

Community Outreach, Education & Technical Assistance Program

Roger Millar

Secretary of Transportation

Karena Houser

Director, Multimodal Planning & Data Division

June 2024



Washington State
Department of Transportation

Background

The Legislature directed WSDOT to develop a community outreach, education and technical assistance program for overburdened communities and their community partners, required in the 2023-25 Supplemental Transportation Budget, ESHB 2134, Section 219 (10). The purpose of the program is to:

- Develop community-centered carbon reduction strategies; and
- 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; and
- **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

WSDOT is working to implement the grant program and the access to funding strategies.

STRATEGY 1: GRANT PROGRAM STRATEGY

WSDOT solicited, through an RFQ process, a community-based partner that could support the creation of a grant program. The grant program is currently being established in partnership with *Front and*

Centered, our prime contractor. *Front and Centered* is a diverse and powerful coalition of communities of color-led groups across Washington state, whose missions and work come together at the intersection of equity, environmental and climate justice. The program is expected to provide \$1.5 million in direct support of community-centered solutions to carbon reduction.

STRATEGY 2: ACCESS TO FUNDING STRATEGY

WSDOT is working to provide pathways to shared decision-making and transparent funding processes through pilots. The first pilot underway is a collaboration with the *Sandy Williams Connecting Communities Program*. This program was established to improve active transportation connectivity for people walking, biking, and rolling along and across current and former state highways. It focuses on communities with high equity needs, which are those most affected by barriers to opportunity and environmental health disparities. The program can fund any project phase from planning through construction.

The pilot will involve convening a steering committee of members from overburdened communities and vulnerable populations. The steering committee will provide leadership in the development of the grant program and be part of the team allocating grant funding. The steering committee will receive compensation for their work and a cohort manager will ensure their capacity needs are met by providing technical assistance and other resources. The intent of the pilot is to provide WSDOT with the opportunity to partner with the community on power sharing when it comes to resource allocation and build best practices for the agency. This supports WSDOT's process of integrating environmental justice into the work and moving towards internal and external shifts in community ownership.

Contact Information

Please feel free to reach out to Jesseca Brand, Community Engagement Program Manager, at Jesseca.Brand@wsdot.wa.gov with questions.