

Community Engagement

Best Practices Compendium

Thriving Communities Program - Metropolitan Area Planning Agency

March 2025



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Executive Summary

This compendium emphasizes the importance of meaningful public involvement in transportation decision-making. Key features include understanding community demographics, building relationships, proactive involvement, responsive engagement techniques, and documenting the impact of community input. Building public involvement capacity through dedicated resources, staff, and training is also vital, along with measuring success using metrics like influence, transparency, timing, inclusion, targeted engagement, and accessibility. Techniques for meaningful involvement should be tailored to the community's needs and include both virtual and in-person methods.

Several challenges to community engagement are identified, such as lack of trust, barriers to participation (language, access), and financial constraints. These challenges can contribute to the Conflict Cycle, which includes phases like tension development, role dilemma, injustice collecting, confrontation, and adjustments. Recognizing these phases allows for targeted interventions, such as hosting public forums, facilitating discussions, and promoting collaboration.

The document highlights successful community engagement strategies from across the country. In St. Paul, MN, the Reconnect Rondo project utilizes the 4P Funding & Project Development Model (Public, Private, Philanthropic, People) to restore a neighborhood impacted by highway construction. Milwaukee, WI, implemented the Park East Redevelopment Compact, a Community Benefits Agreement ensuring that redevelopment efforts benefit local residents and businesses. In Tulsa, OK, the Kirkpatrick Heights-Greenwood Master Plan is a community-driven initiative to revitalize the historic Greenwood District, emphasizing trust, transparency, and inclusive decision-making.

Key opportunities for improving community engagement in North Omaha include ensuring access to information, responsiveness to input, and a solution-oriented approach. By implementing these best practices, Omaha can foster trust, promote inclusive development, and address the historical injustices caused by the North Freeway.

Section 1: Background & Context

This section of the Best Practices Compendium is designed to provide contextual information on the Thriving Communities Program, a timeline of the North Freeway in Omaha, and the challenges local governments commonly face in regards to community engagement.

In 2022, an initial \$25 million was allocated to fund the Thriving Communities Program (TCP), a new capacity building program under the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). The following year, in April 2023, USDOT announced that 64 communities were selected to participate in the inaugural Thriving Communities Program, designed to provide two years of no-cost technical assistance to communities to help identify, develop, and deliver projects that strengthen communities. Additionally, TCP provides participants with greater access to the historic infrastructure funds of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL), better positioning them to bring transformative projects to their respective communities. The **Metropolitan Area Planning Agency** (MAPA) was one of the applicants selected to participate in the first cohort of Thriving Communities, along with its designated partners - **Metro Transit, One Omaha, Spark**, and the **City of Omaha**.

Project partners have emphasized the importance of **implementing community engagement practices that foster meaningful discussions about the historical context of the North Freeway and explore interventions to mitigate its negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods**. While the North Freeway has already affected thousands of residents over many decades, improved outreach and engagement practices would lay the groundwork for **restoring community trust**, especially as it relates to transportation planning and transit-oriented development.

Timeline of the Near North Side Neighborhood & North Freeway

1919 - The [lynching of Will Brown](#) in downtown Omaha results in the North Side being the only safe place for Black residents in Omaha.

1935 - The Omaha Home Owner Loan Corporation designated North Omaha as “high risk,” a practice known as redlining.

1944 - The Federal Highway Act of 1944 established a 50% cost share to subsidize states in their construction of national highways.

Timeline of the Near North Side Neighborhood & North Freeway

1946 - The City of Omaha's Housing and Slum Area Elimination Committee, as part of the City's [Improvement and Development Program](#), recommends that nearly 15% of homes in the Near North Side neighborhood be condemned. Additionally, the Committee proposed:

- The City of Omaha "initiate an aggressive program of condemnation and demolition of dilapidated structures;" and
- Tax foreclosures in the Near North Side neighborhood be sped up

1954 - The State of Nebraska and the City of Omaha propose a north-south expressway through North Omaha.

1956 - The National Interstate and Defense Highways Act increased the federal cost share to 90%, meaning states only had to cover 10% of the costs to construct highways.

1960 - Despite protests from Black residents in North Omaha, the first phase of construction of the North Freeway begins: Dodge to Hamilton.

1973 - Despite further protests from North Omaha's Black community, the second phase of construction of the North Freeway begins: Hamilton to Lake.

