Meeting Report
Building Equity Summit
February 2, 2024
New Orleans, LA

SUMMARY

The Committee for a Better New Orleans (CBNO) and the Workplace Justice Project (WJP) brought together stakeholders from the New Orleans City government, organizing and civic groups, labor groups, and philanthropy in New Orleans to strategize about how to prioritize equity in applying for and using the major federal funding available through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

The January convening was the culmination of a year of engagement, convening over 70 stakeholders through group and individual meetings. The Building Equity Collaborative (BEC) came together to make New Orleans a better contender for competitive IIJA funds by developing a practical approach to building equity into funding proposals and project execution. IIJA creates a unique and timebound opportunity for cities like New Orleans to deliver lasting and meaningful change for residents while creating infrastructure that will last for generations. All while convening multidisciplinary partnerships and prioritizing workforce development, community engagement, and transparency.

This report summarizes the background and process leading to the meeting, key takeaways from the meeting, and general next steps.

THEORY OF CHANGE

The Building Equity Collaborative set out to:
1. **Deliver tangible benefits to people in New Orleans** – show that the IRA/IIJA dollars can create good jobs, lower energy costs, improve quality of life, and advance climate action– all with real impact for residents.
2. **Build collective power** – work across sectors and fields in labor, organizing, government, business, and nonprofit to apply for and secure federal funding while demanding greater equity.
3. **Develop knowledge about the available funds** and the potential for impact, and the role equity plays in funding opportunities.
4. **Create a model for southern cities** – Infrastructure is underinvested throughout the south. IIJA presents a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to invest in southern communities to set the stage for lasting equity.
5. **Secure New Orleans' Future** – Climate change impacts New Orleanians daily and has already caused severe displacement, placing New Orleans' very existence in the balance.

During its January convening, the group specifically wanted to:
- Create a framework for actionable recommendations for applying equity goals to City infrastructure projects under IIJA and IRA.
- Create alignment between the City's equity goals, residents' goals, and federal equity guidelines for infrastructure.
- Strengthen connections between organizations, residents, and City stakeholders.
- Better prepare the City to win grants for projects that would reduce disparity.

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

In April of 2023 the Building Equity Collaborative, composed of 30 groups, started convening virtually with the goals of developing a shared framework around equity to address the inequity pervasive throughout New Orleans' infrastructure projects.

The group secured support from the Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP) to conduct research on:

- New & expanded federal opportunities for building capacity in equitable planning, transparency, procurement, support for DBE's, and workforce development.
- Peer city case studies – Examples of DEI, transparency, fair pay, local hire and novel workforce development programs from other Southern cities with similar demographics to New Orleans.
- Equitable outreach and engagement practices – What has worked in other cities? How can we ensure all communities are being engaged? How can we ensure outreach is accessible (language barriers, ADA considerations, a variety of scheduled outreach events at different times, etc)?
- Enforcement & governance controls of enacted equity practices from across the country, particularly for local government in states prone to preemption.
- Workforce development and protections including Disadvantaged Business Enterprises, local partnerships for workforce development including unions, and community benefits agreements.

These virtual meetings included members from city departments such as the Mayor's Office of Community Engagement and the New Orleans Office of Economic Development, nonprofits working on issues ranging from the environment to criminal justice, labor union groups and university groups and occurred monthly and sometimes bi-weekly. For the full list of participants see appendix 1. During these meetings members and city and community leaders gained a better understanding of Justice40 and how it interacts with IIJA funding, what programs the city, state, and nonprofits are already supporting that foster equity and transparency, and learned about how various community groups are acting at the intersection of equity and infrastructure in New Orleans. For a list of meetings see appendix 1. The steering committee, which met quarterly, felt it was time to move forward with a summit when they had amassed a full body of research and were ready to share that research and chart a path forward.

