



CLIMATE POLLUTION REDUCTION GRANT

Community Engagement
kick-off. February 16, 2024



1.1 OVERVIEW

On February 16, 2024, Sarasota County, and its Consultants, WSP USA Inc., held a virtual community-based organization workshop with community leaders of Sarasota and Manatee Counties to kick off community engagement surrounding the project, and discuss community priorities and get feedback on how to effectively engage with the local communities.

1.1.1 ATTENDANCE

ORGANIZATION	
MANATEE COUNTY	Hjalmar Pachas & Gintautas Zavadzkas
SARASOTA COUNTY	Sara Kane & Alia Garrett
COUNCIL OF NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATIONS (CONA) - SARASOTA	Kafi Benz
CITY OF HOLMES BEACH	Dylan Calella
MULTICULTURAL HEALTH INSTITUTE	Helen Neal
CITY OF VENICE	Amy Nelson
SOUTHFACE	Cassidy Statler
GIRLS INC. SARASOTA	Claudia Lagnese & Andrea Garza
FLORIDA DEPT. OF HEALTH	Jerald Berry
WSP PROJECT CONSULTANTS	Catherine Prince, Fabian Campos, Bakai Ruslanbek Uulu, Daren Cheatham

1.2 BREAKOUT SESSION

1.2.1 SUMMARY

The breakout sessions focused on Transportation and Solid Waste Management, Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency, and Community Engagement. In the **Transportation** conversations, the discussion centered around the challenges of the existing transit system, the need for real-time data, improving on-



demand services, and the importance of air quality. The session also highlighted the need for affordable housing to reduce congestion. The **Solid Waste Management** conversations emphasized the importance of education and awareness about recycling methods, the need for infill technologies, and the development of incentive-based pilot programs for composting and recycling. The session also discussed the need for improved collaboration with schools and organizations for food redistribution. The **Renewable Energy** and **Energy Efficiency** conversations focused on identifying residents' greatest energy burdens and addressing barriers to accessing the existing renewable energy and energy efficiency programs. The **Community Engagement** conversations focused on the importance of cultural preferences, local engagement, hosting culturally relevant workshops, youth engagement, and using advertisements and marketing campaigns.

1.2.2 BREAKOUT SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

TRANSPORTATION

What are the transportation challenges you and your communities face?

- Existing transit travel times are long, and the network is disconnected and unreliable. Transit riders travel far distances and times to access destinations.
- Manatee has offered fare-free transit since 2020, yet ridership remains stagnant.
- Existing infrastructure doesn't allow for expanded transit. Buses are often stuck in congestion, leading to increased travel times.
- Reducing air pollution near the airport.
- The lack of affordable housing pushes lower-income residents further to the city outskirts, which creates more congestion since many of these same residents must enter the city for work.

What are your top priorities for transportation investment?

- There is a need for an app that shows real-time data to make transit use more efficient and popular.
- Improve information about on-demand transit services for senior populations and other vulnerable communities that may be unaware of existing services to access areas in the counties.
- Improve first-last mile connections. Invest in e-bikes, e-scooters, and other forms of micro-mobility that connect to the existing network since some residents don't live near high-frequency transit.
- Increase real-time information about air quality and increase prompters in key areas. Review purpleair.com. Develop an advertising campaign discussing the problems and implications of



poor air quality. Develop a single-brand clean air quality approach encompassing all regions, rather than relying on different agencies with diverging priorities.

- Develop agency-wide fleet vehicle carbon emission reduction goals to reduce negative impacts.
- Add zero-emission buses to county fleets to offer newer buses with better amenities and improve the overall ridership experience, leading to increased transit ridership.
- Create a list of electric vehicle (EV) rebate programs to make EVs more accessible.
- However, the counties should focus on zero-emission public transit options because not all community members can afford EVs currently on the market.
- Expand bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure to increase safety. Bicycle travel is often faster than bus travel.

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT

Would investment in food waste reduction programs and redistribution resonate with your communities?

