

WSDOT Community Outreach, Education, and Technical Assistance Program Final Report

Julie Meredith
Secretary of Transportation

Karena Houser
Director, Multimodal Planning & Data Division

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Department of Transportation**

Background

The Legislature directed WSDOT to develop and implement a community outreach, education and technical assistance program for overburdened communities and their community partners, funded by \$3,000,000 from the Climate Commitment Act account ([ESHB 2134 Sec. 219 \(10\)](#)). The purpose of the program is to:

- Develop community-centered carbon reduction strategies.
- Help overburdened communities access available funding to implement these strategies.

Development of the Program

WSDOT convened an internal working group that included people with skills and expertise in community engagement, carbon reduction policy and equitable grant-making. The group proposed and WSDOT leadership approved moving the program forward through two strategies.

STRATEGY 1: GRANT PROGRAM

Contract with a community-based organization partner to co-develop and implement a grant program to determine community-centered carbon reduction strategies that would be:

- **Community-centered** (meaning community-led), building capacity to leverage available funding.
- **Equitable**, defined as focused on delivering results within overburdened communities and with vulnerable populations as the decision-makers.
- **Adaptable**, based on meeting the community's needs where they were by making resources available for capacity building, implementation, or matching funds (leveraging project dollars).

STRATEGY 2: ACCESS TO FUNDING

Provide pathways toward shared decision-making and transparent funding processes.

Implementation of the Program

STRATEGY 1: GRANT PROGRAM STRATEGY

WSDOT solicited a grant administrator through an RFQ process. In that competitive process, Front and Centered was selected as the prime contractor. Front and Centered is a diverse and powerful coalition of groups that are led by communities of color across Washington state, whose missions and work come together at the intersection of equity, environmental and climate justice. Front and Centered developed the grant program and administered \$2.175 million in grants providing direct support of community-centered solutions to carbon reduction.

Grant Program Development

Front and Centered hosted two pre-scoping workshops, one with community only and one combined with WSDOT and community. The Transportation Justice Leadership Grant Program was developed using the insights gathered in these initial workshops, including:

- Provide support and technical assistance during the application process.
- Provide technical assistance as part of the grant program, remaining flexible in the programming to meet the needs as they developed.
- Provide additional support for reporting requirements, allowing the community-based organizations to focus on delivering the grant outcomes.

Grant Application Process

Front and Centered hosted three virtual and two in-person recruitment events. The in-person events were held in Spokane and Seattle.

- The grant received 38 applicants for a total of \$4,258,350 in requests.
- Applications were reviewed and scored using a rubric by WSDOT, Front and Centered staff, and coalition members.
- Applications that scored highest were invited to an interview. The interview provided additional information on the project's scope and budgets were finalized.

Grant Recipients Technical Assistance and Education

Front and Centered provided technical assistance and education to grant recipients to build their capacity and ensure consistent outcomes. The technical assistance was provided through a bi-weekly two-hour meeting. The grantees were expected to send at least one member of their team to the meetings and provided direction to the design of the technical assistance. Technical assistance areas included:

- Budgeting, finance, audit proofing, data and data management, and agency partnerships.
- Reporting – engaged artist and storytellers to support the grantees on sharing the impact of the work and supporting the grantees capacity to form future funding and collaborative partnerships.
- Relationship building – Members, including WSDOT, could share experiences and problem solve. This provided real-time removing of barriers for success.

Grant Recipients

Nineteen grants totaling \$2.175 million were awarded to community-based organizations across Washington through the Transportation Justice Leadership Grant Program.

ROUND 1

Community-Based Organization	Impact	Amount
Drivers Union	Support a just transition for EV drivers to low/no carbon alternatives. Raise awareness with driver community, identify barriers and work to remove them, advocate for policies that will drive lower VMT overall.	\$150,000
Duwamish Valley Sustainability Association	Educate the community on the circular economy project within South Park, Seattle. Incorporate alternative fuels infrastructure in the neighborhood – electric, biogas.	\$75,000
Ensemble Washington	Distribute e-bikes, bus passes to high need individuals. Educate the community on low-carbon transportation options. Purchase van for vanpool service – low carbon access to needed connection points.	\$204,000
Innovative Change Makers	Address transportation inequities and reduce carbon emissions through a BIPOC Youth leadership development program. Host workshops, bike distribution events with community education, and provide youth led advocacy.	\$150,000
Pacific Education Institute	Develop Indigenous Climate teachings into curriculum for K-12 educators. Develop and train educators with the assistance of the Suquamish and Quinault tribes. Host a two-day workshop held in partnership with tribes.	\$90,000
Puget Sound SAGE	Working within the Chinatown International District (CID) of Seattle to provide education, empowerment rooted in history, and impact the outcomes of the proposed CID Sound Transit light rail station.	\$150,000
Renton Technical College	Develop a training program to enable electric charging station repair pathway and purchase electrical charging stations to support training program.	\$125,000
Whose Streets Our Streets, MLK Transportation Justice	Provide education on transportation options and developing community-centered transportation solutions and advocacy strategies through this BIPOC Youth leadership development program.	\$278,295

