

Sustainable Transportation Equity Project Technical Assistance Final Report

Prepared for the Strategic Growth Council and the California Air Resources Board by
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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) is a pilot grant program administered by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). STEP “aims to address community residents’ transportation needs, increase access to key destinations, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by funding planning, clean transportation, and supporting projects.”¹

STEP Funding Available

In June 2020, CARB released a competitive solicitation for grant applications to STEP. Based on these proposals, CARB awarded \$19.5 million in STEP grants from FY 2019-20 funds to support Implementation Grants as well as Planning and Capacity Building Grants. In February 2022, CARB secured additional funding from FY 2021-22 funds, estimated to be \$25 million, which the agency used to award additional Implementation Grants based on responses to the original competitive solicitation.

STEP Technical Assistance Program

In June 2020, the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) contracted with a consultant team to provide technical assistance (TA) for STEP. Estolano Advisors (EA) led the consultant team, with support from Arup, California Walks (Cal Walks), Community Development Resources Group (CD-RG), Investing in Place, and CivicWell (formerly Local Government Commission).

Report Overview

This report provides an overview of technical assistance provided during the STEP Grantee Support phase, which includes project launch and grant administration. During this phase, the TA team supported the three FY 2019-20 Implementation Grant recipients. The report concludes with a discussion of challenges during this phase and recommendations for future TA rounds.

II. BACKGROUND

A. STEP Program Summary

The Sustainable Transportation Equity Project (STEP) is a pilot grant program administered by the California Air Resources Board (CARB). STEP is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that has “put billions of cap-and-trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment, particularly in disadvantaged communities.”² STEP “aims to address community residents’ transportation needs,

¹ Note. California Air Resources Board. *Sustainable Transportation Equity Project*. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/lcti-step>

² Note. California Air Resources Board. *STEP Press Release*. <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/news/grant-awards-announced-new-195-million-pilot-funding-equitable-clean-transportation-options>

increase access to key destinations, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by funding planning, clean transportation, and supporting projects.”³

STEP Funding Available

In June 2020, CARB released a competitive solicitation for grant applications to STEP. In November 2020, CARB awarded \$19.5 million in STEP grants from FY 2019-20 funding available. These funds are divided between two grant types— (1) STEP Implementation Grants and (2) STEP Planning & Capacity Building Grants—with the majority of funding (\$17.75 million) dedicated to Implementation Grants. Implementation Grants fund “clean transportation and supporting projects in disadvantaged communities.”⁴ Planning and Capacity Building Grants support “disadvantaged and low-income communities with identifying residents’ transportation needs and preparing them to implement clean transportation and supporting projects.”⁵

In February 2022, CARB secured additional funding, estimated to be \$25 million, based on available FY 2021-22 cap-and-trade funds.⁶ With this funding, CARB awarded additional Implementation Grants based on responses to the original competitive solicitation. These awards provided full funding to one Implementation Grant recipient who received partial funding in 2020; it also funded the next two highest-scoring Implementation Grants.

B. STEP Technical Assistance Program

In June 2020, the Strategic Growth Council (SGC) contracted with a consultant team to provide technical assistance (TA) for STEP. Estolano Advisors (EA) led the consultant team, with support from Arup, California Walks (Cal Walks), Community Development Resources Group (CD-RG), Investing in Place, and CivicWell (formerly Local Government Commission).

The TA team supported all STEP Implementation Grant and Planning & Capacity Building Grant applicants interested in technical assistance during the solicitation period (June 2020 – August 2020). Most TA resources were dedicated to providing in-depth support to STEP Implementation Grant applicants. The team also supported all STEP applicants during the eligibility threshold review period (September 2020).

³ Note. California Air Resources Board. *Sustainable Transportation Equity Project*.
<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/lcti-step>

⁴ Note. California Air Resources Board. *Implementation Grant Solicitation*.
https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/msprog/step/step_implementation_grant_solicitation.pdf

⁵ Note. California Air Resources Board. *Planning and Capacity Building Grant Solicitation*.
https://ww3.arb.ca.gov/msprog/step/step_planning_grant_solicitation.pdf

⁶ Note. California Air Resources Board. *CARB pilot program awards additional \$25 million to support equitable, clean transportation options in disadvantaged and low-income communities*.
<https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/news/carb-pilot-program-awards-additional-25-million-support-equitable-clean-transportation-options>

After CARB awarded grants and negotiated grant agreements, the TA team provided grant administration support to Implementation Grant recipients only (June 2021 – April 2022). Under a separate contract, the University of California, Berkeley's Othering & Belonging Institute provided grant administration support to Planning and Capacity Building Grant recipients. The additional Implementation Grant recipients through the FY 2021-22 funding did not participate in this phase of technical assistance.