New Orleans' equity statement reads, "Equity is achieved when identity, status, and ability no longer predicts a person's quality of life in our City." Yet it is clear from past climate disasters including hurricanes Katrina (2005) and Ida (2021) and previous infrastructure decisions and processes, like those surrounding the Claiborne Corridor, that New Orleans has severely underinvested in infrastructure and climate resilience in an equitable manner, causing the displacement, death, and destitution of thousands. New Orleans is positioned below sea level and is frequently hit by hurricanes due to its location on the Gulf of Mexico. If New Orleans does not seize this federal opportunity, the consequences will be grave. As one convening attendee stated, "We cannot afford to miss out this time."
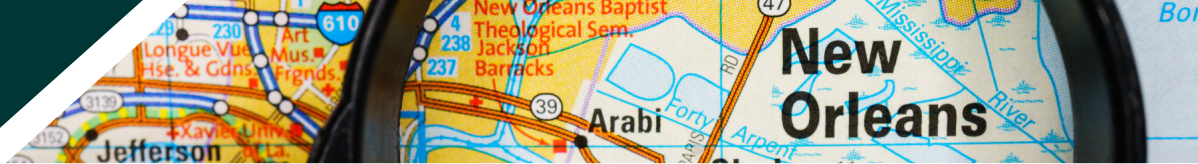
On the positive side, New Orleans is especially well-positioned for federal investment. New Orleans' need for equitable infrastructure and climate resilience means it fits perfectly within the very purpose of IIJA, IRA, and the Justice40 initiative. This also aligns with SEAP's analysis of IIJA and how the city can raise IIJA funds and plan and execute its projects. Based on this partnership, seven themes were identified to evaluate the equity of proposed projects. These themes and a corresponding framework in Appendix 2 were discussed at the January convening. These themes include:

Accessibility:
- Increasing access to jobs, housing, transportation, funding, education, healthy foods, and a clean environment for low-income communities and BIPOC communities.
- Removing barriers through city infrastructure, policy, and investments.

Accountability:
- Ensuring low-income and BIPOC communities can hold governments and institutions accountable for equitable implementation.
- Elevating the voices of low-income and BIPOC communities by developing and strengthening the skills, abilities, and resources a community needs to survive, adapt, and thrive.

Affordability:
- Lowering and stabilizing costs related to basic living needs (housing, food, utilities, healthcare, transportation, etc.) for low-income and BIPOC communities.

Community Engagement:
- Incorporating community voice and choice at every stage, including planning, execution, and evaluation, prioritizing those who have been historically marginalized.

Procurement:
- Allowing BIPOC communities to participate in every phase of the project including the contracting process, including DBE's.

Transparency:
- Increasing community visibility into the projects' progress and outcomes, including engaging with the project's progress and end results.

Workforce Development:
- Elevating low-income and BIPOC communities' voices by developing and strengthening the skills, abilities, and resources communities need to survive, adapt, and thrive.
- Engaging and utilizing labor unions, developing skills and workforce amongst traditionally marginalized communities, and partnerships to upskill and re-skill workers.

These themes must be pervasive and proactively analyzed throughout the process to prioritize, plan, and execute an equitable infrastructure project.

The convening (notes and agenda are in Appendix 3) used different modalities to engage the group and gain input and insights from attendees. These methods included grounding conversations with the City's Office of Resilience and Sustainability and Thrive NOLA, an organization that works in New Orleans to develop a skilled workforce, build up BIPOC-owned businesses, and engage vulnerable youth and families, all with the goal of creating a more economically and environmentally sustainable city. We started our day with presentations by people who are doing "the work" on the ground in terms of building more sustainable infrastructure and those upskilling and working with communities to ensure communities of color are ready to benefit from those infrastructure initiatives.

Speakers discussed the successes, opportunities and challenges they've encountered. From there, we had a brief presentation on the Coalition's work and how we got to the convening, with an opportunity for input and feedback on the proposed themes offered above and framework as detailed in appendix 2. We closed out the day by discussing the feedback on the framework and breaking into groups based on the lifecycle of an infrastructure project– prioritization, planning and design, building, and evaluating. In these groups, participants with facilitators discussed how the City and its partners could build equity into infrastructure.

