



Our AREA



ALLIANCE REGIONAL EQUITY AGENDA

Our AREA is a collaborative document created with our advisory committee & partner organizations. Thank you!

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The Alliance
ADVANCING REGIONAL EQUITY



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WHO ARE WE?

The Alliance is a coalition of community-based organizations and advocacy groups building shared power to advance strategic campaigns around the intersections of racial justice, economic justice, environmental justice, and health equity. Our mission is to advance justice and equity in economic growth and land development in the Twin Cities region.

Our AREA will continue to evolve as a living document, and our strategies for equity will move forward to shift the landscape. We ask you to share *Our AREA* with your networks. Please contact Alliance for how you may support the implementation of *Our AREA* at info@thealliancetc.org or visit www.thealliancetc.org for future adaptations of and tools for *Our AREA*.

INTRODUCTION

People of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities have always been at the forefront of social change. Here in the Twin Cities metro area, these communities are leading powerful, creative work to establish a just region where all can thrive.

Our AREA: The Alliance Regional Equity Agenda is a strategic document developed through conversations with local leaders. It highlights the strategies Alliance members and partners are using and calls for further collective action to heal communities, stimulate regenerative power, dismantle structural racism, and end the displacement and gentrification of our communities. This agenda moves toward reclaiming the term “equity” and defining it in our terms via our strategies.

The Twin Cities region has long harbored some of the nation’s most extreme racial disparities in employment, wealth, and housing. These injustices have received increasing publicity—spurring targeted research, ongoing dialogues, and task forces that repeatedly describe the problem, while the data has not substantively changed. Although we are collectively more aware of the issue, people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities continue to experience disparities in every facet of life. These inequities destabilize our communities and make us vulnerable to displacement by those with more resources. We know that we are facing systems and institutions intentionally built on a foundation of racism, bias, and injustice—designed to benefit white people at the expense of people of color. To achieve regional equity, systems must be changed.

Regional equity requires racial justice, environmental justice, economic justice, and health justice. It is impossible to separate them. Decisions and investments that affect housing, transportation, land use, economic development, and other regional issues affect all these critical areas. *Our AREA* provides a strategic plan for regional equity centered around the needs and aspirations of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities and ties each strategy to the other. Therefore every step forward you, the reader, take in any area of the agenda, is a step for the whole.

THE SYSTEMIC WITHHOLDING OF WEALTH

Our AREA centers the needs and aspirations of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. Although not all people of color, indigenous people, and immigrants are low-income, we know that all of these communities are systemically under-resourced. Institutional racism and white supremacy have supported wealth-building in white communities over generations while withholding those supports – and often actively stripping wealth - from people of color, indigenous, and immigrant communities. Resources withheld include livable incomes, stable housing, access to capital, land ownership, and quality education. Under-resourced is thus distinct from “low-income” and applies in our region (and nation) to specific geographies as well as racialized cultural groups.

CORE PRINCIPLES

Implicit and essential to each Our AREA strategy are four underlying principles.

1

EQUITY MUST BE CLAIMED AND DEFINED BY THOSE MOST HARMED BY SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION. The inequities in our region are rooted in an imbalance of power between white people and people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. This imbalance of power occurs across systems and decision-making spheres, effectively omitting our communities from visions of a prosperous region.

2

WORK TOWARD EQUITY MUST FUNDAMENTALLY BE ABOUT BUILDING POWER, capacity, and leadership to annul structural and institutional racism. Thus, *Our AREA* strategies all implicitly center the engagement and inclusion of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities to assert power and mitigate further harm, while promoting healing from past harm with targeted strategies for our communities' well-being.