1976 - The North Freeway is designated as Interstate 580.

1977 - The third phase of construction of the North Freeway begins: Lake to Ames. White residents successfully protest the expansion into their neighborhoods.

1979 - The City of Omaha requests removal of the I-580 designation. Completed in 1980

1980 - City of Omaha and State of Nebraska route money from interstate construction to development of the Sorenson Parkway and Storz Expressway

1981 - The fourth phase of construction begins: Ames to major interchange.

1989 - The construction of the North Freeway is complete.

Before examining community engagement strategies from across the country, it's important to consider the [**Promising Practices for Meaningful Public Involvement in Transportation Decision-Making**](#), a guide developed by the U.S. Department of Transportation in October 2022 to "develop publicly-supported, well-thought-out plans and designs for deployment at the outset."

- **Features of Meaningful Public Involvement** - For public engagement to be a meaningful endeavor, the process should seek out representation from the impacted community to hear their concerns and visions, and, if possible, incorporate the feedback and community input into the final plan. Collaborative efforts can lead to better decision-making. As such, the features of public involvement include: Understanding the demographics of the affected community
 - Building durable relationships with diverse community members outside of the project lifecycle to understand their transportation wants and needs
 - Proactively involving a broad representation of the community in the planning and project lifecycle
 - Using engagement techniques preferred by, and responsive to the needs of, these communities, including techniques that reach the historically underserved
 - Documenting how community input impacted the final projects, programs, or plans, and communicating with the affected communities how their input was used
- **Building Public Involvement Capacity** - Public involvement should be a priority across all levels of an organization to ensure effective collaboration, trust-building, and community engagement in transportation projects, with dedicated resources, staff, and ongoing training. By institutionalizing a consistent, organization-wide approach to public participation, organizations can enhance community relationships, meet legal requirements, and design projects that truly serve the needs of the public. Community Participation Plans (CPP) are useful for achieving organizational understanding on community engagement and provides an outline for how an organization approaches such activities. The CPP should be a living document that outlines strategies for public input, incorporates feedback, and includes metrics for evaluating success, while organizations should ensure adequate resources and flexibility in implementation to foster meaningful public involvement

- **Measuring the Success of Public Involvement Strategies** - According to a Transportation Research Board (TRB) [project](#) for the National Cooperative Highway Research Program (NCHRP), there are six key metrics to track for improved community engagement:
 - **Influence and Impact:** Public feedback has an impact on the project decisions and ensures that organizations are not just eliciting feedback from the public as part of a “checklist.”
 - **Transparency and Clarity:** Trust of government agencies has increased or improved as a result of the public involvement processes, and agencies were appropriately transparent about the project.
 - **Timing:** Public involvement started early enough and was of sufficient length and frequency to be valuable.
 - **Inclusion:** Public involvement was inclusive and representative of all targeted and affected populations.
 - **Targeted Engagement:** Public involvement included locations relevant to the targeted and affected populations.
 - **Accessibility:** Public involvement activities used multiple methods for participation.
- **Techniques for Meaningful Involvement** - A combination of virtual and in-person engagement tools tailored to the specific needs of the community, such as language considerations, helps build trust, fosters transparency, and broadens participation, with an emphasis on continuous evaluation to adapt outreach strategies as necessary.

While implementing a meaningful community engagement strategy can improve decision making processes and improve public trust, there are challenges to consider. First, a lack of trust creates a self-perpetuating cycle: skepticism and apathy hinder participation, leading to less engaged decision-making, which further reinforces distrust. Second, barriers such as language differences, lack of internet access, time, and accessibility limitations may limit resident engagement and participation. Third, financial and capacity constraints may make it difficult for local governments to put together a more robust and representative engagement process. These challenges play a significant role in the [Conflict Cycle](#), an operational framework developed to better understand the stages most communities go through when addressing conflict. The Conflict Cycle, introduced by Jerry Robinson, Professor of Sociology at University of Illinois, can be used as a diagnostic tool to better comprehend the issue and strategies to respond.

