Live captioning by Ai-Media.

SPEAKER:

We are going to get started in a couple minutes. Lots of people still coming in. We are going to give it about one more minute for folks joining us.

DARREN BATES:

Ready?

SPEAKER:

Good to go.

DARREN BATES:

Alright. Hello, everyone. And welcome to lessons learned on engagement strategies for inclusive transit planning. My name is Darren Bates, CEO of Darren Bates LLC which is again taught -- consultancy rooted in disability inclusion, advocacy, and disability justice. I would like to thank the Institute for including -- inviting me to facilitate today's discussion. For effective communication, I want to provide a visual description of myself. I am a biracial man who uses the pronouns he/him. I have multiple non-apparent disabilities. I have brown hair, hazel eyes and am wearing a striped long sleeves shirt. I am in Austin, Texas with some bookshelves and other oddities behind me.

Today's conversation is between Zoe Miller, and Kiana Parker. Before we begin, there are a few housekeeping items that we need to cover. Do you -- to do that, please welcome my colleague, DeBrittany Mitchell.

DeBRITTANY MITCHELL:

Thank you, Darren. This is DeBrittany Mitchell. As Darren said. I use she/her pronouns and I am a Black female that happens to be wearing all black today. Welcome to today's virtual roundtable discussion on lessons learned on engagement strategies for inclusive transit planning.

I have a few PowerPoint slides where I will walk through the logistics and give a brief overview of the transit planning for all project. This event is being recorded. Please keep your sound on mute to prevent any background noise. This event is also being life captioned. We also have an ASL provider interpreting today's event. So thank you for being with us today.

Please feel free to chime in, share your thoughts and comments in the chat area. Also, feel free to raise your virtual hand, and we will call on you to chime into this discussion verbally, if you prefer to participate that way.

Last but not least, please identify yourself when speaking. The transit planning for all project is an inclusive and coordinated transportation planning project seeking to increase inclusion in transportation planning for people with disabilities and older adults.

It is a partnership funded by the administration for community living. The project partners are the Institution for Community Inclusion, the community transportation Association of America, DJ B evaluation consulting, and US aging.

Feel free to visit the transit planning for all website to access -- to access the recording of this session, as well as to access all that we have produced for the last five years. The website is transit planning4 all.org. We also have a twitter. Feel free to treat us throughout this event. Also, email us at transit planning for all at CTTI -- CTA.org.

The transit planning for all project has four rounds of funding but went out to organizations that were a variety of different sizes, serve different geographic locations and have different focuses. Again, all focused on the inclusion of people with disabilities in transit planning.

This is the third roundtable in a series of virtual roundtable discussions that focus on different topics or themes related to inclusive transit planning. As I say, today we will talk about inclusive engagement strategies. Our presenters, Zoe and Kiana will begin briefly.

After each roundtable discussion, we will also release a brief that gives an overview of this roundtable discussion, as well as other lessons learned throughout the project.

Last but not least, our hashtag for today is #TP4A engagement. I will hand it back to my colleague Darren who will facilitate today's conversation.

DARREN BATES:

Thank you, DeBrittany. This is Darren. Let's talk meaningful engagement strategies for transit planning, with today's speakers: Zoe and Kiana. Welcome, both of you. Thank you so much for being here today, and joining us.

To start today's roundtable, would East -- each of you introduce yourself, tell us where you are at, provide a visual description and a brief history of your transportation projects. Zoe, would you like to go first?

ZOE MILLER:

Sure. Thank you so much, Darren, and DeBrittany for opening and inviting me to be part of this. My name is Zoe Miller. I use she/her programs. I have my own small independent consulting business called Zoe Miller strategies. I am a white cisgender woman with black rimmed glasses and a black shirt today. I am in a very nice colorful orange room. My consulting business really came out of work that I had been able to do through the transit planning for all initiative that got me on the road of building healthy and equitable communities through inclusive engagement. I am excited to be here today, to talk about the work that I did as a staff member at the greater Portland Council of government, and then continued to get to work here and beyond.

DARREN BATES:

Thank you. Kiana?

KIANA PARKER:

Hi, everyone. My name is Kiana Parker. I use she/her pronounce. I live in Seattle, Washington. I am a biracial woman, half Filipino and half cup black. -- Black. I'm currently sitting at my dining room table. I am a baseball fan so I'm wearing an orange New York Mets T-shirt.