C. COVID-19 Pandemic

The entire solicitation period and Grantee Support phase took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, many applicants faced pandemic-related challenges such as staffing constraints and conflicting priorities that affected the application process. After CARB awarded STEP grants, grantees continued to face many ongoing pressures from the pandemic, including limited staffing and the need to host engagement activities virtually. During both the solicitation period and Grantee Support phase, technical assistance and communication between CARB, SGC, the TA team, and grantees took place remotely.

III. STEP APPLICANT AND AWARDEE SUMMARY

CARB received 34 STEP applications, including 14 Implementation Grant applications and 20 Planning & Capacity Building Grant applications, representing 15 counties in California. STEP Implementation Grant applicants were largely from Northern California and the Central Valley, while STEP Planning & Capacity Building Grant applicants were concentrated in Southern California. Local government agencies, including cities, counties, and regional entities, served as the lead applicant for most proposals, including 11 out of 14 Implementation Grant applications and 13 out of 20 Planning & Capacity Building Grant applications. More information on the solicitation phase can be found in the Interim TA Report (**Appendix A**).

With \$19.5 million available in FY 2019-20 and \$25 million in FY 2021-22, CARB awarded five Implementation Grants and eight Planning & Capacity Building Grants. Implementation Grant awardees are distributed throughout the state.

Table 1 summarizes STEP TA recipients, STEP applicants, and STEP awardees, organized by county and grant type.⁷

Table 1: STEP TA Recipients, Applicants, and Awardees by County and Grant Type

County	Implementation TA Recipients	Implementation Applicants	Implementation Awardees	Planning TA Recipients	Planning Applicants	Planning Awardees	Both
Alameda		2	1	1	2	1	
Butte	1						
Contra Costa	2	1		1			
El Dorado				1			
Fresno		2		1			1
Imperial							1
Kern					1	1	1
Lake				1	1		
Los Angeles	5	2	2	7	6	1	4
Mendocino				1			
Monterey				1			
(Multiple)	2						
Orange				1	1	1	1
Riverside					2		
Sacramento	2	3		2			1
San Bernardino				2	2	1	1
San Diego	3	2		5	3	1	4
San Francisco	1	1	1				

⁷ Several TA recipients were interested in applying for both grant types. To avoid double-counting TA recipients, this column represents the potential applicants interested in both grant types.

County	Implementation TA Recipients	Implementation Applicants	Implementation Awardees	Planning TA Recipients	Planning Applicants	Planning Awardees	Both
San Luis Obispo				2			
San Joaquin	2	1	1				
Santa Barbara				2	1	1	1
Santa Clara							1
Solano				1	1	1	
Ventura				2			
Total	18	14	5	31	20	8	16

Table 2 summarizes STEP applicants and awardees by lead applicant and grant type.

Table 2: STEP Applicants and Awardees by Lead Applicant and Grant Type

Lead Applicant	Implementation Applicants	Implementation Awardees	Planning Applicants	Planning Awardees
Local Government	11	5	12	5
Community-Based Organization	3	0	8	3
Total	14	5	20	8

IV. STEP GRANTEE SUPPORT TA OVERVIEW

A. TA Team Structure

With guidance from CARB and SGC, Estolano Advisors led the STEP technical assistance team. In this role, EA coordinated with the other TA providers throughout the STEP Grantee Support phase. EA also served as the primary TA provider for the City of Commerce and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation (LADOT). Cal Walks served in this role for the San Joaquin Council of Governments (SJCOG). Other TA providers served more specialized roles based on area of expertise or geography. Arup provided data collection and tracking support to all grantees. CivicWell and Investing in Place served as strategic advisors, providing support to SJCOG and LADOT, respectively, based on applicable experience and geography. CD-RG was originally scoped to provide additional greenhouse gas emission tracking and support; however, this work was not needed for grant administration. **Figure 1** shows the technical assistance team structure for the Grantee Support phase.