Phase	What happens?	Intervention Opportunities
Tension Development	Community members begin taking sides over an issue, with tensions building gradually or suddenly.	Host public forums or town halls to share objective information and clarify facts. Use surveys or feedback tools to gather diverse input and ensure all voices are heard. Reframe the issue by focusing on shared goals or community benefits to defuse polarization.
Role Dilemma	Community members question the situation, who is right, and what should be done, often while tensions are still developing.	Facilitate small-group discussions or workshops to help participants understand the complexity of the issue. Form citizen advisory boards to help guide discussions. Highlight shared community values and common ground in communications.
Injustice Collecting	Groups rally support, justify their positions, and escalate grievances, potentially seeking ways to "win."	Create visual aids or data-driven presentations to clarify the root causes and consequences of the issue. Organize stakeholder roundtables to promote open dialogue and explore diverse perspectives. Work with local leaders or community influencers to encourage collaboration.
Confrontation	Parties face off directly, risking entrenched divisions if no resolution is found.	Use visual tools like maps, data presentations, or decision matrices to illustrate potential solutions. Promote "win-win" scenarios by addressing key concerns from all sides and outlining actionable steps forward.
Adjustments	Conflict lessens as parties make adjustments to avoid or resolve confrontation.	Provide ongoing updates to the community about outcomes and next steps to maintain engagement. Recognize and celebrate progress publicly to reinforce cooperation. Document and share lessons learned to build institutional knowledge for future challenges.

Several key opportunities emerged through conversations with project partners and stakeholders on how to improve community engagement in North Omaha. For example, when asked what a thriving community looks like, stakeholders mentioned:

- **Access to Information** - Relationships between stakeholders, community members, and local government allow for the flow of information and access to resources. This means that residents understand the processes by which the government makes decisions and how its actions are influenced by state and federal policy. For this to be possible, communication methods should be expanded to ensure they reach a wider audience.
- **Responsiveness to Input** - For engagement to be effective, residents must know that their concerns, needs, and visions are of interest to project owners. As such, project owners should be flexible in their planning and adapt to community needs.
- **Solution-Oriented** - Effective community engagement goes beyond identifying problems; it focuses on collaboratively developing and implementing solutions. By fostering open dialogue and active participation, local governments and stakeholders can harness community insights to drive actionable outcomes. This approach ensures that projects are not only responsive to community needs but also sustainable and impactful in the long term.

Section 2: Best Practices from Across the Country

The 4P Funding & Project Development Model: Reconnect Rondo St. Paul, MN

BACKGROUND

During the 1950s and 1960s, as highways were constructed throughout the country, the Rondo neighborhood in St. Paul was one of the many communities negatively impacted by urban sprawl. The development of Interstate 94 resulted in the demolition of 700 homes and 300 local businesses, erasing millions of dollars in unrealized home equity. Decades later, in 2015, the Minnesota Department of Transportation formally acknowledged, and apologized for, the destructive impacts of I-94 on the Rondo community. Following that acknowledgement, [**Rethinking I-94**](#) was launched to reimagine the corridor. In 2018, the Urban Land Institute conducted a [**study**](#) and found that a land bridge was a feasible option to reconnect communities, enhance livability, and catalyze development.



The Rondo neighborhood in 1940 (left), prior to I-94, and the neighborhood in 2020 (right).

PLANNING FOR CHANGE

In 2020 a [feasibility study](#) was completed to assess the potential opportunities for a land bridge over I-94.

Additionally, the study highlights the many benefits the community could experience as a result of constructing the land bridge, including:

- 450+ housing units
- 1,000 new residents
- 1,300+ construction jobs
- 100K sq. ft. for offices, retail, and nonprofits
- \$3.8M increase in annual city revenue

THE 4P FUNDING MODEL

While the study presented several opportunities, there were significant costs to consider for such a project. In total, the planning and construction costs for the land bridge are expected to be more than \$450M. The cost requires an innovative approach to financing and project delivery. This is where the [4P Funding Model](#) factors in. The model, developed by residents, community leaders, and members from the Urban Land Institute, was the result of a "Hackathon," a technology-based engagement process that features facilitated activities, informational resources, and case study presentations. Participants were asked to develop sustainable funding strategies, define beneficiaries, and explore community ownership models—ensuring equitable investment and long-term returns for Rondo residents.



This conceptual rendering highlights the potential of the land bridge to host mixed use and recreational areas, allow for the continuation of vehicle flows on I-94, and reconnect the Rondo neighborhood.