Did you want me to share a bit about the project now?

DARREN BATES:

If you would, just a little bit about the project.

KIANA PARKER:

Sure. The project in Seattle attempted to inject more equity into our transportation system. If you have ever been to Seattle before, it has a lots of hills. It rains a lot. It has a lot of broken sidewalk infrastructure. It has huge swaths of the city that have no sidewalk infrastructure at all.

A lot of the transportation that people with disabilities and older adults use requires an advance reservation to take advantage of those services. Our project, I wanted to inject more equity into that by creating a transportation solution specifically for older adults and people with disabilities that did not require a reservation in advance. We sought to take advantage of on demand right technology to assist people in getting around far more quickly than they had been able to do in the past.

DARREN BATES:

Thank you. I want to talk about equity just a little bit later, because the first thing I would like to know from each of you is how did you invite older adults and individuals with disabilities to participate in your project? And what steps or what levers did you have to push to ensure outreach engagement practices were equitable, accessible and culturally sensitive? So we, would you like to start?

ZOE MILLER:

Sure. This is Zoe. Before we even received our funding through transit planning for all, we had been working on better engagement for older adults and people with disabilities, and started using a paid volunteer position called the mobility liaison. What we were trying to do is test out the idea that if we would take away some of the common barriers, could we get better participation from people? So often, I think most of the people who were coming to a table to be part of an ongoing effort are there through a job they have, that they are getting paid to be at the table. They have a job title, they often have a degree of some time, -- kind. They have decent income and are able to get transportation. So with amused -- mobility liaison position, we said we are going to address a bunch of these inequities, essentially, by paying people. Giving them a title. Providing support. Having them become part of a group, so that they have folks they can lean on.

What we found right away was that it really did work, and we were successful in getting four people to volunteer and start working with us. They were actually a big part of the application that we put in. And then, the other aspect of how we have cultivated inclusive engagement is to be building those relationships between... So in the organization I was working in, which is the Council of government, to be building relationships with other organizations who work with people we hope to engage. And really have open ended relationships with them that are as much as they can be reciprocal, and not necessarily tied to help us get people to respond to the survey, but more like how can we have an ongoing relationship with one another?

So when it came time to recruit people to be mobility liaisons, we had these great partners who grabbed hold of that opportunity, and shared it with the people they worked with. So we were able to leverage that they had trusted relationships with people, and it endears people to us.

DARREN BATES:

What types of collaborative relationships did you make in the community that allowed you to incorporate people with disabilities, or to engage them? Does it matter who is doing the asking when you start those relationships?

ZOE MILLER:

This is Zoe. I would say that one feature of our project is that I have been living and working in the greater Portland community for 20+ years. I think of it as we are just constantly building on the relationships that we have. So when I took my job at the Council of governments, I was coming to the table with relationships.

So I really think of it as being a good orientation that folks who are successful in this work have, and I know Kiana has it as well, that it is like you are always building relationships. Seven people... You have a reputation as someone who listens and wants to hear what an organization needs.

I think that approaching the independent living organizations, and we have a number of different organizations that work with older adults. Really applying that relationship building model to the topic that we were working on. And making those inroads with different communities.

DARREN BATES:

Excellent. And Kiana, how did you ensure that your outreach engagement was equitable and accessible? And culturally sensitive? I think when we talked before, and maybe I'm wrong and it was you, Zoe, but I think we talked before that you had different languages in the community. Is that right?

KIANA PARKER:

Yes. This is Kiana speaking. With the Seattle project, it kind of grew very organically from the start. Like with project grants, we had to recruit people to be part of the steering committee to start the inclusive planning process. When our project originally started, I took the lead in identifying people and identifying them to be part of our project.

I do not have a background in transportation. A community member who has a day job in higher Ed, so my educational background and my professional background will not really informal transportation planning. The biggest power that I faced was...

DARREN BATES:

Oops. We may have lost Kiana. I think we have lost Kiana for a sec.. Zoe, let me go back to you while we wait for her to come back. How important is live knowledge for getting that expertise from older adults who rely on transportation? And is not something that was important for you regarding your engagement strategy?

ZOE MILLER:

Thank you, Darren. This is Zoe I think it is so important to hear from people who use transportation services, especially people who have lived barriers. Older adults and people with disabilities, I think we all know, there are communities that have the greatest need support rights from friends, or public transportation, or volunteer right programs.