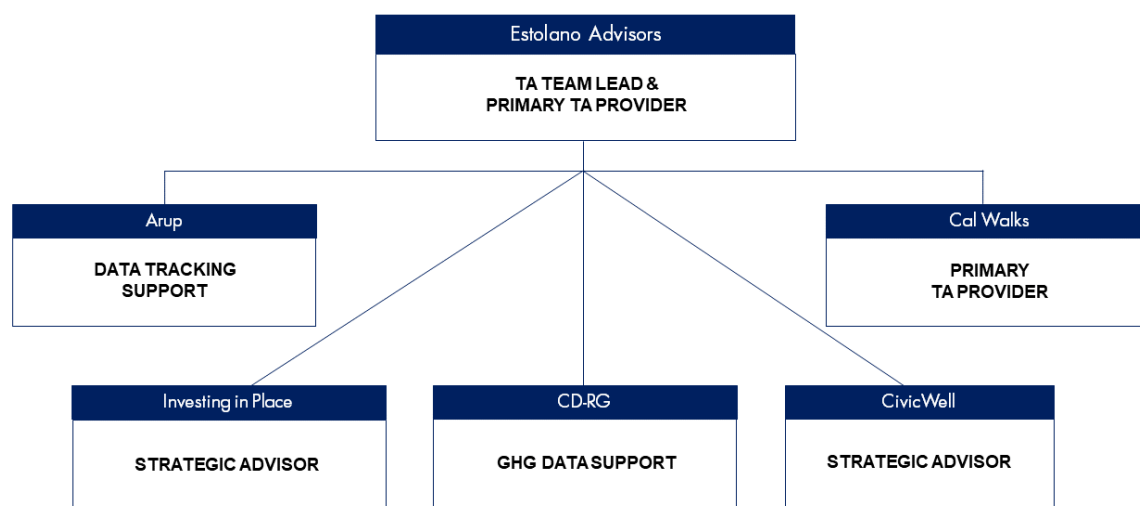


Figure 1: TA Provider Team Structure, Grantee Support Phase

B. Grantee Support TA Process

Overview

Grantee Support TA officially launched in June 2021 after CARB executed grant agreements with each award recipient.⁸ The Grantee Support process proceeded as follows:

⁸ Direct technical assistance was on hold between September 2020 and June 2021 while CARB reviewed applications and negotiated grant agreements with awardees. During this period, the TA team drafted the Interim TA Report and prepared materials for the Grantee Support phase.

1. CARB emailed a Google Forms survey, developed by Estolano Advisors, to the three Implementation Grant recipients to identify and prioritize TA needs before the start of the Grantee Support phase. The survey was organized to help awardees understand the TA resources available and identify areas for support related to data collection and reporting, community engagement, general advising, or other. Grantees replied to the survey between April and June 2021, depending on individual project needs.
2. Based on responses to the TA survey, Estolano Advisors designated a primary TA provider and developed a draft Work Plan template for each grantee.
3. Estolano Advisors scheduled one-hour kick-off calls with each Implementation Grant recipient to revise their Work Plans and discuss the types of support needed, primary TA providers, TA roles and timeline, and next steps. Kick-off meetings took place in June and July 2021.
4. Arup scheduled a data collection and tracking kick-off call for each grantee to launch this major component of Grantee Support.
5. Primary TA providers and other members of the TA team supported grantees with grant administration on an ongoing and/or as-needed basis from kick-off through early April 2022.

The timeline for Grantee Support TA varied by grantee. This is due to fact that each grantee had their own internal processes to complete prior to starting grant administration (e.g., finalizing sub-grantee agreements, securing City Council approvals, dealing with staffing changes, etc.). In addition, the type and level of support that the TA team provided varied by project, given that each grantee had different staffing capacity available.

Unlike during the solicitation period, during the Grantee Support phase grantees could communicate directly with CARB for questions related to grant administration. Communication modes and frequency varied by grantee; however, the TA team and CARB encouraged grant recipients to have direct communication with CARB for agency-specific questions, wherever possible.

TA Assignments

Due to the timing of the TA contract and grant awards, the TA team dedicated assistance to the FY 2019-20 Implementation Grant recipients only. TA assignments are based on TA provider experience with grantees during the application phase, geography, and individual grantee needs. Key information about each Grantee Support TA recipient, including primary TA provider, is shown in **Table 3**. More information on TA recipients during the solicitation period can be found in the Interim Report (**Appendix A**).

Table 3: Grantee Support TA Recipients and Assignments

Grantee	County	Award Amount	Solicitation Phase TA Provider	Grantee Support Phase TA Provider	Original Grantee Needs
City of Commerce	Los Angeles	\$3,240,078.08	Estolano Advisors	Estolano Advisors	Data Collection / Community Engagement / General Advising
Los Angeles Department of Transportation	Los Angeles	\$7,077,770.53	Estolano Advisors	Estolano Advisors	Data Collection / Community Engagement / General Advising
San Joaquin Council of Governments	San Joaquin	\$7,480,385.53	Cal Walks	Cal Walks	Community Engagement / General Advising

C. Menu of TA Options

Data Collection and Tracking Support

As part of the grant agreement, CARB requires grantees to develop a data collection plan and secure CARB approval before collecting data. To support grantees with this requirement, Arup worked with CARB to develop a data collection plan template (**Appendix B**). Depending on grantee need, Arup also worked directly with grantees to complete and update their data collection plans for CARB review.