3

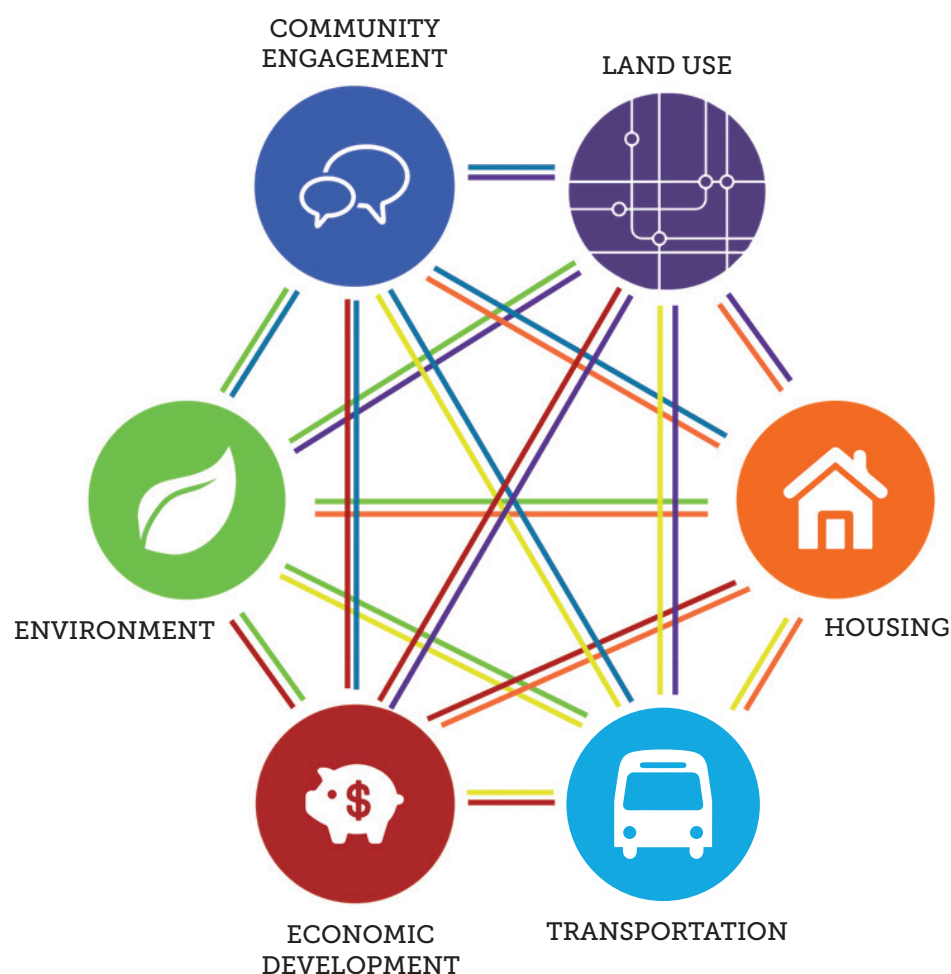
EQUITY EFFORTS MUST BE INTERSECTIONAL. People's identities are made up of many overlapping pieces such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, and ethnicity. Thus, patterns of oppression are interrelated and bound together. To undo one form of oppression, we must fight all its forms.

4

EQUITY IS A HUMAN RIGHT. It is about providing opportunities and creating positive outcomes for everyone. Policies and practices that restrict or exclude certain communities in order to maintain the status quo violate this principle. *Our AREA* strategies assume communities have the right to safe, healthy, and dignified housing, employment, and neighborhoods. It promotes practices that support healing from centuries of dispiriting and destructive policies and establishes our right to stay in, or move to, our chosen communities.

OUR AREA STRATEGIES

The regional equity strategies presented in *Our AREA* focus on communities that live at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression. We recognize the historic and ongoing violence of patriarchy, colonialism, and white supremacy that has created systems of exclusion and harm. *Our AREA* offers opportunities to heal from these traumas through transformative strategies that will advance prosperity for people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities of the Twin Cities region. We recommend strategies to advance regional equity in the areas of Community Engagement, Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, and the Environment.





COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Effective community engagement spurs regenerative power.

Authentic community engagement calls for institutions to be transparent and accountable to communities. It requires institutions to dedicate time, energy, and resources to building mutually beneficial relationships with community members. Most importantly, it demands that institutions allow the community to substantially influence public decision-making. Community engagement processes must allow people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities to secure benefits from public plans and investments. One-directional public forums and superficial tweaks do not constitute effective community engagement.