I think in our case, it really brought it into focus. And I have seen it be very powerful, the decision-makers are hearing, and in our case, it was our policy board for our regional planning organization. Seeing people in front of them who use a power chair, who used a mobility device to come into the room, who have low vision and are walking with a cane, talking about their experience, and I have never seen people cry at one of our policy board meetings. But when we had people talking from their lived experiences, I saw people's eyes tear up. I think it is a beginning to a relationship.

That's the other thing, I think what is powerful about the type of roles that our projects both have is it is not a one time thing. Someone stands in front of you, you hear what they have to say, and then you never talk to them again. We are really focus on getting those folks with lived experiences to be in advisory positions, on governing boards, so that people are hearing from them multiple times, and it becomes one of the perspectives that they carry around.

I was really pleased last week. I was attending a meeting with a bunch of managers in our area for a totally different project. One of them brought an older adult from part of our reaching -- region that is low income and has inadequate transit, talking about that person's testimony during a meeting. He had no idea that I had anything to do with that. So he wasn't saying that for my benefit, but he was sharing this story of an older adult with a disability who doesn't have a car, who lives in this community. That emphasize that that is the perspective he is now carrying around and it is shaping his view of what is needed in the community.

Professionals, when we do our jobs well as transportation planners, we are bringing the voices in. But we so often get discounted, because it is easy to... It's like there is a lack of emotional... A lack of humanity to it. The voices getting filtered through somebody versus hearing directly from people with the experience.

DARREN BATES:

That's what I was saying earlier. Do you think that engagement strategies and diverse stakeholders like older people, that use the transportation system, do you think that they can mediate the critical expertise that is sometimes missing in planning teams?

ZOE MILLER:

That is an interesting question. This is Zoe. I think, you know, with that question if the mage -- immediately makes me think of how I watch folks... When we made the plans to start bringing folks with lived experiences onto the committees, there was questioning of what they be able to do it? Would they find it too technical?

I am hearing that as like a... I don't think people realize that they are doing, but it is patronizing. I think it actually then pushes organizations and professional planners, engineers, to make it more layperson friendly. Because things being very technical is alienating for lots of people. Not just people who are older, who have disabilities.

I have actually watched it push staff who are putting together meeting packets, and pushing decision-makers who are speaking at meetings to be more intentional about putting things into layperson friendly language.

DARREN BATES:

Talking about collaboration than bringing people in, how did you sustain the relationships... We have Kiana back. How did you sustain relationships with people with lived experience of disability? How did you sustain for the long term? I think when we spoke earlier, you talked about a leadership team or transportation leadership program. I don't know if that coincides with sustainability. You were talking about bringing in plain language. How do you sustain those relationships? Did you compensate people for the subject matter expertise? Did you offer them childcare our meals or gift cards or any types of incentives? Or did you have to push another lever to engage that level of community?

ZOE MILLER:

I would say we did all of it that we were able to do. We talk about the desk being iterative and assumption free, so if we had someone who child care was a need, then we would figure out childcare. We would offered compensation. We talked about this a little bit when preparing for this panel. Sometimes receiving compensation is actually a problem for people, because it messes up their benefits that they already rely on.

We had one case where somebody donated their stipend, so they still got to decide what happened with the money, but they didn't accept it personally, because it would have been problematic.

It sounds like a lot of work. I don't think it is. It's just shifting our orientation about how we work with people, and to your question about the leadership, one of the things that we identified early on in our project is that people... We really wanted to provide more support and cultivate folks with lived experience to create cohorts, and we developed a program called the community transportation leaders. We have now had we've had to cohorts. There are a lot of acronyms and technical jargon, and politics to navigate. So we went a step beyond the mobility liaisons, and created this program where people become a group, and together they learn to navigate. And there is very good staff support. One of the magical things is that they formed relationships within the group, so we thought. Two peer support would be valuable, it would be important. And they just blew us away with the extent to which they formed relationships, and provided support to one another.

Which, you know, is like an analog to the support that so many of us get within a workplace or an affinity group for the fields we work in.

So creating community as part of the process was really important, and I think it remains important. It is something that isn't always easy to sell to folks making decisions about budgets. Because it is seen as softer. So I think we are constantly swimming upstream. Dominant culture is like the other committee members don't need so much handholding. But then you often have people drop off of committee.