TAKEAWAYS

The discussion revealed several key themes that will shape the next phase of this work in New Orleans:

ONE

A community change grant would provide this group with the resources it needs to engage in deeper community listening and move a realistic plan forward. **The Building Equity Collaborative has been operating without funding, which has limited its ability to reach as deeply into community listening and galvanizing.** A track II Community Change grant would allow the Collaboration to develop a multi-year plan for community engagement in environmental infrastructure projects. Additionally, CBNO will consider adding more members to the core group that applies for this grant, including a city office.

TWO

Building community trust is essential and requires a true plan moving forward. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans saw massive devastation and an influx of money. The money was largely taken by developers who conducted numerous community listening sessions, creating community engagement plans only to sit on shelves. Not to mention the long history of racism and classism in New Orleans, community trust is severely eroded. IIJA presents an opportunity for New Orleans to get it right, but it will take time, effort, and genuine investment in the community engagement process. Another component of trust that emerged throughout the convening was data transparency and governmental accountability. **People want real mechanisms and tools to hold public officials accountable.** Part of that is having consistent and clear data reporting from the local government. Data and transparency are both tools to hold the government accountable and to provide the government with the resources it needs to move forward in equitable and sustainable infrastructure projects.

THREE

An equity framework that can be used as a uniform rubric for the city to apply would be helpful and recommended. At the convening, CBNO and the WJP presented a draft equity framework to gain feedback from stakeholders as a tool to evaluate potential infrastructure proposals for their equity in impact, design and execution. Twelve city officials were present at the convening, and 13 city offices have participated in the collaborative process over the past year. Throughout the convening, many expressed that a uniform method for evaluating projects would be helpful.

FOUR

We must consider developing a diverse and responsive pipeline of projects to ensure equitable project proposals. The current equity framework is created as a mechanism to ensure equity is a throughline through every stage of an infrastructure project– prioritization, planning, building, and evaluating. Moving forward, we need to consider how to ensure a diverse set of project proposals is on the table to begin with. **How do we ensure proposals occur in partnership with the community and not simply from developers?**

FIVE

New Orleans is ripe for infrastructure and sustainability investment with an eye toward equity. For the community members gathered in New Orleans, the meeting affirmed that New Orleans is ready for action regarding equitable infrastructure and sustainability. New Orleans is perfectly situated for IIJA funding because of the current political moment, New Orleans' current sustainability concerns, its experience with climate disasters, and New Orleans' unique intersectional history of race, displacement and environmental disasters make it especially poised for equity-based infrastructure investments. **There is a team of diverse stakeholders from a wide array of sectors who are ready for transformative change. New Orleans can serve as a model and testing ground for governing strategies relevant to cities nationwide.**

NEXT STEPS

- Continued collaboration: The Building Equity Collaborative will engage in monthly meetings. These meetings will include the full group bi-monthly, in person to grapple with larger decisions and bi-monthly with the core planning group to make tactical decisions. SEAP is providing continued support with collaboration convenings and ideation.

- An immediate next step of the continued collaboration is applying for the EPA's Community Change Grant, track II. The grant would pay for developing a longer term community engagement plan that further considers engaging community throughout the infrastructure process and as a means to engage community more meaningfully, including during the pre-proposal process, those who are not always involved in community engagement, and a sustainable, long-term engagement process. The Southern Economic Advancement Project will support the Collaborative by supplying a grant writer to continue the grant writing process.

- Deeper Community Engagement: As mentioned above, a core next step in the process is ensuring the pipeline of project proposals incorporates community voice and is even community-led. The Collaborative needs to consider how this can be a reality through deeper community engagement and ensuring lessons learned from prior broad community engagement efforts during the aftermath of Katrina are incorporated. This process and learning will also be incorporated into the community change grant.