The 4P Model Explained

1. Public Sector: Securing Government Commitment

- State and federal commitments will fund the land bridge structure and ensure long-term maintenance.
- Legislative authority will designate the Rondo Community Enterprise Trust as the holder of air rights, ensuring community control over development.

2. Private Sector: Driving Investment and Economic Growth

- Private developers will partner with the Rondo Community Enterprise Trust to build housing, commercial spaces, and cultural institutions.
- Ground leases and air rights agreements will ensure community wealth-building rather than speculative real estate development.

3. Philanthropic Sector: Supporting Restorative Development

- Philanthropic contributions will fund job training, small business incubation, and cultural preservation efforts.
- A fundraising strategy will focus on restorative justice—ensuring that past harm is addressed through economic reinvestment.

4. People: Community-Driven Ownership & Governance

- A Community-Based Enterprise Trust will hold and manage assets, ensuring decisions are made by and for Rondo residents.
- Residents will have ownership stakes, benefiting from home and business ownership, job creation, and increased local economic activity.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

One of the primary outcomes thus far has been Reconnect Rondo's successful embrace of the 4P Model to [bring together](#) government entities, community organizations, philanthropic, and private sector partners to build the capacity and capital stack needed to advance the ambitious land bridge project.

- Involved **government entities** include the State of Minnesota, Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT), Ramsey County, City of Saint Paul, Metropolitan Council, Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) Minnesota Division.
- Partners from the **private sector** that have provided pro bono services include an architectural and engineering firm, a law firm with experience in development and infrastructure, and advisory services for digital storytelling and photography.
- Organizations representing the **people** of St. Paul include neighborhood associations, faith-based organizations, and arts and culture advocates.

- **Philanthropic stakeholders** include local funders, organizations with a focus across Minnesota more broadly, and large philanthropies with a national footprint.
- **\$4M funding secured** through the Reconnecting Communities Program for planning activities and **\$6.2M** appropriated by the Minnesota legislature.

LESSONS LEARNED & ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

1. **Community Ownership is Essential for Long-Term Equity** - Establishing a Community-Based Enterprise Trust ensures that land, air rights, and economic benefits remain under local control. Community-driven governance prevents displacement and secures intergenerational wealth-building through land leases, right-to-return policies, and local business ownership.
2. **Public Sector Commitments Lay the Foundation** - Early government buy-in at state and federal levels is crucial to securing funding for infrastructure, land acquisition, and ongoing maintenance. Legislative authority can be leveraged to grant air rights and development control to a community trust, ensuring policy-driven protection against market-driven displacement.
3. **Diverse Funding Streams Strengthen Sustainability** - Combining public, private, philanthropic, and people-driven investment creates a resilient financial model. Innovative approaches—such as social impact bonds, crowdfunding, and mission-driven development—can supplement traditional financing to support equitable economic development.

Community Benefits Agreement: The Park East Redevelopment Compact Milwaukee, WI

BACKGROUND

In the 1960s, Milwaukee envisioned a freeway network that would encircle its downtown, aiming to modernize transportation and drive economic growth. However, by the time the Park East Freeway's first one-mile spur was completed in 1971, enthusiasm for the project had waned. The unfinished highway sat underutilized for decades—physically dividing neighborhoods, limiting development, and disrupting the lives of 17,300 residents and nearly 1,000 local businesses.

By the late 1990s, momentum was building for a bold solution: removing the freeway entirely and reclaiming the land for a more connected, prosperous future.

A VISION FOR REVITALIZATION

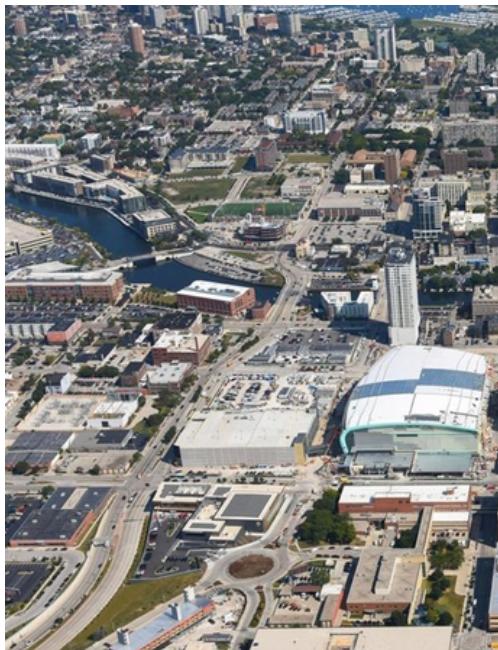
In 1999, Milwaukee leaders set forth a redevelopment plan centered on tearing down the Park East Freeway and replacing it with a street grid that would restore access between downtown and surrounding communities. This transformation was made possible through a combination of federal funding from the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), state resources, and local tax increment financing. Additionally, asset recycling and right-of-way use agreements helped finance the project. But physical infrastructure was just one piece of the vision. Community advocates and local organizations played a key role in ensuring the redevelopment benefited all Milwaukeeans.