So if you want to have successful engagement amongst your committee members, putting in a little bit of extra effort, I think, goes a long way. I see Kiana is back. Let's let Kiana do the next questions.

DARREN BATES:

Before that, I wanted to compliment you. I love that you said you are building community all along the process. That was a priority. I think that is one of the reasons why you are saying to me it was so successful. Because you prioritize community and let people have those voices. And to build community. I just love that. That's great. Kiana, you are back. Do you remember what you are talking about?

KIANA PARKER:

My power went out! I will try to condense what I was going to say.

DARREN BATES:

You don't need to condense it.

KIANA PARKER:

What I was trying to say was that the Seattle projects crew very organically. I was tasked with trying to recruit interest in the project and getting people to want to participate. And as I mentioned, one of the biggest barriers that I encountered on how to overcome was convincing people that this was a project that start was going to listen this time. The biggest weapon that I had in my arsenal that was convincing to people was when I told them that I was going to co-lead the project. So SDOT wasn't leading. I assured them that they would be heard, because I would be there to ensure it. Even though I also served on us ? make a steering committee. I laid in a community that typically doesn't exist in most projects. It is rare, if ever, that transportation agencies steps back enough to let someone from the community lead the development of a transportation initiative from start to finish. I've never seen that happen before, so I tip my hat for them at least being willing to try it.

DARREN BATES:

I remember you talking about that and saying that you slowed but your expertise is not in transportation.

KIANA PARKER:

Not really. Justin that I tried to take my lived experience and share with transportation agencies to help them make changes. But I don't work in a transportation agency. I was just a frustrated community member who had an idea, and after months and months convinced it -- them to try to develop with community a solution that better served us and prioritized us.

And with the ground, we included older adults in that model as well.

DARREN BATES:

Ok, so let's just say historically, I think genuine, effective, inclusive public engagement and transportation planning has been challenging sometimes. Difficult sometimes, depending on where you are at in the community.

I will ask you this, because you are talking about rising up, and having a voice. Not any having a voice but being able to make decisions. Do you think we are undergoing a shift in public outreach where the public was notified of decisions that had already been made before. You think we are making a shift to a more collaborative, empowering engagement strategy? How hard is that? How hard has that been?

KIANA PARKER:

To answer the first part, I would hope so. I would hope that even if they are not yet -- there yet, I hope that transportation agencies want to move in that direction. I think in order for that to happen, a couple things have to be present. Number one, I think transportation agencies start by believing that there are people in their community that want to engage with them consistently to help find solutions.

They do exist. I fully believe that there are people in community who want to co-create these solutions. So believing that community can do this work from start to finish, I think, is one shift. The second shift is that you have to value them appropriately. By value them appropriately, what I really mean is you have to pay them. Especially if you want to keep them engaged, coming back over and over again to continue to stay engaged in the process. I think that Seattle has learned that it is not enough to invite them to share and give feedback. I think you have to pay them.

Number one, they are experts in their own way. But number two, you are also asking them to be very vulnerable in what they share in order for transportation outcomes to be improved and for them to work. But, also, has value that I do not think has been valued in the same way in the past.

Three, and I think this is most important, the transportation agency itself has to be willing to give up power. It needs to be able to step back, not only absorb what the community is telling you, but then work with them to create what the community says they want to create.

DeBRITTANY MITCHELL:

This is DeBrittany speaking. And I'm chiming in because we have a couple questions and comments from the audience. One question relevant to what Kiana just said was Penelope wondering how much did you pay them, and she answered $100 per hour.

There was another question about public outreach. Kari was wondering, she says her challenge is her agency's. It's challenging to get participation in rural areas because there are fewer resources all around. How can these tactics be adapted for agency with a small staff, and with no one particularly trained as a (indiscernible).

KIANA PARKER:

Can I take that one?

DeBRITTANY MITCHELL:

Sure.

KIANA PARKER:

This is Kiana speaking. I think that increased engagement, whether you work in a rural community, or an urban community, I think one shift that also needs to happen in order to increase engagement is for agencies, whether big or small to take a step back and think about who is doing the asking of community when you are trying to do your outreach?

I don't think it necessarily needs to be transportation planners who are the ones doing the outreach. I think it is really important that the people doing the asking, or the people doing the engagement are people who come from those communities, and people who share those lived experiences. Typically, in my experience, the people doing the asking when it comes to older adults and people with disabilities, our younger adults with a lot of ableist privilege who have backgrounds in transportation planning.