Resilience and healing from past traumas within historically marginalized communities are vital outcomes of authentic community engagement. Effective engagement requires the implicitly white supremacist systems that have perpetrated the harm to transform

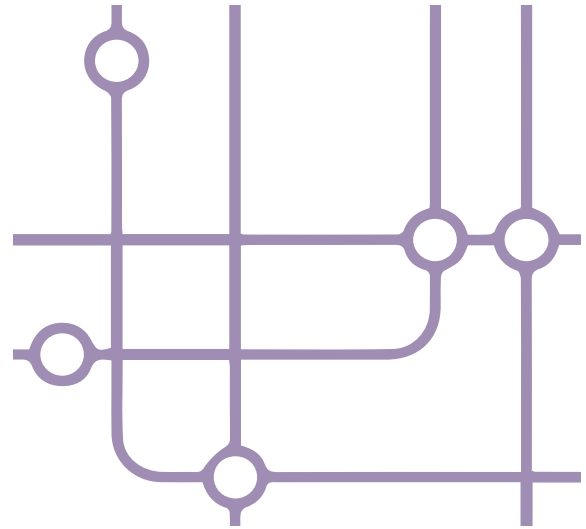
before they can effectively engage with communities they have historically failed. Institutions must be intentional and develop lasting collaborative relationships with people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. Institutions and their representatives must acknowledge and work through a healing process that strengthens the community's ability to engage and benefit. Without such intentional practice, policies and projects will likely continue to inflict harm.

To ensure that projects and programs meet community needs, community engagement must be a mandatory, embedded, and ongoing process that guides all institutional work. Within this framework, communities are respected as experts who define the problems, design the solutions, and evaluate the outcomes.



STRATEGIES

- **ADOPTION OF MEANINGFUL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES** that include built-in time and resources. Authentic engagement requires significant time investment by institutions to develop trusting relationships across multiple community members including people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. Institutions must demonstrate respect for the expertise and time invested by communities by establishing transparency in process, in decision-making, and in meaningful incorporation of public input.
- **REQUIRE EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS OF ALL BUDGET AND POLICY DECISIONS.** This may require that institutions answer questions about community engagement, assess both positive and negative impacts of decisions, mitigation strategies to prevent harms, and an articulation community benefits with/by/for people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. Equity impact assessments must also have accountability repercussions if budget or policy decisions do not meet community standards or are not fully and thoughtfully implemented. Additionally, institutions must create budgets reflective of these values, which includes resources for community engagement, such as compensation to community groups and individuals who give significant time, resources, or credibility to a project.
- **INTEGRATE THE USE OF THE EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES & SCORECARD** in planning and development across neighborhood, local, and regional institutions. The Scorecard is a tool created by Twin Cities communities to ensure the practices of equitable development, environmental justice, and affordability are applied in all communities as they plan for economic development and wealth creation that benefits everyone. Implementation of the Scorecard requires early and ongoing engagement with people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. <http://thealliancetc.org/our-work/equitable-development-scorecard/>



LAND USE

Thriving neighborhoods form the foundation for community health and economic well-being.

For neighborhoods to prosper, developers, communities, and government agencies must collaboratively plan and implement land use strategies that will benefit all people. In low-wealth communities, it is especially important that land use policies intentionally support and benefit the people who are already there.

Traditional applications of land use policies have limited choice and divided communities. Often hidden from residents, the rules of the game determine which neighborhoods are home to acute environmental pollution and which are environmentally and economically healthy. The burden of inequitable land

use policies and regulations falls largely on neighborhoods with people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities, driving gentrification and displacement and reinforcing environmental harm and poverty. As a result, land use planning and regulation are social justice issues.

Equitable land use policies support a broad set of choices for where we live and work and how we get around the region. These policies should enrich neighborhoods by encouraging all kinds of social, cultural, and economic interaction.



STRATEGIES

- **USE “UPZONING” TO PROVIDE MORE THAN DENSITY.** Upzoning (the practice of changing zoning restrictions to allow for higher-value or higher-density development) should advance equity by including affordable and equitable housing commitments, local hiring requirements, and publicly accessible green spaces.
- **SUPPORT MORE COMPACT AND MIXED-USE FORMS OF DEVELOPMENT** in all neighborhoods to enrich resident access to all of the social, cultural, environmental, and economic opportunities our region offers. For example, land use policies can be utilized to broaden housing choice for all families by allowing for accessory dwelling units and rental opportunities in both single family residences and multi-unit buildings of various sizes, configurations, and ownership models.
- **INCORPORATE GREEN SPACES** such as playgrounds, public seating, public plazas, community gardens, and pathways within and for neighborhoods where people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities live.
- **REQUIRE COMMUNITY-LED LAND USE PLANNING PROCESSES THAT START AND END WITH COMMUNITY.** Conventional land use planning separates uses and limits choices, thus a more form-based approach which begins with a community-led placemaking exercise and is centered on people of color, indigenous, immigrant and low-income communities, will result in a broadened local economy built upon existing assets and diversity.
- **ESTABLISH EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES** ESTABLISH EQUITY ADVISORY COMMITTEES as a means to tap local expertise. Equity must be centered on communities most impacted by decisions; therefore an equity advisory committee made up of local communities, including people of color, indigenous, immigrant and low-income communities, can guide land use planning processes and placemaking exercises, and advocate for the kinds of equitable policies needed internally and externally to implement the plans.
- **REQUIRE EQUITY IMPACT ASSESSMENTS AND/OR EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT SCORECARDS** for planning processes. Use of these tools creates opportunities for residents to inform and engage the planning process, as well as to understand their relationship to land use plans and regulations.