In addition to grantee-developed data collection plans, CARB selected the University of California Berkeley Transportation Sustainability Research Center to support with evaluation of the three Implementation Grants. Arup helped facilitate coordination between the grantees and UC Berkeley representatives to streamline these simultaneous data collection processes.

Community Engagement Support

As part of the grant agreement, CARB requires grantees to develop a community engagement plan and secure CARB approval prior to implementation. To support grantees with this requirement, Estolano Advisors worked with CARB to develop a community engagement plan template (**Appendix C**). Primary TA providers shared this template with grantees, provided input on draft plans, and helped address CARB's comments, as needed.

In addition to supporting with community engagement plan development, the TA team also assisted grantees with developing partnerships and planning for and facilitating community engagement events and meetings.

General Advising

The third category of technical assistance encompasses grant administration support that falls outside the previously mentioned CARB requirements. Technical assistance in this area included:

- Advising on project implementation and implementation plans;
- Developing shareable project folder systems;
- Supporting coordination with sub-grantees;
- Providing example documentation; and
- Supporting grant administration tasks (e.g., reviewing disbursement requests).

D. Summary of TA Provided

During the Grantee Support phase, the TA team provided technical assistance to the three Implementation Grant recipients. Below is a summary of the support that the TA team provided to each grantee.

City of Commerce - Commerce Moving Forward

Sub-applicants: Climate Resolve and TreePeople

The TA team provided the City of Commerce with the following forms of technical assistance:

- Data collection and tracking
- Community engagement
- General advising

At the start of the Grantee Support phase, the City of Commerce indicated a high need for TA support, given that the City only had one part-time staff person dedicated to grant implementation. To coordinate this level of assistance, the grantee requested bi-weekly check-ins with Estolano Advisors and CARB early in the process. These check-ins consisted of two parts: EA, the City, and sub-grantee Climate Resolve met for the first half, and CARB joined the group for the second half. This two-part structure allowed the group to raise issues and receive responses directly from CARB. To keep track of deliverables and upcoming tasks, the team also used a shared, rolling notes document in Google Docs for these meetings.

Estolano Advisors focused much of its TA support on community engagement. Initially, EA helped facilitate an expedited community engagement plan process by supporting coordination with CARB, participating in check-ins with all project partners, and providing input on several plan drafts. In addition, EA supported the City and Climate Resolve with facilitating the Commerce STEP Advisory Group, by reviewing materials and sharing best practices for hosting virtual meetings. EA also supported with breakout room facilitation and notetaking during the meetings themselves. Lastly, EA leveraged its connections with the LA Metro Bicycle Education Safety Training (BEST) program to help the Commerce STEP team plan a series of bicycle education events for the Commerce community (**Figure 2**). These events created an opportunity for

Commerce to share about STEP with residents, while also providing participants with the skills they will need to utilize the STEP-funded bicycle infrastructure improvements.

In addition, Arup supported Commerce with its data collection and tracking plan. At the start of the Grantee Support phase, Arup met with Commerce to share the data collection and tracking plan template and review initial drafts. Arup also facilitated conversations with the UC Berkeley Transportation and Sustainability Research Center.

Lastly, Estolano Advisors supported Commerce with designing and developing a shared STEP file management system using Google Drive. This system is intended to streamline the file management process for the project's partners.



Figure 2: Photo from Metro BEST Bike Class, courtesy of Riley O'Brien

Los Angeles Department of Transportation – South Los Angeles Universal Basic Mobility Pilot Program

Sub-applicants: CicLAvia, EVgo, Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator (LACI), Los Angeles County Metropolitan Transportation Authority (LA Metro), Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), Los Angeles Mayor's Office, Los Angeles Trade Technical College (LATTC), Mobility Development (MD), and South Los Angeles Transit Empowerment Zone (SLATE-Z)

The TA team provided LADOT with the following forms of technical assistance:

- Data collection and tracking
- Community engagement

At the start of the Grantee Support phase, LADOT indicated a moderate need for TA support. Ultimately, the TA team focused assistance on community engagement and data collection and tracking. To discuss these grant requirements, the City started with regular calls with the TA team and CARB, followed by calls on an as-needed basis.