That is all fine and good, but when it comes to engaging new voices into the conversation, that can be one, really intimidating. And two, I think it can cause a disconnect. Because there is not a lot of faith that those same people can relate to our experiences.

There is not a lot of faith that even if they do listen, they are going to feel the urgency of what we bring up, and take steps accordingly.

A lot of times, we bring up things that are really urgent, and they acknowledge that they hear them, but in terms of the extra action piece, it either doesn't happen at all or takes a really long time. So I just think that rethink how you think about who is doing the outreach. I think that will help a lot.

DARREN BATES:

To that point then, no matter where you are, if you are a person with disability, if you are an older adult, if you are the broader public, how did you build trust with the community? How did you make sure that you are accountable? Close that feedback loop so that when people come to your meetings and they say something, like you are saying Kiana, the transit agent person comes back and closes that feedback loop.

How did you guys personally do that? How did you build trust? What about accountability?

KIANA PARKER:

Do you want me to answer first and then Zoe? I am happy to.

DARREN BATES:

Go ahead.

KIANA PARKER:

I will start and then we can let Zoe time and if she wants. For the Seattle project, I think one of the things that helped with our accountability was that we fostered a space that had a lot of healthy debate. We spent a lot of time early on just getting to know each other, asking each other silly questions to get to know each other, because we all didn't know each other initially. Some people knew me, some people knew other people in the group, but we all do know each other to start.

We succeeded in creating a space where there was a lot of healthy debate as to what should happen with our project. We went back and forth a lot within our project, changing things, reconsidering things. We stopped at many intervals to debate what we should do next. I think that really helped bolster the accountability, because people could see that their comments were having an impact, just by the way their project Changing direction.

I'll give you a good example of what I'm talking about. Initially, when we were thinking about the project, at first, we were thinking about our on-demand solution just being one that helps connect older adults and people with disabilities to mass transit. Like a transit connection kind of thing. There were people on our steering committee who were like, "no, our solution needs to be broader than that because there are lots of times when people need to take short trips within their communities that isn't well served by transit, and those people deserve to have access to services as well."

So we expanded our transit solution to include both trips to mass transit if that is how people want to lose the service -- use the service, as well as short trips. So that is how we pivoted base of the feedback that we got. Another example was that we were initially thinking that because our resources were limited, our transit solution should serve a specific geographical area. We ended up shifting that decision, and just deciding to do it citywide. To help as many people as possible.

All of that came back through community feedback, and steering committee feedback. Which ultimately, shaped how our pilot ultimately looked.

DARREN BATES:

So we, can you talk a little bit about how you build trust in the community. And also, I want to ask you another question that goes hand-in-hand. How important is it for transit staff people to go out into the community, to get outside their office? Is that one way to build trust?

KIANA PARKER:

...

ZOE MILLER:

Absolutely! Sorry...

KIANA PARKER:

Go ahead, Zoe.

ZOE MILLER:

This is Zoe. I did want to circle back to applying some of this to rural settings. The area that I work in... Maine is very rural overall, and even the county were greater Portland is, we have rural towns. I think about this all the time in terms of engagement. It is looking at whatever you have.

Say you have a food pantry. In rural settings, where there isn't as much going on, there aren't as many gatherings, there aren't as many groups, I think there is something in every community. Whatever it is, that is the thing that you need to hook up with.

So if it is a food pantry, if it is a Summerside for kids, if it is a concert in the park. I remember going to one of our little towns, and they had a concert at their bandstand, and we are out there chatting people up. Bugging them. You've got to be outgoing, that's for sure. (Laughs)

But I think you absolutely need to get out there. And I think it is also so much about leveraging relationships to think about who you already know might be able to introduce you. Because even the most outgoing among us don't necessarily love a cold call, or just showing up. But talking of folks who can give you kind of the inside track on what is going on in the community. And maybe make a couple of introductions.

That is where I think doing this work, doing outreach, engagement, being a mobility manager, it is like you are crossing over these lines of what often are... In the professional work world, these very black-and-white lines. There is your work life, and then your personal life. I think most of us who are successful in doing engagement, it is, I think, we are willing to blur the lines. It is not for everyone. There is a lot of folks out there, a lot of the community transportation leaders have my personal cell phone. And I have discretion to not feel like I have to call someone back on a weekend if I do not feel like it. It is a different orientation to doing the work. And I think it is something to get used to, because it requires... You know, you still have boundaries. I'm not suggesting you do not have boundaries. But it is just doing the work in a different way than realizing your off the clock and checking out of the office.