HOUSING



Housing is a human right.

White supremacist policies like redlining have historically limited choice and confined people of color, indigenous people, and immigrants to certain neighborhoods in the Twin Cities. As those neighborhoods become desirable to developers, long-time residents are at risk of displacement. As gentrification occurs, our communities are increasingly burdened by soaring housing costs that limit mobility, allow exploitation, and threaten stability across our region.

Individuals and families need the opportunity

to stay in their neighborhoods without fear of being displaced or forced to endure appalling living conditions for lack of better choices. Affordable and equitable options for people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income community members to rent or own in our region are vanishing at an alarming rate and eviction, displacement, and homelessness are everyday realities for far too many. Policies and practices must honor our right to stay in or move to any community that positions us to thrive.



STRATEGIES

PROTECT TENANTS. The affordable housing crisis sets an exploitive environment for renters, which also violates renters' freedom of choice. Increased rents without improvements to units, excessive application fees, restrictive leasing policies, and lack of protections from retaliation when issues arise are all prevalent and unregulated.

- **CREATE RENT CONTROL/STABILIZATION POLICIES** which places a cap on rent increases and prevents dramatic increases in rent that cause large scale displacement.
- **INSIST ON JUST CAUSE EVICTION.** Unlawful detainers (UDs) and evictions have lifelong impacts on people's ability to rent, regardless of whether the eviction was upheld or merely filed. Just cause eviction policies would limit a landlord's ability to file for eviction without just and reasonable cause. This would reduce the number of unfounded UD's showing up on people's background checks and credit reports.
- **CREATE RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL** policies which prevent landlords from selling properties without notice to tenants. These policies provides tenants with the right to purchase the property before a third party has opportunity.
- **ESTABLISH AND ENFORCE SECTION 8 PROTECTION** to prevent landlords from discriminating against Section 8 housing voucher holders.

PRESERVE THE HOMES WE HAVE NOW. The loss of affordable units across the region is contributing to the crisis, making it significantly more difficult to meet the need for affordable housing with new units. We must preserve both subsidized and naturally occurring affordable housing.

- **SUPPORT COOPERATIVE HOUSING AND LAND TRUST MODELS.** These are creative options to maintain affordability of homes for the long-term.
- **EXPAND AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUNDS.** These trust funds can provide gap financing for preserving naturally occurring affordable housing, for affordable housing with expiring subsidies, and for the production of new affordable homes.

PRODUCE MORE HOMES—it will take 65,000 affordable homes to meet the needs of all in the Twin Cities region. We call for new production to meet our standards of equitable housing.

- **ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT INCLUSIONARY ZONING POLICIES** which require affordable units be built within any building project receiving public resource support. Inclusionary zoning policies also authorize city staff to require affordable units as condition of approval when reviewing redevelopment and site plan proposals.
- **ADOPT ZONING CHANGES THAT PROMOTE MIXED-USE DEVELOPMENT AND DENSITY WITH AFFORDABILITY REQUIREMENTS** to allow our region to meet production needs.
- **CREATE FINANCING OPTIONS** that make production more feasible for small and emerging developers with stronger ties to community.
- **INCREASE RESOURCES** for the construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of public housing.

WHAT IS CONSIDERED AFFORDABLE? A CAUTION WITH LANGUAGE

Housing is generally considered to be affordable to an individual or a family when it costs 30 percent or less of their income. A lot of our available public funding goes to help provide housing that is affordable to people (or families) earning 30, 60, and 80 percent of the area median income of the Twin Cities region.

Of course, incomes vary tremendously not just within a particular city but across our region. Therefore, while our public investments in this new housing have made it affordable to more people than it would have been otherwise, they

certainly haven't made it affordable to everyone.

