

Memorandum

To: MEMBERS

Roundtable Meeting: February 3, 2022

From: MITCH WEISS, Executive Director

Reference Number: 6

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Subject: Discussion: Equity Advisory Committee Structure

Summary:

C. Sequoia Erasmus, Associate Deputy Director for Equity and Engagement at the California Transportation Commission (Commission), Avital Barnea, Deputy Secretary for Transportation Planning at the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA), and Amar Cid, Race and Equity Program Manager, for the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Office on Race and Equity, will provide an overview to Roundtable members on insights into existing equity advisory bodies at local and state level agencies in California. These models are being considered by staff in the development of a structural and procedural proposal for the future Equity Advisory Committee(s). Additionally, conversations held within the Equity Advisory Roundtable continue to inform the proposal development.

Background:

The Commission, CalSTA, and Caltrans are coordinating to establish an Equity Advisory Committee(s) focused on transportation equity and environmental justice issues as they relate to transportation planning and programming. As documented in the Roundtable Charter (available at: <https://catc.ca.gov/-/media/ctc-media/documents/programs/equity-public-engagement/equity-advisory-roundtable/roundtable-charter-2021-a11y.pdf>), the Roundtable will advise the Commission on the development of an Equity Advisory Committee.

The September 2021 Roundtable Meeting featured a discussion panel composed of Roundtable members and a representative from the San Diego Association of Governments. Panelists identified core themes for coordinating and convening effective equity advisory committees. These themes include:

- Active listening; honest presentations of work and initiatives, including challenges and limitations; willingness to share power; and ability to take ownership of past wrongs is crucial to trust building within the committee structure.
- Compensation of community-based organizations is essential for those agencies to engage in the work. Some state agencies compensate experts for their time, so members of an equity committee should be compensated in a similar manner.

- Centering marginalized and disenfranchised perspectives and leadership can address historic power imbalances and ensure that all communities are represented and heard.

At the October 2021 Commission meeting, Veronica Eady, Senior Deputy Executive Officer of Policy and Equity with the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, presented lessons learned from implementing a government-level equity advisory committee. Committees that support the Bay Area Air Quality Management District initiatives are fundamental to accountability and transparency. Positions on committees are publicly solicited by leveraging existing relationships and apportioned by total population or number of disadvantaged communities per county. Responsibility and power sharing are evidenced in the candidate selection process, where all submitted applications are screened for interview candidacy by non-applicant community members and staff members of sister agencies. Another consideration for the support of these committees is monetary compensation, which is based upon regional cost of living expenses, standard practices from other agency groups, as well as time and effort obligations for the operation of the committee. Lastly, expectation setting in the form of partnership agreements and charters, as well as regular reporting and assigning liaisons to the Board, help maintain accountability and transparency to the public. These committees require a significant amount of Bay Area Air Quality Management District staff time and effort but, according to Ms. Eady, have been well worth the effort to maintain trust with the communities.

At the December 2021 Commission meeting, Noemí Gallardo, Public Advisor at the California Energy Commission presented on experiences implementing a state-level equity advisory committee. The Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group was mandated by Senate Bill 350 (De León, Chapter 547, Statutes of 2015) and serves as a two-way communication channel with the California Energy Commission, as well as the California Public Utilities Commission. The Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group improves policies and programs of the California Energy Commission by providing feedback, acting as an accountability watchdog, and functions as ambassadors of clean energy by providing education to their communities about the California Energy Commission and related activities. Significant staff time and support is needed to ensure this relationship functions smoothly and efficiently. The Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group is governed by three officers, nominated and voted internally by the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group, who are supported by staff from the California Energy Commission, and undergo yearly conflict of interest training. The Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group also narrowed the focus of the group to ten topics for 2022, selecting one or two members who act as a lead for a single priority area who can complete any tasks relating to the topic, and up to five members who act as a subject matter expert. At the end of each calendar year, the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group releases a report using the priority areas as chapters and outlining the work completed, which increases transparency and accountability. Monetary compensation in the form of per diem and reasonable expenses was mandated by Senate Bill 350.