- Continuing to build political power and will. The first in-person convening had strong city representation. The Collaborative needs to ensure continued City official engagement, including city council members. This engagement will require ongoing briefings, meetings, and mutual feedback. Additionally, the group needs to be further diversified, specifically including members of the immigrant, indigenous, and disabled communities.

- Updated Equity Framework that incorporates feedback. The draft equity framework presented at the convenings needs to be updated with the feedback presented. However, there still needs to be deeper conversation and feedback before finalizing the framework. An immediate next step is to refresh the framework and develop a timeline and process for finalizing the framework.

Partnerships & Organization Consulted

* Indicates Steering Committee / Working Group Member

Advocates & Community Organizations
- 350 New Orleans*
- Alliance for Affordable Energy*
- Broad Community Connections
- Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- The First 72+*
- Finance New Orleans
- Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance / HousingNOLA*
- Greater Treme Consortium
- Greater New Orleans Foundation*
- Healthy Gulf
- ISeeChange*
- Infinite Circle LLC
- Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center
- LA Bucket Brigade
- Lower 9th Ward Center for Sustainable Engagement and Development (CSED)
- Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans (MACCNO)*
- New Orleans Complete Streets Coalition*
- New Orleans Workers Center for Racial Justice
- PolicyLink
- Sierra Club
- Step Up Louisiana
- Taproot Earth (Formerly Gulf South Center for Law & Policy)*
- Together New Orleans
- VERA Institute of Justice
- The Water Collaborative*
- Water Wise Gulf South
- Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law School*

Research & Policy Strategy Support:
- Southern Economic Advancement Project (SEAP)

Labor & Workforce Development
- Thrive New Orleans*
- Louisiana Green Corps*
- Greater New Orleans, Inc
- Downtown Development District
- AFL CIO / IUPAT /SELABTC*
- Southeast Louisiana Building & Construction Trades*
- Central South Carpenters Regional Council*
- LiUNA: Construction and General laborers local 99*
- UNITE Here

City of New Orleans
- Infrastructure CAO Joe Threat
- Office of Resilience & Sustainability
- Office of Human Rights & Equity
- Department of Public Works & Project Delivery Unit
- New Orleans Office of Workforce Development / Job1
- New Orleans Office of Economic Development
- Mayor's Office of Neighborhood Engagement
- Department of Procurement & Purchasing
- Department of Health
- Children & Youth Planning Board*
- City Planning Commission Staff & Board
- City Council Offices
- Roadwork NOLA

Coalition & Public Engagement Meetings

Committee for a Better New Orleans is facilitating this initiative alongside Loyola University's Workplace Justice Project in partnership with the City of New Orleans. We are guided by a diverse steering committee of advocates, community leaders, and residents. Steering Committee List

The **Steering Committee's responsibilities** include -
- **Meet monthly**
- Recruit organizations to participate
- Communications for the project
- Approve certain measures relevant to the mission as a whole
- Support the Working Groups

The **Working Groups responsibilities** include -
- **Meet monthly / as needed**
- Research and document - new & expanded federal opportunities & tools, national best practices, local programs & initiatives, & leading people in the Working Group's area of focus
- Synthesize convening notes & draft recommendations for adopting & implementing equity goals & practices in New Orleans re: the Working Group's specified area of focus

Public Meetings
- April 1, 2022: Launch of Steering Group
- April 7, 2022: Just Recovery Stakeholder Convening (Corpus Christi Community Ctr)
- April 18, 2022: Steering Committee Meeting
- May 11, 2022: Just Recovery Stakeholder Convening (Virtual)
- July 13, 2022: Stakeholder Meeting
- November 3, 2022: Stakeholder Meeting
- December 13, 2022: Steering Committee & Rebrand (ReFresh Community Room)
- January 10, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- February 9, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- March 9, 2023: Training on Justice 40 for City staff, in partnership with the Office of Human Rights & Equity, GNO Inc., and the Office of Resilience and Sustainability
- April 19, 2023: Project Why Lunch & Learn for City Staff: Barriers to Equity
- April 24, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- Summer: Monthly Working Group Meetings to review & compile research
- August 15, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- September 5, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- September 19, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- November 13, 2023: Steering Committee meeting
- January 10, 2024: Building Equity Summit