Community-Based Organization	Impact	Amount
Somali Independent Business Association	Elevate the needs of Vulnerable Populations through educational workshops, focus groups and coming together to build community-centered solutions as part of the Breathe easy, Live Better in King County project.	\$45,950
WA State Coalition of African Community Leaders	Complete participatory research to understand the barriers to a just transition for the African Diaspora community. Leverage findings to develop policy action plans.	\$150,000
Women of Wisdom	Increase access to EV Carshare and E-Bike program – purchase of vehicle, bikes and associated infrastructure and provide an education program for transitioning to low carbon transportation.	\$350,000

ROUND 2

Community-Based Organization	Impact	Amount
Asian Pacific Culture Center	Purchase a vanpool vehicle to connect community members to needed services. Provide low carbon alternative transportation for drivers.	\$65,000
Beyond Survival	Provide vanpool services to connect community members to needed services. Provide low carbon alternatives for service delivery.	\$15,000
Kitsap Black Student Union	Purchase a vanpool vehicle to connect youth to transportation justice leadership programming.	\$40,000
Permaculture	Conduct participatory data collection in support of low carbon neighborhood planning efforts.	\$75,000
Revive Center for Returning Citizens	Purchase a vanpool vehicle to connect community members to needed services. Provide low carbon alternatives for service delivery.	\$103,000
Snohomish County Transportation Coalition	Work with community members to safely use transit and bicycles for access through this bilingual mobility navigation program.	\$52,900

Community-Based Organization	Impact	Amount
Transit Riders Union	Improve transit access and increase ridership, creating and championing policy changes toward more accessible and affordable public transit.	\$35,000
West Papua Campaign	Provide an education program to support more access to low-carbon transportation options. Electric scooter lending library.	\$20,000

Lessons Learned

- WSDOT's partnership with Front and Centered, a community-based organization, as grant administrator provided tremendous benefit both from maintaining the community-centered focus of the grant as well as recruiting front line communities.
- Grant administration has a tremendous upfront cost, and a community-based partner may not have the resources to extend the credit. WSDOT, and all state agencies, are reimbursement based; and that system requires any grant making partner to carry costs for an extended amount of time. Learning from this opportunity, our community-based partner will likely not have the ability to host another grant program based on the impact to their finances. This limits who we can partner with and how we can partner.

Grantee Impact in their own Words

"Funding for community-led transportation solutions like Women of Wisdom EV Carshare/E-Bike is essential because it allows residents, local organizations, and grassroots leaders to directly address transportation challenges that impact their daily lives. In Benton and Franklin counties, many working families, agricultural workers, students, and small business owners struggle with limited access to reliable and affordable transportation. Without investment in community-driven solutions, these challenges persist, limiting economic mobility and environmental progress."

"By centering the voices and leadership of overburdened communities through funding for community-led solutions in transportation, it creates lasting, equitable solutions that enhance mobility and reduce emissions for those most in need."

"The demographics of the youth we work with are predominantly Black, Pacific Islander, and from low-income households and experience significant barriers in accessing affordable and equitable transportation options. These barriers can prevent them from fully participating in educational, employment, and community opportunities."

STRATEGY 2: ACCESS TO FUNDING STRATEGY

The Sandy Williams Connecting Communities Program awards grants to fund projects that improve active transportation connectivity across current and legacy state highways. The proviso provided funding to establish a Community Advisory Council (CAC) for this program. The CAC was convened to co-design the grant evaluation process and ensure that projects receiving funding delivered the greatest benefit to community members.

WSDOT sought candidates for the CAC that had lived experience using active transportation, showed established commitment to equity and environmental justice, and were members of a community that is presently or historically furthest from environmental justice. The final CAC represented communities geographically throughout the state. WSDOT received 63 applications and accepted 12 committee members.

The CAC met four times and provided insights through storytelling exercises, group work, and surveys. These insights were foundational for the new screening tool and grant decision rubric. Several CAC members joined the grant application review team and developed the final funding proposal. The legislature makes the final decision on grant awards.

The CAC was a positive way for community members to support WSDOT in delivering these important funds. It created capacity within the community to understand how granting decisions are made and resources are distributed.

Lessons Learned

- The timeline has an impact on the amount of work that can be done and the impact of that work. WSDOT will provide more time for the community to come together in support of our work as a best practice.
- Community compensation requires additional administrative support. Onboarding community members to the statewide vendor system and ensuring they are paid in a timely manner requires additional staffing resources.

CAC Participants in their own Words

"This council exemplifies how focused community engagement can foster a strong sense of ownership and lead to impactful positive change."

"This advisory council was a great idea to help with our own inputs and experiences as a youth. Hopefully, we can have more exposure to these types of opportunities and discussions in the future."

Contact Information

Jesseca Brand, Community Engagement Program Manager

Jesseca.Brand@wsdot.wa.gov