

Factors that Drive Implementation of Equitable Land Use and Transportation Policies



Philanthropic Investment

Sustained funding of both organization and project capacities to advance health equity and racial justice during all policy stages

In places where strong implementation practices are advancing bike and pedestrian mobility, access to greenspace, and equitable development strategies, **leadership and resources of strong community organizations are the vital through-line** for how policies are crafted and monitored. As distinct issue-based non-profits, or as collaborative entities that express a community's broader perspective, these groups are best positioned to organize research and learning activity, committee/taskforce participation, events, and communications activity. Organizations whose leadership and staff are more representative of historically marginalized communities are especially vital to this work, as they bring a stronger lens for equity in various dimensions and policy stages.

The Challenge of Sustaining Policy Efforts through Implementation

There is continual pressure on organizations, however, to move from policy effort to policy effort as funder priorities or governing platforms shift. The action planning, monitoring, and public support needed

to implement equity-focused policies can fall into a leadership vacuum when staff funding isn't sustained; a common reason for lost momentum and unclear government response after a policy or resolution is adopted. Funders who acknowledge this challenge, and value the longer arc of advancing policies through to implementation, hold a key role in **sustaining those organizations best positioned to lead the work forward**, particularly through core operating support.

The support and influence provided by The **Chicago Community Trust** in advancing equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) is a model for sustaining commitment. It joined conversations with local organizations in 2016 about strengthening the city's 3-year-old TOD ordinance, which led to the creation of Elevated Chicago, a collaborative that successfully guided the effort to draft and adopt an **ETOD policy plan** and a stronger **ETOD ordinance** during the following six years. The Trust now funds Elevated Chicago's backbone staff as it continues to facilitate the city's implementation working group and develop policy and financing solutions for ETOD projects. Another important role played by the Trust is that of outreach partner. Because it is a

long-time, prominent funder of projects across Chicago, local alderpersons and city staff are more inclined to consider the priorities of a policy effort that the Trust is actively supporting, with Trust staff even leading this form of engagement in certain strategic cases.

The Effect of Community Organizations Driving Investment

Interviews with local practitioners elevated another notable strategy: community organizations were able to use collaborative relationships with government staff and insist on stronger implementation practices because of **valuable project funding they generated externally and were bringing to the conversation**. Equity-focused policies can evolve faster with more detailed commitments from responsible agencies when at least partial funding for the work is already at hand. Placing this funding at the vision and directive of community organizations also sets a different power dynamic, fostering better norms for engagement and accountability as government staff collaborate with groups to advance policy.

Akron Civic Commons is a notable and transformative example of philanthropic investment placing local groups at the lead of an equity strategy. Originating in 2016, the large-scale redevelopment of three interconnected greenspaces is funded through the national Reimagining the Civic Commons initiative in combination with local sources. It is guided by a collaborative of non-governmental partners, with the Ohio & Erie Canalway Coalition as the lead convener. The collaborative insisted that a patient planning process rooted in trust-building (with city staff and the diverse neighborhoods along the Ohio & Erie Canal Towpath Trail) was essential for the projects' success, challenging the top-down approach that city departments often default to. The collaborative's leadership has generated heightened engagement, important design alterations, and broadened support within and across neighborhoods. Based on this experience, Akron's government leadership was inspired to consolidate several major departments into a new office charged with furthering inclusive growth and placemaking/keeping as the city's primary economic strategy.

A vital aspect of Elevated Chicago's success in advancing an ETOD policy was funding for both organization capacity and demonstration projects through the **Strong, Prosperous, and Resilient Communities Challenge (SPARCC)**, an initiative backed by numerous national funding entities. The prospect of investment helped make ETOD policy relevant in many Chicago neighborhoods where displacement continued to be driven by racialized economic abandonment. It also encouraged the active support of locally rooted community development organizations that could mobilize engagement with residents and elected leaders. A broad base of supportive groups was key to how Elevated Chicago advanced both development and preservation needs in neighborhoods of color facing differing threats. Where displacement is (or could be) driven by intensifying gentrification pressures, the ETOD policy has altered development rules to better protect affordability.

Grant initiatives that support equitable bike and pedestrian planning have also helped catalyze stronger Complete Streets policies at the local level. These funding sources often generate capacity for more representative and skillful engagement than stretched agencies are able to provide. Local government leaders that are attuned to these opportunities may be motivated to collaborate with recipient organizations, due to community support that can be demonstrated for a Complete Streets approach, and also the potential acclaim of a widely recognized model policy. In Tucson, the Living Streets Alliance (LSA) obtained a grant in 2016 from **Voices for Healthy Kids**, a joint initiative of the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. LSA used the funding to sustain its vital facilitative role in engaging disenfranchised voices about bike and pedestrian safety. The Complete Streets policy passed by Tucson leaders three years later is one of the strongest and most equitable to ever be recognized by the National Complete Streets Coalition. In Milwaukee, a systems change grant from the **Medical College of Wisconsin** provided local organizers from the Wisconsin Bike Fed with a three-year investment to conduct surveying where people with lower incomes and people of color reside evaluating the city's Complete Streets policy. Survey results highlighted acute challenges and safety concerns of cyclists, pedestrians, and transit riders from these neighborhoods that had been under-recognized previously.