

# Community Engagement at the Intersection of Public Health and Transportation: Highlighting Community Based Organizations' Use of the Promotores Model for Engaging Community Members in the Field of Transportation

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Fall 2023

## Introduction

Under federal statutes, transportation planners have an obligation to actively engage community members and to conduct equity-based analyses on transportation plans to ensure that people of color, low-income people, and other historically disenfranchised groups are neither disproportionately burdened nor denied the benefits of transportation investments. Planning professionals have an ethical and moral responsibility to involve and engage the communities they serve—to intentionally center community members in planning decision-making processes regarding their communities and ensure equity within the field. Equitably engaging all community groups is critical because having a political voice may empower community members to voice issues concerning their community. For instance, they may raise concerns about safety at an intersection, which may result in further investigation by agency staff. Community participation may also result in a city's Active Transportation Plan or Circulation Element in the General Plan to take a different form if planners apply the community's priorities and visions in these plans.

The Community Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Program (CPBSP), funded by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS), offers SafeTREC and California Walks the opportunity to work closely with dozens of local community stakeholders, including community-based organizations (CBOs), businesses, residents, and local advisory committees, in jurisdictions across the state. Recently, SafeTREC had the opportunity to work in partnership with a few CBOs that are using a Promotores Model to deliver resources and programs in the communities they serve. This brief explores the use of the Promotores Model to engage residents in transportation safety campaigns in their community.

## What are Promotores?

According to the Bureau of Health Workforce, in public health, Promotores are volunteer or paid Community Health Workers that reduce the community's barriers to health education and services. They may be identified by many titles, including health advisors, lay health advocates, outreach educators, peer promoters, and peer educators.

Promotores' key attributes in the community include:

- providing culturally appropriate education and information,
- assisting people in navigating systems, and
- advocating for individual and community needs.

According to *Visión y Compromiso*, an organization specializing in leadership development and capacity building of Promotores in California, Promotores are trusted and respected community leaders who provide service from the heart. The organization emphasizes Promotores as agents of change due to their shared lived experiences with other community members and their ability to serve the community in culturally and linguistically accessible ways. There is an emphasis on Promotores' shared lived experiences, roles, and identity because of how these attributes may create an inclination to empathize with community members, which enables Promotores to connect in a more effective, culturally aware, and authentic manner, according to a research that examined their role as Promotores and Latino identity.

To learn more about the potential application of the Promotores Model in the transportation field and its impact on supporting communities, Project Staff conducted a descriptive case study focused on Los Angeles Walks' (LA Walks) use of the strategy in their advocacy work. The aim of this case study was to understand more about the impact of the Promotores Model in facilitating community participation in planning, creating community leaders and political voices in the community, and advancing infrastructure improvements.

## Methodology

This case study used a mixed-methods approach of information gathered through an unstructured group interview with LA Walks staff, drawing from the project staff's experiences working with them as well as qualitative data collected from the organization's social media posts, website pages, publications, audio recordings, webinars where LA Walks' staff and Promotores presented about this topic, all of which were available online. In addition, this case study compared observations of workshop participants in pedestrian and bicycle safety education to explore the overlaps and connections between LA Walks Promotores and the women-led advocacy efforts of participants the project staff worked with in San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

## Findings

LA Walks recently took a new approach to intentionally engage community stakeholders historically left out of planning processes. They approach this issue by implementing a Promotores model to support advocacy and community engagement in planning. Los Angeles Walks' implementation of this model entails working with Spanish-speaking Promotores, mostly women from predominantly low-income communities, by empowering, training, and employing them to advocate for creating safer and more walkable streets in Los Angeles. Advocating for equitable mobility systems within their neighborhoods has enabled Promotores to attain infrastructure safety improvements in their communities, has empowered them to join the City of Los Angeles Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and has presented new professional opportunities in transportation spaces.

The Promotores Model was essential to conducting community engagement in transportation planning conversations through culturally and linguistically accessible events; creating and/or strengthening political voices of traditionally underrepresented voices in planning; contributing to professional opportunities in planning; and bridging lived experiences from the community.

A similarity between the women-led advocacy groups in Riverside and San Bernardino counties and LA Walks' Promotores was the influencing factor for becoming involved in active transportation. Their role as mothers and their desire to give their children safer conditions motivated them to become champions of traffic safety. They sought to create a safe environment for their children, often beginning their advocacy journey by becoming involved in school groups, such as the parent-teacher association. Community leaders and Promotores were experts at reaching community members by reducing barriers to participation and creating familiarity through food, culture, and language as they introduced complex topics, such as sustainable modes of transportation, crash underreporting, and Active Transportation Program funding applications.

A major distinction between the women-led transportation safety advocacy groups in Riverside and San Bernardino counties and LA Walks' Promotores was the resources provided by the organization to receive training, as well as the support for navigating political participation, which included the process for participating in community meetings. Whereas LA Walks Promotores were able to join advisory committees and participate in additional city meetings, transportation safety advocates in Riverside and San Bernardino faced language barriers and technical difficulties for navigating the process and needed additional support understanding where to begin or how to communicate their walking and biking safety concerns with their elected officials and appropriate agency staff.

Ultimately, the Promotores Model is a powerful community engagement and outreach tool that can pave the way for ongoing community engagement of underserved groups in the field of transportation. It achieves this by borrowing a strategy that has proved successful within public health. Los Angeles Walks' use of the Promotores model can help inform the reproduction of this model in other community planning spaces; and transportation planning professionals seeking to advance equitable community engagement can use this model for guidance.

## Next Steps for Promotores

Aside from LA Walks, the Promotores Model is gaining traction in Los Angeles and beyond. Several other CBOs, including LUNA (Latinos United for a New America) in San José and the National Health Foundation (NHF), work with promotores to deliver programs and resources related to transportation safety, while the California Department of Parks and Recreation (State Parks) used the model as a community outreach intervention for engaging underserved groups in the planning of park use in Los Angeles. In public health, the Promotores Model not only improves community engagement but also improves leadership skills, builds community capacity, and uplifts the community's goals. Its success in Los Angeles suggests that this model is promising for the field of transportation planning.

## Conclusion

Transportation planners should explore the use of the Promotores Model within their organizations and agencies to better understand and support the needs of marginalized Latino communities. There is a need for conducting a more prescriptive approach for reaching and intentionally engaging this population, all of which can directly positively impact their ability to advocate for resources, environments, and systems conducive to their well-being. Incorporating personal community experiences, perspectives, and knowledge into policymaking and decision-making processes is important for ensuring equitable and inclusive community engagement. The Promotores tool is promising for ensuring that decision-making is reflective of community voices. Other communities could adapt this model, create and fund localized programs like this, integrate this model to strengthen their current community engagement efforts, and may seek partnerships with their jurisdictions' departments of transportation to train and support the work of Promotores. Other transportation professionals may provide opportunities for their inclusion by hiring existing Promotores programs in their community or community members and facilitators to support their project's community engagement needs.

*To learn more about Los Angeles Walks Promotores Program and how to support the work of Promotores visit [https://www.losangeleswalks.org/our\\_promotoras](https://www.losangeleswalks.org/our_promotoras) or contact Los Angeles Walks at [hello@losangeleswalks.org](mailto:hello@losangeleswalks.org).*

**Funding for this program was provided by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.**

**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.**

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