

Factors that Drive Implementation of Equitable Land Use and Transportation Policies



Government Partnership

Government leadership and internal champions maintain the intent to implement equitable transportation and land use policies

This resource shows that **collaboration with staff, executives, and elected officials from the government sector was essential for** communities that established stronger implementation practices for equity-focused policies. Local case examples describe how work beyond a single adoption moment involves considerably more engagement and accountability for staff in government departments, and the sustained attention and influence of staff in elected offices to drive norms change.

Using Catalytic Moments to Drive Collaboration

Shifts in leadership can often be a catalyst for stronger, evolving partnership dynamics. An example can be found in equitable transit-oriented development (ETOD) efforts in Chicago when Lori Lightfoot was elected as Mayor in 2019 on a platform that explicitly centered racial equity. Participants in the **Elevated Chicago** collaborative were invited onto a variety of transition teams following Lightfoot's election, which progressed naturally into commission appointments and staff roles within key departments and the mayor's office.

Strengthening the city's TOD ordinance was, therefore, part of the administration's early agenda for advancing equity. It helped establish a vital understanding of Elevated Chicago's procedural values for how new policy should be crafted (this included the co-convening of a new ETOD working group with a 50/50 balance of government and community representation). As work on the policy progressed into complex technical questions, staff that were knowledgeable about the effort were present in city departments to apply a strong equity lens. As challenging conversations arose, supportive staff in the mayor's office also helped ensure key departments were engaging authentically.

Chicago's ETOD effort also benefited from the **support of key internal champions** within the city, including the public health department and the housing department. The public health department made grants for walkability improvements near transit and lent early validity to the policy on the basis of health equity. The housing department committed to investing \$800 million toward affordable housing developments near transit. This set a visible standard for engagement that other departments eventually felt compelled to match.

Demonstrating Capacity and Public Awareness through the Setbacks

Momentum can also be generated from short-term policy setbacks. In Tucson, organizing in support of a local bond measure that included pedestrian improvements built the capacity and visibility of the **Living Streets Alliance** as a voice for better mobility options. Although the bond measure failed to pass in 2015, engagement efforts beforehand helped the organization forge many partnerships and mobilize support for a pedestrian safety strategy moving forward. Living Streets Alliance hosted a community forum a few months later, where the concept of a Complete Streets policy began to take shape. This initiated a process of purposeful engagement with city officials and some of Tucson's most impacted communities, building support for [a policy](#) centered on equity that was adopted in 2019.

Similarly, [the repeal](#) of a statewide Complete Streets policy in 2015 spurred the **Wisconsin Bike Fed** to bolster its support of local governments and community organizations advancing their own policy responses (at least seven of which adopted safer streets legislation since the repeal). When Milwaukee leaders began outlining a Complete Streets policy, the Bike Fed formed a partnership with local organizations on a campaign to build public awareness across the city's diverse neighborhoods and inform the policy's development. The resulting input addressed gaps in the draft [policy](#) (adopted in 2018), leading to a stronger consideration for the context of disinvestment and local values for promoting active transportation within communities of color.

Leveraging Supportive Relationships with Government Staff

Trusted and supportive **staff within departments can be a vital resource** for monitoring the progress of equity-focused policies after adoption. One example relates to the [infrastructure project tracker](#) developed for online viewing by **Propel ATL**, which was a strategy to maintain awareness about the [Action Plan for Safer Streets](#) enacted by Atlanta's then-Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms in 2019. Working with limited resources, Propel ATL collaborated with the city's newly formed transportation department to access current information about the status of capital projects and verify the tracker's information for accuracy. This online source has drawn attention to the slow progress made for prioritized projects on the high-injury network, where traffic injuries and fatalities are concentrated within Atlanta's Black and transit-rider populations.

Local practitioners also noted that **maintaining rapport and communication with government staff is important** for timely updates about important project activity, particularly when implementation actions might challenge an understood policy intent. This informal communication channel can be a valuable supplement (though not preferable) to regularized forms of reporting on implementation progress, which can be interrupted by staffing and budgetary challenges.