

Engagement of Latine Communities in Transportation Safety

By Ana I. Lopez, Alma Leyva, Jill F. Cooper
Fall 2021

Introduction

Public participation in government is a foundation of democracy; however, it exists on a spectrum. In the field of transportation, decision-makers may seek information by simply making public announcements to invite input. Alternatively, governments devote resources to conduct thoughtful and extensive outreach to seek meaningful input. Recently, professionals and policymakers have considered an equity approach not only to reach and engage a diverse, representative group of community members, but to develop plans, projects, and policies that are inclusive of the community. Engaging Latine¹ communities requires rethinking traditional engagement and developing strategies that have considerations for the range of factors that shape this diverse community's experience, including culture, social inequities, and socio- and geopolitical factors. This brief highlights a few best practices for engaging Latine communities.

Background

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, the "Hispanic or Latino" population has increased from 37.6 percent in 2010 to 39.4 percent in 2020. While this was only a modest increase during a 10-year period, Latine people are the most-populous group among all races and ethnicities in the State. Relative to their representation in the overall population, Latine populations are overrepresented in poverty. In California, 15.5 percent of Latine families live below poverty levels, higher than other racial groups with the exception of Black or African American families (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). It is well documented that income has an impact on health outcomes. The Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services lists income, built environment and social and community context, among other factors, as social determinants of health. To illustrate their interrelated relationship, research suggests that lower income neighborhoods are disproportionately represented in traffic injuries (Morency et al., 2012).

Beyond income, pedestrian and bicycling injury outcomes differ across sociodemographic groups. A 2021 research, showed that BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and Other People of Color) communities experience a disproportionate burden of traffic related injuries (McGowen, 2021). In 2018 FARS traffic injury data, Latine² pedestrians accounted for 39.8 percent of total pedestrian fatalities in California, an increase of 3.4 percent from 36.4 percent in 2015. In the same year, Latine bicyclists accounted for 33.5 percent of total bicyclist fatalities in California, a decrease of 3.3 percent from 36.8 percent in 2015. This data suggests Latine communities, second to Black, remain a priority in efforts to reduce traffic related injuries.

Engaging Latine communities in transportation is important not only because of the potential impact it could have on reducing transportation related injuries but also because of the impact it could have on improving people's relationships and interactions with other community members, in turn, affecting health and well-

¹ In this research brief, the term *Latine* and *Latines* encompasses people of Latin American origin or descent who identify as *Latina*, *Latino*, or non-binary *Latines*. 'Latinx' was formerly used to address the gender inequality rooted in Spanish Language, but recent articles suggest that *Latine* is more linguistically appropriate (New York Times, [2020](#); [2021](#)).

² FARS reports race and ethnicity for fatal crash victims based on information gathered from death certificates. FARS uses the terms "Hispanic" and 'Hispanic or Latino' interchangeably. <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/09/30/2016-23672/standards-for-maintaining-collecting-and-presenting-federal-data-on-race-and-ethnicity>

being. It is important to note that language barriers may hinder participation, and must be considered in engagement efforts. Of the Latine population age 5 years and older, 29.4 percent speak English less than very well. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).

Rethinking Traditional Outreach and Engagement Strategies

Equitable Outreach and Engagement Strategies

For transportation professionals, the planning process should be thorough and look at the communities' unique needs to successfully engage the public. When engaging predominantly Latine communities, having background knowledge of the community or working with an organization that has this knowledge may help determine language needs, community priorities, convenient meeting times, etc.—all of which let traditionally marginalized communities know their input is desired. Some communities, especially those that are undocumented, may be wary of interaction with the government or other officials. Creating partnerships with organizations trusted by community members is key in outreach.

Understanding the best way to reach the target community is important because it can provide insight into how to allocate resources. For example, outreach might be most successful if it is done via phone, door-to-door flyering, social media platforms, local radio, and newspaper, rather than by announcement on a website or direct mail.

Equitable outreach is cognizant of the fact that community members may not be able to provide input or be engaged because of competing interests for other needs, such as food security and housing security. In this case, it may be possible that barriers to, for example, healthy food, rely on adequate and safe transportation. Transportation improvements, thus, may be framed in the context of accessing food.

Non-traditional Engagement Strategies

Sensory Engagement Activity

Sensory engagement is a non-traditional form of engagement that recognizes the central role of imagination and personal experience in transportation planning (Main, 2012). With it, participants draw from their early memories of

mobility and use their current lived experience to provide solutions to help meet their community's current needs. Engaging in this way recognizes community expertise and provides a culturally supportive space for Latine communities to engage in the planning process.