Before: The former Park East Freeway prior to its removal

COMMUNITY-LED CHANGE: THE PARK EAST REDEVELOPMENT COMPACT

In 2002, community leaders were concerned that tax-payer dollars would subsidize developers and not lead to substantial economic gains for local residents. To address that concern, a network of 27 community organizations formed the **Good Jobs and Livable Neighborhoods Coalition (GJLN)** to campaign for a Community Benefits



Agreement to be incorporated into the city's redevelopment plan. The GJLN Coalition hosted more than 100 meetings with officials and residents over 18 months to collaboratively craft the agreement. When the Milwaukee Common Council rejected the CBA in 2004, the GJLN quickly pivoted its campaign to focus on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, majority landowners in the project area.

The **Park East Redevelopment Compact (PERC)** was eventually approved by the County Board of Supervisors in late 2004, ensuring that the removal of the freeway and future investment in the corridor also created opportunities for local workers and businesses. To guarantee that new development served the public good, the PERC established strong community benefit requirements:

- 20% of housing on county-owned land designated as affordable
- 25% of construction contracts awarded to Minority Business Enterprises
- 5% of construction contracts awarded to Women's Business Enterprises
- Expanded transit options and energy-efficient building standards

After: The project area after the freeway's removal

"CBAs are a great organizing tool because they enable many groups to come together on a joint project. Everyone is able to hold onto their own issues and it builds the coalition in a great way. They are a powerful tool for winning good jobs and more livable neighborhoods." - John Goldstein, PERC architect

LESSONS LEARNED & ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

- 1. Coalition Building is Essential** - The success of the GJLN Coalition in securing a CBA resolution hinged on the strength of its diverse coalition, which included labor unions, faith-based organizations, and community groups. By uniting different stakeholders around a shared vision, the coalition was able to mobilize thousands of people, engage in extensive advocacy efforts, and apply sustained political pressure. This demonstrates that broad-based coalitions can amplify community voices and counter opposition from developers and policymakers.
- 2. Strategic Framing Shapes Public Perception and Policy Outcomes** - GJLN effectively centered the economic disparities and the need for inclusive development in their campaign. Their narrative helped shift the public discourse from developer-driven growth to community-driven economic justice. By using clear, relatable messaging about job quality, local hiring, and economic equity, the coalition maintained public support and kept decision-makers accountable.
- 3. Persistence and Adaptability are Crucial in Advocacy Efforts** - Despite an initial setback when the Milwaukee Common Council rejected the CBA, the coalition quickly pivoted to focus on the Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors, ultimately securing a resolution requiring community benefits provisions. This adaptability highlights the importance of persistence in advocacy efforts—when one path is blocked, finding alternative routes can still lead to meaningful policy changes.

A LASTING IMPACT

Since the freeway's removal in 2003, the Park East Corridor has attracted:

- \$1.06B in private investment
- 1,367 apartments and condos
- 200K sq. ft. for commercial and retail
- Entertainment venue with indoor and outdoor social space
- Fresh Thyme Farmers Market
- Riverwalk extensions
- Athletic facilities
- 780 parking spaces

And the remaining parcels have a development potential of \$250M!

The Kirkpatrick Heights-Greenwood Master Plan

TULSA, OK

A century ago, the Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma, was a thriving hub of Black entrepreneurship and community prosperity, known as Black Wall Street. That legacy was nearly erased in 1921 when the Tulsa Race Massacre claimed hundreds of lives, destroyed 1,256 homes, and left the district in ruins. Decades later, in 1975, the construction of Interstate 244 further displaced residents and businesses, cutting through the heart of Greenwood and severing its connection to the broader city.

But Greenwood's story didn't end there.