And for some cities, the new "affordable" housing is not truly affordable to even a simple majority of their residents. This is why, when being more precise in our language, our field speaks about housing that is affordable to someone at a specific percentage of our area median income. Or, in frequently used short-hand, "@60% AMI". This is also why using a more localized (neighborhood- or city-level) median income to set affordability levels is often proposed

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- **PRIORITIZE USING VACANT HOMES AND GOVERNMENT-OWNED LOTS** to create affordable homeownership opportunities. Many of these should be prioritized as wealth building opportunities for people of color, indigenous, immigrant and low-income communities in acknowledgment of historic wrong from redlining to predatory lending practices which have left communities of color with little wealth compared to white families.
 - **REQUIRE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLICLY-OWNED LAND TO INCLUDE AFFORDABLE RENTAL UNITS.** Public land should provide public benefit; therefore any development that happens on publicly-owned land must include affordable and equitable housing options.
 - **EXPAND AFFORDABLE HOUSING TRUST FUNDS** to provide gap financing for affordable and mixed-income rental housing and to support both housing production and preservation projects.

EQUITABLE HOUSING

Beyond affordability, we call for equitable housing. Equitable housing offers more than affordability—it must also be safe, dignified, and accommodating to the needs of the household in both size and location.

Safe housing provides healthy and structurally sound shelter that provides a sense of peace and belonging without fear of displacement or harm.

Dignified housing protects tenants from exploitative leasing practices and unjust evictions by property owners and allows individuals and families to establish a home.

Accommodating housing meets the needs of all, including large families and multi generational households, giving families of all sizes a choice in where they live.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Building wealth builds power.

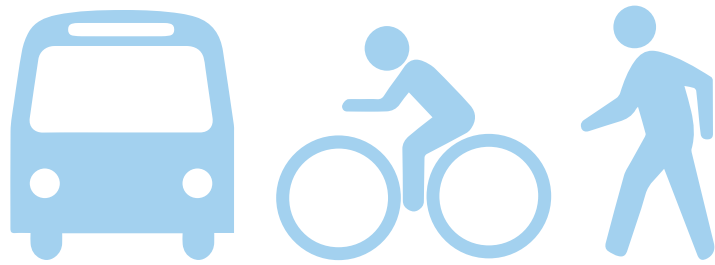
For a prosperous and sustainable region, economic development must prioritize resourcing people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. This requires intentionality behind investments to uplift locally-owned small businesses, promote local hiring, improve education, and enhance overall community vitality. This vision is achievable if we develop creative, purposeful ways to attract investments to under-resourced communities and keep dollars cycling within communities once there.

Current economic development trends initiatives are changing local neighborhoods. They are displacing local businesses and naturally occurring affordable housing, and replacing them with trendy high-rent commercial spaces and luxury housing. Equitable economic development builds on existing assets and allows people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities to build and sustain wealth in their neighborhoods, creating healthy, thriving, and well-resourced communities.



STRATEGIES

- **SUPPORT SMALL BUSINESSES** with culturally tailored resources, technical support, and training for and by people of color, indigenous, and immigrant communities.
- **USE CREATIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES** to provide the capital needed to start and support small businesses, such as cooperatives, microloans, lending circles, Sharia-compliant loans, and crowdsourcing.
- **SET PROCUREMENT GOALS FOR DISADVANTAGED BUSINESS ENTERPRISES.** People of color, indigenous, and immigrant-owned enterprises must have access to and opportunity to be competitive in institutional investments if we are to build a strong and diverse economy.
- **SET AND MEET HIRING GOALS** for people of color to reduce discriminatory hiring practices, mitigate past harm, and create opportunities to gain work experience and skills. Meeting and exceeding diversity hiring goals is one way to open doors to career paths that have historically been dominated by white workers due to both explicit and implicit racial discrimination in hiring practices.
- **CREATE MARKET SPACE AND SIMPLIFIED REGULATIONS FOR INFORMAL AND MICRO-BUSINESSES** to allow people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities with limited resources to optimize their natural talents, skills, and assets to earn an income.
- **IMPLEMENT CREATIVE PLACEMAKING THROUGH INTENTIONAL INVESTMENTS AND DESIGNS** that are community-driven and that empower local people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income community members. Placemaking builds on and fortifies a neighborhood's existing strengths by catering to local community interests. Local hires, local business-owners, and locally-derived investment opportunities also reinforce economic growth and create a sense of place and belonging for the community.