Trauma Informed Community Engagement

The disproportionate number of crashes occurring in BIPOC communities suggests that these communities may be facing higher levels of trauma in comparison to other sociodemographic groups. When engaging Latine communities, it is important to acknowledge the community's trauma as a result of traffic injuries.

Community trauma as a product of violence manifests itself in symptoms present in the social-cultural environment, built environment and the economic environment (Davis et al., 2016). In transportation, community trauma may stem from the place (deteriorating built environment or lack of infrastructure), opportunity (government and private disinvestment), socio- and cultural environment (lack of safe social networks), among other factors. Community trauma may result from the emotional suffering from being involved in a crash, having a family member, friend or loved one involved in a crash, witnessing a crash or being involved in a near-miss. Healing community trauma due to traffic violence begins with acknowledging the harm done and promoting consciousness. While sharing personal stories relating to traffic injuries and fatalities may cause discomfort, holding a space for community members to share their transportation related experiences can help build the social infrastructure necessary for addressing the community's safety issues.

The Urban Institute developed a [Trauma Informed Community Building and Engagement Model](#) that can guide the development of trauma informed transportation engagement strategies. Walk San Jose's [Post Crash Resource Guide](#) provides resources for survivors of crashes and those who lost someone as a result of a traffic injury. This guide can support trauma informed community engagement.

Empowerment of Communities through Shared Responsibilities and Ownership of Project

Providing meaningful opportunities for community

members to take ownership of planning, outreach, and education projects help promote empowerment and foster transfer of knowledge between community residents and agency staff. Having community groups integrally involved in the planning process may require flexibility since, as volunteers, individuals face competing needs in their daily lives. It is also important to budget for offering compensation to community members as one would pay, for example, a consultant, to address issues of equity. This could help reduce barriers that hinder participation, such as reducing concerns for competing interests.

Conclusion

Engaging Latine communities in transportation safety require rethinking traditional engagement and developing strategies that have considerations for the range of factors that shape this diverse community's experience—such as being cognizant of the disproportionate level of transportation injuries that, in turn, result in varying levels of community trauma for this sociodemographic group. These approaches are integral for ensuring that plans, projects, and policies are inclusive of- and accessible to- the communities that have been traditionally marginalized.

This report was prepared in cooperation with the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS). The opinions, findings and conclusions expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and not necessarily those of OTS.

Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program (CPBSP) *Comunidades Activas y Seguras*

UC Berkeley SafeTREC and California Walks have undertaken a new pilot program in 2021 to improve walking and bicycling safety in Spanish-speaking communities throughout California. This program built its curriculum with Spanish-speaking communities at the center, developing everything in Spanish first and in a way that can be understood culturally and linguistically. The program will continue in the Fall of 2021 and can serve as an opportunity to learn more about non-traditional engagement in transportation safety. Executive summaries for these trainings are available at <https://www.calwalks.org/>. For more information, visit <https://safetrec.berkeley.edu/programs>.

References:

- Davis, R., et al. (2016). Adverse Community Experiences and Resilience: A framework for addressing and preventing community trauma. Prevention Institute. <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/publications/adverse-community-experiences-and-resilience-framework-k-addressing-and-preventing>
- Main, Kelly (2012) "Outreach in Diverse Communities: A Conversation with James Rojas," Focus: Vol. 9: Iss. 1, Article 11. <https://digitalcommons.calpoly.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://scholar.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1208&context=focus>
- McGhee, E., et al. (2021, August). New Census Data Sheds Light on California's Changes. Public Policy Institute of California. <https://www.ppic.org/blog/new-census-data-sheds-light-on-californias-changes/>
- McGowan, M. (2021). Analysis of pedestrian injury, built environment, travel activity and social equity [Technical Memo]. Salem, Oregon: Oregon Department of Transportation.
- Morency, P., et al. (2012). Neighborhood social inequalities in road traffic injuries: the influence of traffic volume and road design. American journal of public health, 102(6), 1112–1119. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2011.300528>
- National Center for Statistics and Analysis. (2021). Fatality and Injury Reporting System Tool (FIRST) data from Fatality Analysis Reporting System (FARS) 2015; 2018. [Data Set]. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.
- U.S. Census Bureau (2020). Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months of Families, 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Income%20and%20Poverty&g=0400000US06&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1702&hidePreview=true>
- U.S. Census Bureau (2020). Language Spoken at Home, 2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates. Retrieved from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=language&g=0400000US06&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1601&hidePreview=true>
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. Social Determinants of Health. Healthy People 2030. <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/social-determinants-health>