January 2024 Convening Notes

Organizations Represented at the Convening (34)

- 350 New Orleans/Climate Reality Project
- The Collaborative
- Alliance for Affordable Energy
- Thrive NOLA
- Bike Easy
- WK Kellogg Foundation
- Central South Carpenters
- Workplace Justice Project
- City Council, District A CM Giarrusso
- City of New Orleans, City Planning Commission (CPC)
- City of New Orleans, Department of Public Works (DPW)
- City of New Orleans, Information Technology & Innovation (ITI)
- City of New Orleans, Mayor's Office of Economic Development
- City of New Orleans, Mayor's Office of Human Rights & Equity
- City of New Orleans, Office of Economic Development
- City of New Orleans, Office of Nighttime Economy
- City of New Orleans, Office of Resilience & Sustainability
- City of New Orleans, Project Delivery Unit
- Committee for a Better New Orleans
- Deep South Center for Environmental Justice
- Downtown Development District
- Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance & HousingNOLA
- Greater New Orleans, Inc.
- Healthy Gulf
- IBEW Local Union 130
- LiUNA! Local 99
- Louisiana Green Corps
- NANO Architecture
- New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice
- NOLA Business Alliance (NOLABA)
- Orleans Parish Communication District (OPCD)
- Our Voice Nuestra Voz
- Regional Transit Authority (RTA)
- RIDE New Orleans

Draft Recommendations for Prioritizing Projects

- **Recommended Practices**
  - Use a standard rubric across departments that includes points for projects that would reduce disparity, build equity, and remove barriers to access for disadvantaged communities. Include equity metrics as well as other feasibility indicators (such as cost feasibility, the strength of the project, etc)
    - For projects above a certain size?
    - How might we prioritize housing/ access/ disaggregated CBA data by race?
    - Safety & Hazards vs. Ongoing Deferred Maintenance
    - Community Voice
    - Data
  - Create a more thorough vetting process for early-stage project funding feasibility studies and planning to ensure projects that would reduce disparity make it into the pipeline for construction funding.
  - Create a streamlined process for community organizations, residents, and advocates to propose and support proposals for IIJA and IRA funding.
    - Many local community organizations are well-positioned to secure funding in coordination with the City of New Orleans.
    - Use this to ensure that we are building a comprehensive and equitable project proposal pipeline
    - Consider: Coordination with a nonprofit organization or coalition, Creating a working group / advisory group, transparency
  - Implement a regular coordination meeting with infrastructure departments and agencies with workforce and economic development to ensure good coordination at the outset of project proposals.
    - Suggested members:
      - Office of Resilience & Sustainability
      - Office of Workforce Development
      - Department of Public Works
      - Office of Workforce Development
      - NOLABA
      - DDD
      - Sewerage & Water Board of New Orleans
      - Cox / Verizon / ISPs
      - Workforce development nonprofit service providers
      - Community organizations in disadvantaged communities
      - Union(s) representation
    - Suggested Governance: This meeting would be convened by the Office of Resilience & Sustainability
    - Suggested Agenda:
      - Upcoming Priorities
  - Transparency
    - Publish the Rubric publicly and illustrate how the rubric informed City priorities
  - Accountability
    - Pass an ordinance that formalizes these recommendations.

- **Rubric**
  - How will equity metrics weigh against other considerations like cost and feasibility?
  - How might our project scoring rubric need to change to accommodate this framing?