A COMMUNITY-LED PATH FORWARD

In 2018, the City of Tulsa took a pivotal step by reacquiring key land parcels in the Greenwood District. Recognizing the need for a development approach that honored the past while creating a sustainable future, Mayor G.T. Bynum and the Tulsa Development Authority committed to a community-driven vision: the [Kirkpatrick Heights-Greenwood Master Plan](#).



The construction of Interstate 244 through Tulsa forced more than 1,000 residents to relocate and led to the displacement or closure of dozens of local businesses.

Red: Areas demolished

Yellow: Street connections lost



Visioning sessions and student workshops gave community members the chance to share their ideas.



A MODEL FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Bringing the Master Plan to life required more than funding—it demanded trust, transparency, and an inclusive approach to decision-making. Over 16 months, more than 800 community members participated in shaping the redevelopment vision for 56 acres of publicly owned land. The Leadership Committee ensured that community voices guided every step, and the subsequent Working Group focused on strengthening long-term governance and rebuilding trust between residents and public agencies.

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

Funding for the Master Plan began with the City of Tulsa, leveraging sales tax dollars from a voter-approved ballot initiative. Additional early implementation support came from PartnerTulsa, which has since secured nearly \$1 million from the U.S. Department of Transportation's Build America Bureau to explore transit-oriented development options. The city also allocated \$7 million toward the plan's implementation, including \$5 million approved through a 2023 sales tax vote.

LESSONS LEARNED & ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

- 1. Test, iterate, and diversify engagement strategies** - City and PartnerTulsa staff continuously evaluated the reach of engagement efforts throughout the Master Plan development process and subsequent early implementation activities, and modified activities to reach a younger audience.
- 2. Be clear about how engagement is translated into action** - Throughout the Master Plan process and early implementation activities, City and PartnerTulsa staff have worked to be clear and transparent about the purpose of engagement, leveraging the [**IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**](#) to ensure there is clarity about whether an engagement is intended to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, or empower community members in processes and decisions.
- 3. Trust-building takes time and is not linear** - Efforts related to the Master Plan are now entering their seventh year. Given the deep history of mistrust between community members, the City, and its economic development agencies, building trust has taken commitment and persistence. The most meaningful progress has been made through longer-term engagement efforts that sought to invest in, educate, and build the capacity of community members, while empowering them to drive decisions directly related to the implementation of the Master Plan.

Rebuild by Design Hoboken, NJ

In 2012, Hurricane Sandy devastated Hoboken, flooding much of the city and leaving some areas inaccessible for nearly a week. With approximately 80% of Hoboken situated in a coastal floodplain, the city remains highly vulnerable to flooding. In addition to putting strain on the city's infrastructure, heavy rainfall and flooding are reasons for the city of Hoboken to have thousands of flood insurance policies through the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) covering a total asset value of \$2.3B. Even with the significant amount of insurance policies, policy limitations resulted in \$9.5B in uninsured or underinsured liabilities that residents would be responsible for if there was a total loss of contents throughout the city. In response to these challenges and risks, the city sought to build resilient multi-purpose parks with infrastructure components that were better equipped to handle heavy rain, while simultaneously providing gathering spaces and recreational amenities for residents. Clearly, this is not a project on reconnecting communities or capping freeways. However, the community engagement and public participation strategies that were implemented throughout the planning process are worthy of inclusion in this compendium as they demonstrate the value in incorporating community feedback, consensus building, and partner engagement.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Prior to the city initiating their “Parks as Defense” strategy, there was considerable agreement throughout the city that something had to be done to make Hoboken more resilient to flooding. However, there were multiple paths forward. Traditional approaches suggested raising the city above grade, while others proposed building a flood wall. Some residents supported a multipurpose parking garage with water detention facilities, while others advocated for more functional infrastructure. The idea to build a flood wall was quickly dismissed because it would physically separate neighborhoods. The idea to raise the community above grade wasn’t considered much because it would greatly impact retail options throughout the city. To come as close to a consensus as possible, the city maintained a high level of community engagement that would continue throughout the planning process and beyond.