Otherwise, I think you'd lose the benefit of leveraging those connections to make inroads and hear from communities that need to be heard from.

DARREN BATES:

That is excellent. Kiana, you had some words on it?

KIANA PARKER:

The only thing I was going to add... I agree. I think those who work in transit just have to think differently about their engagement strategies. And I will speak for Seattle, because I do not live in a rural community, but typically, the model that Seattle uses is they typically do their outreach where communities already gather and then leading -- lien into nonprofit agencies to continue outreach efforts. That is helpful to a point, but to me, it has two significant downfalls. Number one, it seems that... And those places of gathering are typically churches, and places of worship. There is two problems with that. One, worship is declining. And two, leading into long -- nonprofits, it seems that people are connected to those nonprofit agencies.

In this region, there are lots of people who want to weigh in on transportation solutions and programs that are not connected. So one of our questions is how do we reach those people who do not want to gather? How do we reach those people who are not connected to nonprofits? Those are places where shifts in thought and creativity can take place.

DeBRITTANY MITCHELL:

Darren, this is DeBrittany again, chiming in with a question and comment from the chat. It aligns directly with what Kiana just said, so I want to pause for a moment and acknowledge Claire's comment. She says, "If we are looking to connect with folks who have barriers to access related to transportation, how or where can we find those people? What types of groups, agencies or spaces should we be looking into? For instance, with older adults, you could initially think of the senior center. But the people who will be there have some transportation resources or they wouldn't be in that space, for example."

KIANA PARKER:

I have an idea. You guys can tell me what you think of this idea. At least in Seattle, one of the underused resources that I think could use a little bit more attention is bus drivers. I think that bus drivers, at least those who operate fixed route transit, they know the clientele well. They know who their writers are. Just think that there is more of an opportunity to look to bus drivers as a conduit for engagement.

DARREN BATES:

I think bus drivers know about the broader community. I think they know who is riding their buses. I think they are really familiar with the cultural tone in their route, where they are going. But I think the question that is being asked is where do you find people who have barriers to transportation? I am thinking... And often, for instance, we have a committee for people with disabilities, we have the independent native -- independent living center.

That is kind of where you start. There's other things that happen here in Austin, because we are very political. For instance, right now, there is offense going on at our capital about Roe versus Wade. But prior to that there was disability events. There was other events pertaining to older adults. There is lots of rallies. Sometimes, oftentimes, if someone needs to conduct a poll or survey, they've gone right to the capital. Because right there you have a focus group of people with disabilities or older adults or whatever the demographic you are targeting, that are there at a rally for disability inclusion, for advocacy, for accessibility. For disability rights. So oftentimes, because we are a state capital, you can find people who are willing to talk to you, and they could also lead you.

I don't know if you find this to be true too, Zoe, they can lead you to important community leaders that you might not know. I often say if you have a Mayor's committee for people with disabilities, or if you have an agency on aging, or if you have those types of disability service centers that provide disability services, it is good to connect.

But that is just a starting point. If you go to a capital, -- sorry, not a capital. A rally or an event. At a community center. That's my thoughts. What do you think, Zoe?

ZOE MILLER:

I think these are all great ideas. This is Zoe. A few things that came to mind on... For folks not getting out of the house, would be we have had success working with, for us, the Meals on Wheels provider is our agency on aging. They have staff and volunteers going out to people's homes all the time.

They have been willing to put information in people's hands. So if there is a flyer or a brochure, I think in some cases they have even been willing to talk to people and report back. So that has been an amazing asset.

Another thing that has worked frequently is to team up with housing organizations who oversee (indiscernible) housing. Then we have done conversations right out of people's housing. So all we needed to do was get across the parking lot into the community room of their housing. And finally, we have actually going door-to-door. I know the idea of having the capacity to go door-to-door over -- all over the place is not realistic. But if you think about wanting to get the perspective of rural older adults who probably do not get out that much, going and knocking on some doors in a congregate housing place with 30 units, you are going to get a pretty good cross-section of perspectives.