DRAFT Recommendations for Planning & Design

To effectively engage the community, cities should:

- Establish community engagement goals. Engagement goals should be specific and target specific populations. For example, Columbia, MO, held a focus group with disabled people to gather their input into spending priorities. If local governments choose to engage communities through surveys, questions can be targeted toward specific populations, as well. Publicize community engagement goals in advance.
    - Use data to inform your specific populations of focus. Include data about race, income, climate vulnerability, and age, and ensure your outreach is attracting a diversity of voices. If the population qualifies as "disadvantaged" under Justice 40, make sure the engagement process specifically invites individuals from those populations.
    - Gather feedback from both current and potential end-users. For example, while a small portion of New Orleanians currently rely on transit, both riders and non-riders engage with transit infrastructure. In projects that include affordable housing, gather feedback from potential end-users of that development who may live outside the neighborhood.

- Share their infrastructure plans with the broader community to increase transparency and buy-in. This allows a two-way dialogue where communities can engage with governmental entities. Many online tools can also offer a dashboard or other public-facing resource to easily share process updates, resident feedback, survey results and additional information. Providing updates in ways that are accessible to community members including dashboards, visual representations, and various modalities and functions will help ensure ongoing accessibility. Norfolk, VA allowed residents to give online feedback on transportation projects using geocoding.

- In New Orleans, The City of New Orleans' Project Why worked in partnership with CBNO to study resident communication preferences around Roadwork Projects. Residents expressed a desire to have more accessible real-time information about projects. Residents also specified what information is most important to them. Project Why worked with Roadwork NOLA to amend the template for press releases and include trust-based metrics in the contractor report card.

- Translate meeting materials and provide interpretation at community planning and input meetings. Translation should be available in Spanish and Vietnamese. The City of New Orleans' ARPA Advisory Committee, and staff in the Office of Human Rights and Equity are in the process of developing New Orleans' Language Access Plan. Ensure this plan is documented and shared with all departments, and reference the plan in grant applications.

- Engage with trusted community organizations from the beginning.
    - To be successful, community engagement can include partners who can contribute a "trusted voice" to accelerate and expand the community dialogue. Include these partners' services in your project budget and in the planning process.
    - For example, in Atlanta, the city's economic development arm, Invest Atlanta, contracted with community partners to set up community hubs. These hubs and contractors supported small businesses to take advantage of available grants.
    - Locally, the City's partnership with organizations such as Water Wise to educate residents on green infrastructure and install green infrastructure projects in the Treme, 7th Ward, and 9th Ward neighborhoods serves as a scalable model.
    - Local nonprofit design firm Colloquate hires and pays community members to lead engagement efforts as engagement consultants for a fee of $10,000 per leader per project. Include this in the project budget.

- Consider Creative Engagement Strategies - Think beyond the meeting! We know that in New Orleans, it can be challenging to generate turnout at community meetings. However, there are many community events that bring out diverse audiences. Mix non-meeting engagement strategies with the more traditional meeting. For example, the City of Boston has a mobile popsicle stand that they use to do outreach on the go in neighborhoods.
  - Can the project team table at a NORD or Neighborhood Engagement event in the target community? At another organization's event?
  - Can engagement on a particular project be built into NEO Office Hours?

- Empower community leaders in the engagement process (and save some of your own capacity). Local nonprofit design firm Colloquate hires and pays community members to lead engagement efforts as engagement consultants for a fee of $10,000 per leader per project. Include a fee for community engagement in the project budget.

- Make community engagement a central and ongoing part of any IIJA application or project plan. This will work to assure community members that governmental entities are committed to community engagement long term. It will also increase transparency and accountability long term.

Implement a basic Community Benefits Agreement for Federally-funded projects over a particular size. Consider starting implementation with PILOT (payment in lieu of taxes) projects.

Community Benefits Agreements (CBAs) are legally binding contracts between community-based organizations representing the community's interests and developers. The agreement lays out benefits the community will get in exchange for supporting the developer's project.