As it became clear that community members were in favor of a park with recreational amenities above ground and stormwater infrastructure below ground, in 2017, Hoboken commissioned the park's Pre-Design Analysis and Public Engagement Report that included extensive community input from an online survey and other city-wide engagement activities to identify what residents wanted to see in the new park. The report was based on engagement with over 1,400 community members, including youth, who provided feedback that would drive the design of the park, incorporating multi-generational interests and accessibility needs, multipurpose fields, flexible space designs, and community demand for various amenities (e.g., bathrooms and drinking fountains). As part of this process, Hoboken hosted a public design charrette. Throughout the community engagement activities, city officials emphasized the importance of having subject matter experts that clearly articulate the technical aspects and needs of the project in a way that is widely understood. That strategy includes utilizing a series of speakers and carefully tailoring the presentation to the audience.

PARTNER ENGAGEMENT

Hoboken's efforts provide a strong example of effective partner engagement for large-scale infrastructure projects. The city collaborated with key federal, state, and local agencies to advance flood mitigation and adaptation initiatives. FEMA played a central role in funding and risk reduction, while NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) served as a critical partner in securing federal grants and managing permitting responsibilities, allowing the city to focus on community engagement and project execution. The North Hudson Sewerage Authority (NHSA) aligned stormwater infrastructure improvements with environmental regulations, formalizing collaboration through shared service agreements and joint projects. Additionally, external advisors, including experts from the Netherlands and the Hurricane Sandy Rebuilding Task Force, contributed specialized technical knowledge. This multi-agency approach helped Hoboken secure funding, streamline project management, and integrate climate resilience into broader urban development, demonstrating the importance of coordinated partnerships in achieving long-term community benefits.



The City of Hoboken, the project team, and community members in a public design charrette.

OUTCOMES TO DATE

In September 2023, the park's effectiveness was visible when Tropical Storm Ophelia brought 2.15 inches of rain to Hoboken. The NHSA's pumps connected to resiliency parks pumped a total of 17M gallons of stormwater out of the city during the storm. ResilienCity Park's green and below-ground infrastructure withheld stormwater from the city's streets, alongside other resiliency parks in the city; after pooling water on Monday night, and the park was dry by Tuesday morning.

The final design reflects extensive community engagement, incorporating feedback and visioning to create a park that meets the diverse needs of Hoboken residents. From flood-mitigating landscapes to flexible gathering spaces, every element is shaped by local input to enhance environmental resilience, recreation, and social connection.

LESSONS LEARNED & ACTIONABLE INSIGHTS

- 1. Community Consensus Drives Success** – While there was broad agreement on the need for flood resilience, Hoboken faced multiple competing proposals. Through extensive engagement, including surveys, public workshops, and a design charrette, the city ensured that community priorities shaped the final plan. This approach not only built public trust but also resulted in a multi-benefit solution that integrated stormwater management with recreational space.
- 2. Effective Communication is Essential** – Hoboken officials prioritized making complex technical information widely accessible to residents. They leveraged subject matter experts who could clearly explain project details and adapt their presentations to different audiences. This strategy helped build support and align stakeholders around a shared vision.
- 3. Strategic Partnerships Maximize Impact** – The city's success depended on strong collaboration with federal, state, and local agencies, each playing a distinct role. FEMA provided critical funding, NJDEP streamlined regulatory approvals, and NHSA aligned stormwater improvements with environmental regulations. Additionally, external advisors contributed technical expertise, demonstrating the value of multi-sector partnerships in executing complex infrastructure projects.

Section 3: Funding Community Engagement

This section identifies funding opportunities from federal, state, and philanthropic sources that can support the following activities:

- Arts and Culture (visual arts, arts education, cultural programs)
- Capacity Building (fundraising, technology or operating expenses)
- Community Development (leadership training, neighborhood groups, youth programs)
- Neighborhood Outreach (ensuring that neighborhood associations work in tandem with city agencies)

With respect to federal funding, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) established public engagement as an eligible use of funds through several of its programs that have a connection to the Reconnecting Communities ethos. Additionally, several programs funded through the BIL showed preference to TCP. However, this guidance was issued under the Biden-Harris Administration and is subject to review.