Again, I think it goes back to what Kiana was saying about shifting how to do the work, and what your orientation is. And I guess, the last thing I want to add is that I think partnering with nonprofits can be very successful. I think it is important that we pay the nonprofits. Often -- or at least, offer to pay them. Many don't need it, and they can help with engagement without getting extra compensation. But I think not assuming that they can. All over the country there are folks who work as community health workers, and those folks can be amazing, but often, they are working for -- PDM. So saying can we hire community health workers to go out in the field with us, and then we end up with not only cultural brokering. They are interpreting, they are cultural brokering, they are recognizable, getting to the point about who is doing the asking. Someone who looks like me is here and wants to talk to me, and knows how to say hi the way that I feel comfortable with. And knows whether or not I want to shake hands.

That has been really successful. They are all over the country now, so I think that is a great resource. There probably are not enough in rural areas, but they are there, and they are usually connected with the federally qualified health centers. So check in with your SQ HC and see who is there and how you might find them and hire them to work with you.

DARREN BATES:

I know not everybody has broadband, not everyone has access to the internet. That is increasing, hopefully as we move forward across the country. I know not in every area.

You don't have to necessarily be present to engage people with disabilities, because there is social media. So we have a very large presence online of people with disabilities. Right now, you can go online and see people talking about disability rights. And you can engage in your community with people through social media. That's word-of-mouth. If you let people know where, when and how, like you said earlier, so we, you can build that community.

We only have five minutes left, oh my goodness! This is about lessons learned. I want to ask each of you in our final two questions, and if you could both think about it. So we, if I come to you first, what has been your most significant pain point when outreaching to older adults and people with disabilities? And what has been your most considerable success?

ZOE MILLER:

In terms of pain point... This is Zoe... I think I am a very patient person. And I do believe in the long game, but it can be really frustrating how hard it is to institutionalize inclusive engagement. I think, as a paid person doing this work, wanting to not do harm to people by hiring thing -- having them think that a decision will be made using their input, and then having it be tokenized. That still goes on, because there isn't necessarily a strong enough line from giving the input, to the decisions.

That said, I think one of the things that I am most proud of is that through the work that I was involved with with the greater Foley Council of government, we successfully... For the Metropolitan planning organization, their committees were revamped, and we have two seats on the advisory committee for transportation leaders. And flowing out of that, there has also been seats for community transportation leaders on Project Advisory Committee's.

So I think it is about as close to institutionalized as it can be at this point. In the first two folks who took those roles are a woman who is an immigrant and has disabilities, and a young woman who has intellectual disabilities. So, you know, that just is really exciting for our region to have their perspectives and faces at the table.

DARREN BATES:

Speaks to the intersectionality of our community, right? Kiana, looks like you are going to get the last word. (Laughs) Pain points and most considerable success.

KIANA PARKER:

The biggest pain point with me with the Seattle project was that we did this project during the pandemic. And so a lot of the project, even though we wanted to do a lot more things in person, we were very mindful that there were a lot of people in the disability community and the senior community who wanted to remain in virtual spaces and not gather. That made our outreach more challenging, and we had to remind -- rely on word of my aunts leaning to our steering committee and have that one-on-one engagement with people formally and informally to find out what they needed and raise awareness about our project. So that was a shift that we hadn't anticipated when we first started this project. We thought we would be able to do some things in person at some point.

We didn't get there before the end of the project, unfortunately. But I would say, one of the huge successes is that the Seattle project, I think, succeeded in proving that you do not need a program that is built on a verification system to effectively serve older adults and people with disabilities.

What I mean by that is that usually if you are a senior or person with disability and you want to be able to access services, you have to prove that you are eligible. Usually, the proof requires that you have to fill out some cumbersome paperwork, or perhaps go see a doctor or something that is a barrier and very time-consuming. We succeeded in creating a low barrier transportation solution by leaning into our community relationships, and trusting them to put our vouchers in the hands of people who needed them.

We did not have a formal verification system, we just ask people to self identify, and it worked.

DARREN BATES:

Excellent. Thank you both very much. I know that all the partners involved in this roundtable really value your opinions. So if there is a survey -- so there is a survey that DeBrittany is going to put into the chat. If you could take the time today or soon to fill out that survey. Your opinion matters and we would like to know your thoughts on today's program.

With that, I want to say thank you, Kiana, Zoe, DeBrittany, David. All the partners. Thank you so much. Talk to you later.

Live captioning by Ai-Media.