- As part of the IIJA, several funding notices include a preference for project labor agreements, which are not sanctioned in Louisiana but are very similar to CBAs.
- The Department of Energy requires community benefits plans as part of its IIJA and IRA funding, which are similar to CBAs. A CBA toolkit is available to ensure applicants can meet the DOE's requirements.
- Key Questions:
  - How can we incentivize community benefits agreements?
  - Should CBAs be required?
  - What should community engagement throughout the prioritizing, planning, and implementation look like?
  - If CBA's are addressed, how has continuity and enforcement been considered?
- Rubric:
  - How will equity metrics weigh against other considerations like cost and feasibility?
  - How might our project scoring rubric need to change to accommodate this framing?

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BUILDING

There are about <u>72 workforce</u> development opportunities listed in the IIJA, and workforce development programs and initiatives are heavily prioritized throughout the Justice40 initiative. Localities should consider the following when prioritizing workforce development:

Fair Pay: The vast majority of IIJA spending is covered by federal construction prevailing wage protections that require corporations to pay market wages and benefits, and the law strengthens requirements to ensure manufactured goods are made in the United States. Despite this, the minimum wage remains at $7.25 per hour. Localities can lead by example by requiring a higher wage.

- Key Questions:
  - Are contractors paying a prevailing wage and benefits, similar to how the federal government requires this in federal contracting?
    - How will this last question be considered in the planning phase?
    - Will the project create increased opportunities for livable-wage jobs?

Local hire policies give contracting preference to companies that hire local residents from the communities in which the infrastructure is being built. The IIJA allows federal funding to be used to incentivize local hiring in highway and transportation projects. The state or local government commits to having a certain share of contractors and subcontractors be residents of a certain geographic area. <u>Virginia, Texas, and Colorado</u> have examples of successful local hire programs with the Department of Transportation.

- Key Questions:
  - There is a local hire ordinance in New Orleans, but it is not mandatory. Will the City of New Orleans require certain percentages of employees or contractors be hired locally from the city?
  - What percentage would be appropriate?
  - How could the non-profit sector support the government sector in this?
  - How can we use enforcement tools for the policies that we already have? Could we use data like <u>this</u> to ensure we are hiring people from traditionally resourced areas?

Local partnerships for workforce development are also valued through partnerships with community colleges, trade organizations, labor unions, and government and nonprofit partnerships. Examples of these partnerships include:

- <u>Maryland</u> adopted a program in late 2022 to provide employers $10,000 per employee to enhance recruitment, facilitate training, and remove barriers to employment. These funds can be used for employee transportation, childcare, housing, and traditional recruitment tools such as a signing bonus.
- Kentucky engaged in a training program with federal support called <u>FAME</u>, which is part of the National Federation for Advanced Manufacturing Education. The program combines coursework with an apprenticeship. In Kentucky, the program led to an 80% graduation rate, with graduates earning $15,000 more than their technical college peers.
- The <u>Greater Houston Partnership</u> worked collaboratively to found UpSkill Houston to convene businesses and workforce entities to plan for the competencies needed long term and ensure their workforce has durable skills, which are skills that are usable from day one on a worksite. Apprentice programs have been shown to better generate these skills than college settings.
- **KEY QUESTIONS:**
  - How would funding flow here?
  - What unions or apprenticeship programs exist in New Orleans that could collaboratively apply for funding?
  - What supports/needs does the New Orleans workforce have? How could partnerships be used to address those needs?

The IIJA also reauthorized the federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprises program, but the DBE program does not apply to every department / agency. Each state is responsible for setting DBE goals when receiving IIJA funds from the Department of Transportation (DOT) and must submit a plan to comply with goals individual states identify within its specific grant application. The DOT requires at least 10% of all funding for certain projects to be earmarked for DBEs.

- DBE designation relies on the state's designation and certification standards. Best practices in DBEs have include:
  - Mentorship
  - Ensuring businesses qualify for DBE status
  - Ensuring smaller DBEs can qualify for loans to meet larger infrastructure needs.

DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EVALUATION

IIJA and Justice40 prioritize programs data usage to ensure dollars flow to historically disadvantaged communities and transparency in tracking where money is spent. There are national data sources for determining which communities are disadvantaged.