Federal Funding

- **Safe Streets for All (SS4A)** - The SS4A program funds regional, local, and Tribal initiatives through grants to prevent roadway deaths and serious injuries. Almost \$2 billion is still available for future funding rounds. Per previous NOFOs, both the (1) **implementation** and (2) **planning and demonstration** tracks show preference to Thriving Communities participants and prioritize engagement with a variety of public and private stakeholders. The next round of SS4A funding is expected to open before the end of March 2025.
 - Implementation Grants provide funds to implement projects and strategies identified in an Action Plan to address a roadway safety problem. Projects and strategies can be infrastructure, behavioral, and/or operational activities. Previous rounds had a minimum award of \$2.5 million and maximum award of \$25 million.
 - Planning & Demonstration Grants provide Federal funds to develop, complete, or supplement a comprehensive safety action plan. Previous rounds had a minimum award of \$100,000 and maximum award of \$10 million.

State Funding

Several Nebraska state grant programs available to local governments include public engagement as an eligible use of funds:

- **Community Development Block Grant (CDBG):** Administered by the Nebraska Department of Economic Development, the [**CDBG**](#) program supports various community development activities, including public facilities, housing, and economic development. Public engagement is a crucial component of these projects to ensure they meet community needs.
- **Civic and Community Center Financing Fund (CCCF):** This program provides grants to municipalities for the development of civic, community, and recreation centers. Projects funded by [**CCCF**](#) often involve public engagement to align with community interests and requirements.
- **Creating High Impact Economic Futures Act (CHIEF):** This [**program**](#) offers tax credits to businesses and individuals who contribute to approved community betterment projects in areas of chronic economic distress in Nebraska. These projects typically involve public engagement to address local priorities effectively.
- **Humanities Nebraska (HN) Grants:** [**HN**](#) provides grants to government entities, including public schools and libraries, for projects that promote the humanities. Public engagement is often a key aspect of these initiatives, fostering community involvement and education.

Philanthropic Funding

- **The Cooper Foundation** - In addition to other focus areas, the [**Cooper Foundation**](#) offers funding for community and civic engagement activities to nonprofits and units of local governments in Nebraska.
 - While the Cooper Foundation prioritizes Lancaster County, grant funds have been awarded to organizations in outside geographic areas that have demonstrated a commitment to advance civic and community engagement.

- **The Sherwood Foundation - [Program Grants](#)**: The unrestricted funds can be used broadly across a nonprofit organization's operations.
 - As one of foundations funded by Warren Buffet, it is expected that this foundation will sunset in the coming years. However, the Buffets have stated that the Sherwood Foundation's focus will remain local, providing a significant opportunity for nonprofits in Omaha.
- **Omaha Community Foundation - [African American Unity Fund](#)**: Grounded in resident-led decision making, the program is guided by a committee of African American representatives who understand what investments will be most impactful in addressing the needs of their community.
 - Up to \$225,000 in grant funding will be awarded each year. Funding requests may not exceed \$30,000. The average grant award is \$10,000 to \$15,000.
- **Omaha Community Foundation - [Omaha Neighborhood Grants](#)**: Supports community leaders doing impactful work in their own neighborhoods; it's about supporting residents who are making a difference right where they live and empowering neighbors to work together.
 - Up to \$80,000 in grant funding will be awarded each year. The average grant award is \$2,500.

Section 4: Sources

- [A Game of Roads: The North Omaha Freeway and Historic Near North Side](#)
- [A History of the North Freeway in Omaha](#)
- [City of Omaha's 1946 Improvement and Development Program](#)
- [Community Benefits Agreement Guides Development in Milwaukee's Park East Corridor](#)
- [Economic Development and Highway Right-Sizing Case Studies](#)
- [Government, Interest Groups, and the People: Urban Renewal in Omaha, 1954-1970](#)
- [Hoboken's Post-Sandy Resilience: Learning from the Past, Rebuilding for the Future](#)
- [Measuring the Effectiveness of Public Involvement in Transportation Planning and Project Development](#)
- [Project Profile: Park East Freeway Removal Project, Milwaukee, Wisconsin](#)
- [Reimagining the North Freeway](#)
- [ResilienCity Park Case Story \(Hoboken, NJ\)](#)
- [Restoring Community in Partnership with St. Paul's Rondo Community](#)
- [Rondo 4p Funding Model: A pathway leading to restoring a community lost through Federal highway investments](#)
- [Rondo Resiliency: How the Black Residents of the Rondo community created their own community in response to racism in St. Paul, Minnesota.](#)
- [Rondo Avenue Land Bridge Feasibility Study Final Report](#)
- [University of Nebraska Omaha](#)
- [Words That Work: Communications Messaging for Community Benefits Agreements](#)