TRANSPORTATION

Transportation connects us to opportunity.

Transportation systems are essential links between individuals and the community. Safe, convenient, and accessible transportation choices not only helps people grocery shop, get to work, and maintain relationships—it also opens up possibilities for new ventures and investments in community assets as transit stops influence surrounding development.

Past exclusionary transportation policies moved people through neighborhoods rather than throughout neighborhoods (for example, the construction of Interstate 94 through the heart of Rondo Neighborhood in Saint Paul and Highway 55 through North Minneapolis). This choice to destroy rather than build upon

the assets of those communities, has caused generations of harm to the African-American people in these neighborhoods, destroying their homes and economic centers while cutting people off from accessing education, work, and social opportunities.

Development surrounding light rail and bus rapid transit station areas can reverse this, if tailored to the needs of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities who are disproportionately dependent on public transit. The system must efficiently move people to their destinations with accessible, and affordable multimodal options.



STRATEGIES

- **SECURE DEDICATED, PERMANENT, STABLE FUNDING FOR MULTIMODAL**

TRANSPORTATION. Transportation funding is essential for the region as density increases and suburban populations of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income community members continue to grow. These investments should support safety and increased transitways, bikeways, sidewalks, and ADA accessibility with a goal toward a robust network of connectivity for everyone.

- **CREATE CIRCULATOR/CONNECTOR ROUTES** that focus on moving people within a community (strengthening neighborhood ties and local commercial districts' viability) while also connecting people to regional routes and opportunities.

- **DEVELOP OPPORTUNITY HUBS AT TRANSIT STOPS** that create destination points for riders, providing retail, job, social, and educational opportunities. Transit stops have the potential to be destinations that are oriented to riders' needs. Opportunity hubs that center the needs and desires of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities are a clear equity strategy and concrete community benefit.

- **ADOPT POLICIES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMPLETE STREETS** to encourage all modes of transportation including biking, walking, and rolling, and to reduce the number of trips that must be taken by automobile.

- **STANDARDIZE AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES IN**

TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS. Neither road nor transit projects should be planned without the meaningful inclusion of people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities in the early planning and conceptualization phase of a transportation project or plan, as well as all through the implementation and maintenance phases. "Meaningful inclusion" provides deep ongoing engagement with community for input that starts at the front end of projects, and frequent feedback loops regarding how information has been used as well as further dialogues regarding input that was not used.



ENVIRONMENT

Environmental justice creates community resiliency.

We all have the right to breathe clean air and drink safe water. We are living in a time of climate chaos, as temperatures rise and severe weather events become increasingly normal. Our infrastructure is not prepared for the consequences and people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities bear the brunt of these deadly changes due to limited choices in where we

live, work, and play.

We must recreate our built environment to be more energy efficient and transition from a fossil fuel-dependent economy to one based on clean, renewable energy sources like wind and solar. These solutions must be affordable and accessible to communities most impacted by pollution and climate change.

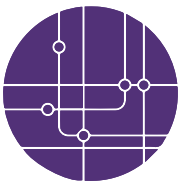


STRATEGIES

- **USE CREATIVE FINANCING** to allow people to purchase, build, and retrofit homes into more updated, energy efficient structures, including but not limited to increased support of weatherization programs for low-income renters and homeowners.
- **GREEN OUR COMMUNITIES.** Parks, urban forests, agriculture, and green roofs can all reduce the “heat island” effect of densely developed cities by providing shade and natural evaporative cooling.
- **BUILD COMMUNITY SOLAR,** a clean sustainable source of energy that benefits entire communities. This strategy should include training and hiring people of color, indigenous people and immigrants to work in the solar energy field.
- **ELECTRIFY THE TRANSIT SYSTEM** by transitioning diesel buses to electric vehicles.

CONCLUSION

Our AREA makes recommendations in six categories related to regional equity – community engagement, land use, housing, economic development, transportation, and environment. These six categories are deeply interconnected, rooted in human rights, and defined by the Alliance community. The actualization of *Our AREA* strategies across these categories both relies upon and builds regenerative power within our people of color, indigenous, immigrant, and low-income communities. Collectively these strategies work to overthrow structurally racist policies and systems to create and maintain healthy, stable neighborhoods that support and nurture us all. **Understanding this holistic view of all the components of an equitable region, it becomes clearer we must work together to achieve truly thriving communities. The next steps include you.**





The Alliance

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