- The Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool highlights census tracts that are overburdened.
- Race Forward's Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE) created the ArcGIS Social Equity Analysis to help governments locate and dismantle inequities in their communities.
- The Environmental Protection Agency's EJScreen tool allows local governments to see demographic, socioeconomic, and environmental information for a specific area.
- Additionally, the National Equity Atlas measures indicators of equity including demographics, economic vitality, readiness, economic benefits, and connectedness, with the goal of providing disaggregated data to advance equity and prosperity.
- The City Health Dashboard provides mapping of health, environment, housing, income, and more with racial breakdowns as well.
- Key Questions:
  - What data do we need to track success?
  - What data do we need to prioritize and plan projects on the front end?
  - Does the City already have or collect this data? Is it published? If not, how could we get this and disseminate it?

As a part of the effort to invest federal funds equitably, public transparency is a best practice. This includes publicly tracking where funds are spent and their impact.

- Raleigh's ARPA webpage provides a range of information, including details on the city's three-phase approach to spending with project-specific details provided through drop-down menus. The webpage also links to key presentations, city Treasury reports, and a simulator to build different funding scenarios. While this is an ARPA example, the same principles apply to IIJA.
- Nationally the American Road and Transportation Builders Association offers a country wide map with details on IIJA spending by state related to transportation.
- Many cities like New Orleans are already tracking IIJA spending. These sites could offer better accessibility with better visualization and manipulation of the data. New Orleans could use national databases like the one from the National League of Cities to provide more comprehensive information.
- Key Questions:
  - How will we ensure public transparency with IIJA funding, including which programs are funded, how and where?

Within the engineering and the infrastructure fields there are multiple surveys and assessments cities could use to analyze post construction equity created. These tools include:

- The <u>Universal Design-Based Framework</u> assessing the usability and inclusion of buildings by using three categories (physical-spatial quality, sensorial-cognitive quality, and social quality) and eight criteria (i.e. usability, functionality, safety/security, wayfinding, understanding, environmental factors, well-being, and social inclusion).
- <u>Oregon</u> conducted a post-construction audit to determine whether it met its equity goals over a period of time. The audit measured against equity goals the city set out for itself.

As localities consider applying for grants, localities with clear and measurable methodologies for ensuring racial equity in implementing IIJA and IRA programs. Localities with clear understandings of equity concerns in their area and a pathway to address these concerns are in better standing for funding.

- An example of this is Charleston, which established a committee to write "<u>The State of Racial Disparities in Charleston County Disparities Report</u>" and then issued a <u>report</u> with long-term goals, objectives, strategies and actions, performance measures, evaluation tools, lead staff, oversight and due dates.
- Austin created a climate equity plan and <u>tool to create accountability</u> toward the plan's implementation. <u>The Climate Equity Plan</u> centers racial equity in its goals, strategies, and plans.
- Planning for equity on the front end is the best predictor of post-construction equity. An equity framework analyzes potential or upcoming projects to ensure post-construction equity. Best practices in creating an equity framework include:
  - Conducting a needs assessment to identify community needs and encourage civic engagement (<u>Greene County, MO</u>)
  - Creating a dashboard to encourage transparency (<u>Norfolk</u>)
  - Creating an equity resolution (<u>Arlington, VA</u>)
  - Creating an equity scorecard that reflects the needs of your community (<u>Newnan, GA</u>)
  - Looking for opportunities to collaborate with other governments to pool resources and address long-range planning (<u>South Carolina Rural Infrastructure Authority</u>)
- Key Questions:
  - What policies do we need to have in place to ensure accountability?
  - What procedures do we need to have in place to ensure public accountability?
  - How should we evaluate projects for success? How should we evaluate projects for equitable impact?
  - Does New Orleans already have the tools we need? If so, are they implemented with fidelity?

<u>Framework</u> as presented at the convening.