- Improve education and awareness of appropriate recycling methods, food waste, and redistribution.
- Invest in additional infill technologies and share knowledge. Infill technologies have shown to be more effective at composting, recycling, and reducing pollutants since lower-income residents may not be as aware of proper methods to dispose of waste and materials.
- Approach allows for more efficient use of resources since the community has competing priorities. In other words, resident-based programs may not meet people where they are since their most urgent needs are prioritized over recycling technologies.
- Develop incentive-based pilot programs for composting and recycling.
- Improve collaboration with schools, such as Newton and Booker High School, and food redistribution organizations. Streamline approach for collaboration and implementation of in-school programs. Remove redundant efforts such as paperwork, administrative processes, etc., that may discourage community-based advocate groups from collaborating with schools.
- Improve access to local sites to dispose of hazardous material safely.
- Provide pickup on select days using green fleets led by a local community-based organization.



- Develop a list of organizations, restaurants, and other businesses interested in food redistribution programs. Create a coalition of restaurants and other businesses committing to redistribution.
- Create a pilot program where a local community-based organization picks up food redistribution from local restaurants.

RENEWABLE ENERGY AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

What (if any) are the energy burdens on the communities?

- Energy is just one of the burdens facing residents. Residents are also trying to manage the cost of living and other economic burdens. High energy costs that can often be up to \$500/month will likely keep increasing with climate change and inflation. A lot of communities and houses are still recovering from hurricane damage (damaged roofs, windows, etc.). PACE financing can be a solution for the county's middle-income residents. Lower-income residents often referred to weatherization improvements through the Step-Up Suncoast program.
- Due to the age of houses/buildings, very little insulation can be improved.
- Community outreach and education programs regarding energy usage should consider people's time and educational background (literacy levels).
- A potential strategy to reduce people's utility bills is to make local utilities more efficient and pass down the savings to consumers.
- There is a need for AC replacements or upgrades, but interventions must consider the incentives for house owners or renters.
- Water quality is also an issue many feels is worth a separate discussion.
- Need increased transparency in energy costs for different units to help consumers choose more efficient housing.
- Potentially introduce a marketing program for property owners to exercise some citizenship in the community.

Would your communities be amenable to solar PV on their roofs?

- General barrier is unknown impacts (impact on home insurance, the structure of the roof, use of precious metals, long-term goals for staying in the area, etc.).
- Need to consider that improving structural reinforcement of a house to install solar PV panels may improve 20% of the value of that house, which has implications for bringing the whole house up to code (additional costs).



- Need to educate communities about solar (clear up any misconceptions regarding holes on the roof, improper contractors, etc.).
- Potentially create a self-replenishing fund that helps with the upfront costs of solar PV installation.
- More education and awareness for groups like Solar United Neighbors to address misconceptions about installing solar and show off pilot projects in communities.
- Development of a “preferred construction catalog” with approved solar contractors.

How should agencies prioritize Energy Efficiency & Renewable Energy for Agency-Owned Assets?

- Making facilities more resilient, secure, and efficient will reduce the cost of operation and lead to savings for the county and its residents.
- Schools should be prioritized because of additional educational impacts. Having solar PV on the grounds will help students learn about renewable energy.
- Community centers/libraries or other structures that can serve as heating or cooling centers should be prioritized.
 - Newtown Community Center
 - Betty J. Johnson Center
 - Boys and Girls Clubs
 - YMCAs
- Sarasota: All new buildings are LEED certified already; LEED requirements could be incorporated into the preferred construction catalog to drive new construction in this direction.
- Need for decarbonizing schools and school buses.
- Water treatments are energy hogs and need solar to reduce future costs.

Engaging the Community

- Remain cognizant of cultural preferences and access. Be mindful of castigating based on resources and lifestyles.
- Visit local farmer’s markets and grocery stores. The farmers' market on Tittel Avenue could be a place to engage the community.
- Use maps to identify areas that require translation services. Spanish and Haitian Creole are priorities, respectively. Ukrainian and Russian are growing communities.
- Host workshops on Saturdays when the community is more available. Make it a more lively and culturally relevant event. Provide food and childcare.



- Engage youth and high school students.
- Engaging ministers and churches may be a strategy for engaging historically underserved communities. Community Bible Church
- Use advertisements and marketing campaigns. Have a pre-meeting with local CBOs to vet questions to remain culturally relevant. Helps ensure questions are tangible to the community.

1.3 NEXT STEPS

There will be more opportunities for community engagement in 2024, including two in-person community workshops and pop-up community events. The community survey (<https://www.surveymhero.com/c/Sarasota-CPRG>) will remain open until February 20, 2024.