

The “Strategies for Promoting Civic Engagement in Inclusive Transportation Planning” series is sponsored by the Transit Planning 4 All project, and presents key tips for enhancing inclusion through civic engagement strategies.

Civic engagement is key to improving the quality of life within any community. Promoting effective and inclusive participation amongst all citizens leads to decision-making that is reflective of a diverse range of individuals and groups. A sustainable transportation system that meets the needs of its users requires inclusive planning at the city, regional, and state levels.

If inclusive transportation planning is done effectively, it balances the needs of multiple stakeholders,

accounting for the social, political, and economic compounding factors within unique geographic locations. In this brief, we define community mapping and explain how it can be used as a tool to promote inclusive civic engagement.

*“A well-designed inclusive planning process leads to the development of better transportation programs that meet the needs of the people for whom they are designed.”*

– Community Transportation Association of America

### What is Community Mapping?

An inclusive decision-making process should involve a variety of ways for citizens to be involved at the individual, group, and community-wide levels. Community mapping is a tool for identifying various assets and resources within a specific geographical area through the direct participation of community members. It is a process of visual and geographic data collection and presentation of community characteristics on a particular issue, program, policy, or intervention. For example, community members, city planners, and advocates could generate a community map that depicts where the greatest concentrations of older adults and overlays existing public transportation systems to identify gaps in access to transportation. This participatory mapping exercise is meant to empower the public and lead to consensus-building and decision-making that guides future services, policies, and program designs.



Community maps can serve as visual representations of transit options and access in local communities. It can be used as a strategy to inform inclusive planning efforts as it engages the community to help pinpoint barriers to transportation and target interventions in areas of need for individuals with disabilities and older adults. For example, rural communities may lack adequate public transit options while 25% of all Americans aged 65 and older live in a rural area of the U.S. and the disability rate is higher than urban communities at 15.1% (ACS, 2017). The image above outlines some examples of transit options that may be helpful to visualize to identify gaps in service areas during a community mapping exercise.

### Key Tips to Engage the Community in this Process

Community mapping leads to the development of maps that serve as visual representations of geographic-specific data. It can help determine the gaps in transportation service areas for underserved populations, such as persons with disabilities and older adults. The better your partnership development and community outreach, the greater potential to use community mapping to identify transportation barriers in terms of accessibility, frequency, and adequacy.

- **Identify existing groups and organizations** that support inclusive transit planning initiatives. Contact local or state transit authorities and ask about workgroups or committees that focus on the topic or take on the work as part of their mission. The strong partnerships developed in planning will allow for greater reach and resources in transportation planning.

- **Conduct an environmental scan** to discover how you can best tailor your outreach and feedback mechanisms to the audiences you wish to reach. Determine what resources are available in specific areas and develop a community engagement plan that reflects the inclusive transit values of the group and has specific tools for engaging hard-to-reach populations.
- **Involve stakeholder groups** in determining what information and geographical areas your map should include. This will help uncover where the majority of your target populations live, work, and congregate. Engage community leaders from the beginning so their values and ideas can be incorporated into the entire process.
- **Collect data on community perspectives** about barriers and opportunities for greater access. This can include qualitative and quantitative data derived from focus groups, surveys, in-person meetings, telephone interviews, crowdsourcing, etc. Community maps should evolve based on participant input. The product should change and grow based on what stakeholders share as priorities and concerns.
- **Encourage active participation** to maintain momentum during and between in-person meetings. Develop a solid agenda for each meeting, and have an experienced facilitator keep the group on task and allow everyone the opportunity to contribute in a safe space. Meetings with a clear goal and discussion questions will be the most productive in creating the map and generating action items and discussions thereafter.

### How Can Community Mapping Impact Inclusive Transit Planning Efforts?

Community mapping empowers the public to share their experiences on a range of topics that impact their communities. The process helps state and community leaders to systematically map the transportation supports and services available to persons with disabilities and older adults, and to determine what additional resources are needed.

The findings from the mapping process should be disseminated in formats and mediums that meet the needs of diverse audiences. Products may include reports, press releases, fact sheets, multimedia, and other methods. Information gained from the process should be communicated clearly to intended audiences and can be used to:

- **Inform policy development** and resource allocation related to new and existing transit programs and initiatives.
- **Increase awareness** about the environments of underserved populations and ways to better serve them.
- **Motivate individuals and organizations** to advocate for and deliver transportation services that are inclusive and responsive to the needs of all.

*Community mapping is defined as “using mapping technology to identify, understand, analyze, resolve, disseminate community issues with the explicit intentions of education, engagement and empowerment.”*

– National Community Mapping Institute

### References

Crane, K., & Mooney, M. (2005). Essential tools: Community resource mapping. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration, National Center on Secondary Education and Transition.

Civic Engagement: Best Practices and Examples from Across the State (2014) <http://placemaking.mml.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/FINAL-MML-2014-Engagement-Booklet.pdf>

#### Civic Engagement

[www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement.aspx](http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/civic-engagement.aspx)

#### Community Planning Toolkit: Community Engagement

[www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf](http://www.communityplanningtoolkit.org/sites/default/files/Engagement.pdf)

#### Community Transportation Association of America

[www.ctaa.org](http://www.ctaa.org)

#### National Community Mapping Institute

<http://communitymappingforhealthequity.org/>

Transit Planning 4 All is an inclusive and coordinated transportation-planning project that has funded a series of pilot projects across the nation, each seeking to increase inclusion in transportation planning and services for people with disabilities and older adults.



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