oyster Fest in 2019

Acknowledgements

About the Institute for Local Government

The Institute for Local Government (ILG) is the non-profit training and education affiliate of the League of California Cities, the California State Association of Counties and the California Special Districts Association, which represent thousands of local agencies across the state. ILG helps local government leaders navigate the constantly changing landscape of their jobs by offering training, technical assistance, written resources and facilitation services specifically designed for local agencies. From leadership to public engagement to housing and workforce, ILG helps local leaders with a wide range of issues. Visit www.ca-ilg.org to find out more.

Acknowledgements

The ILG team would like to thank the dedicated staff and elected officials at each of our BOOST communities for trusting us as a partner through this pilot program. We are in awe of your dedication and commitment to the communities you serve.

We also want to extend our gratitude to ILG Board Member Rod Gould, former California Air Resources Board Member Judy Mitchell and Assemblymember Richard Bloom for helping make the BOOST Program possible and for being tireless champions for local government and vibrant, healthy communities.

Lastly, we would like to thank the California Climate Investments Program and the California Strategic Growth Council (SGC), which provided funding and support to develop and implement this program. ILG acknowledges the commitment of SGC staff and technical assistance partners who supported the BOOST communities throughout this process by sharing their knowledge, expertise and commitment to achieving sustainability, equity, economic prosperity and better quality of life for all Californians, especially those living in the most under-resourced communities.



BOOST

Build • Organize • Optimize • Strengthen • Transform