The TA team advised LADOT on its data collection and tracking approach. At the start of the Grantee Support phase, Arup met with LADOT to share the data collection and tracking plan template and review initial drafts. Arup also facilitated conversations with the UC Berkeley Transportation and Sustainability Research Center. At the end of the TA term, Estolano Advisors and Investing in Place provided additional guidance to LADOT on strategies for integrating its STEP data collection processes with those for its other existing programs. This included leveraging EA's experience providing TA for other state funding programs to provide a summary of key data points needed for future funding opportunities.

Lastly, Estolano Advisors and Investing in Place supported the LADOT team with its community engagement plan. In addition to reviewing the draft plan, the team shared resources and templates with sub-grantee SLATE-Z whose work comprises a major component of the community engagement plan.

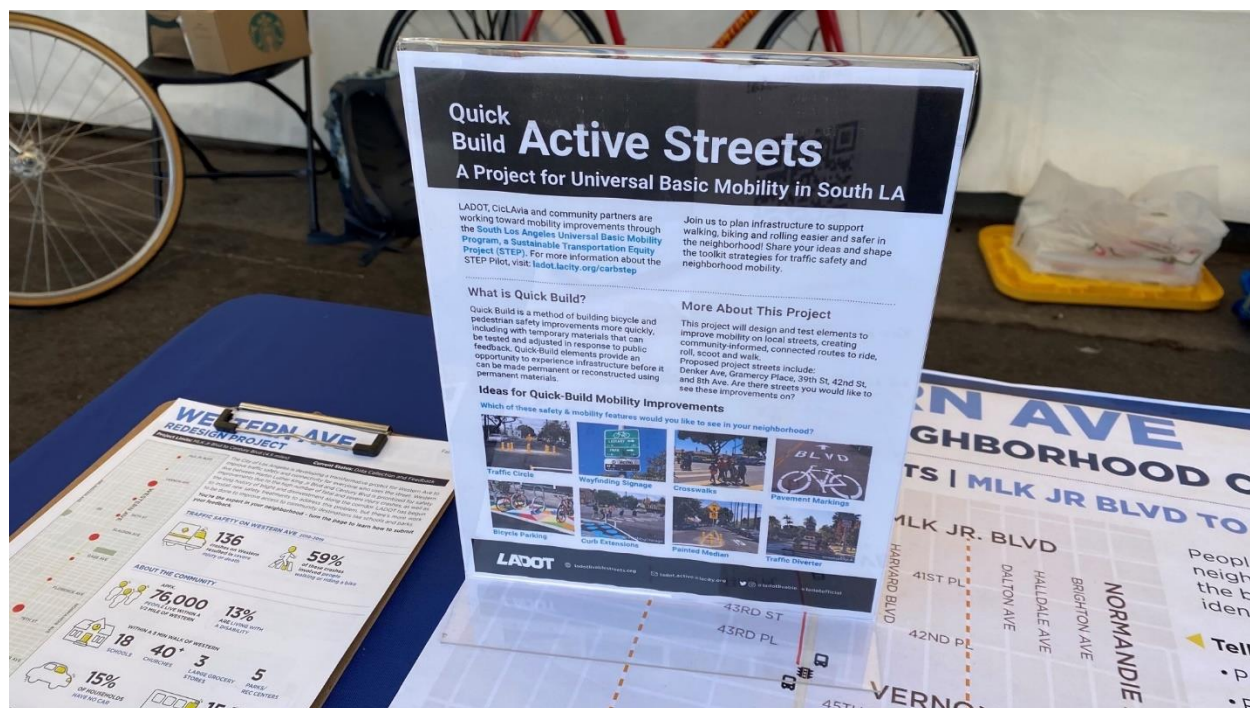


Figure 3: Photo from CicLAvia outreach event, courtesy of Riley O'Brien

San Joaquin Council of Governments – Stockton Mobility Collective

Sub-applicants: ITS-Davis, Sigala Inc., San Joaquin Valley Community Shared Mobility Inc., Mobility Development Partners, San Joaquin Regional Transit District, Third City Coalition, and Institute for Local Government

The TA team provided SJCOG with the following forms of technical assistance:

- Data collection and tracking
- Community engagement
- General advising

At the start of the Grantee Support phase, SJCOG identified a light need for TA support, preferring to have resources available as needed. SJCOG indicated that the TA team could support with document review and general questions. To stay up-to-date on project developments, Cal Walks and CivicWell attended regular SJCOG planning meetings related to community engagement and the bikeshare and carshare projects.

In addition, the TA team reviewed and provided input on SJCOG's draft materials and provided light support for a community engagement event. Draft materials included SJCOG's community engagement plan, data collection and tracking plan, and additional implementation plans. Cal Walks also shared media resources for SJCOG's demonstration event (shown in **Figure 4**).

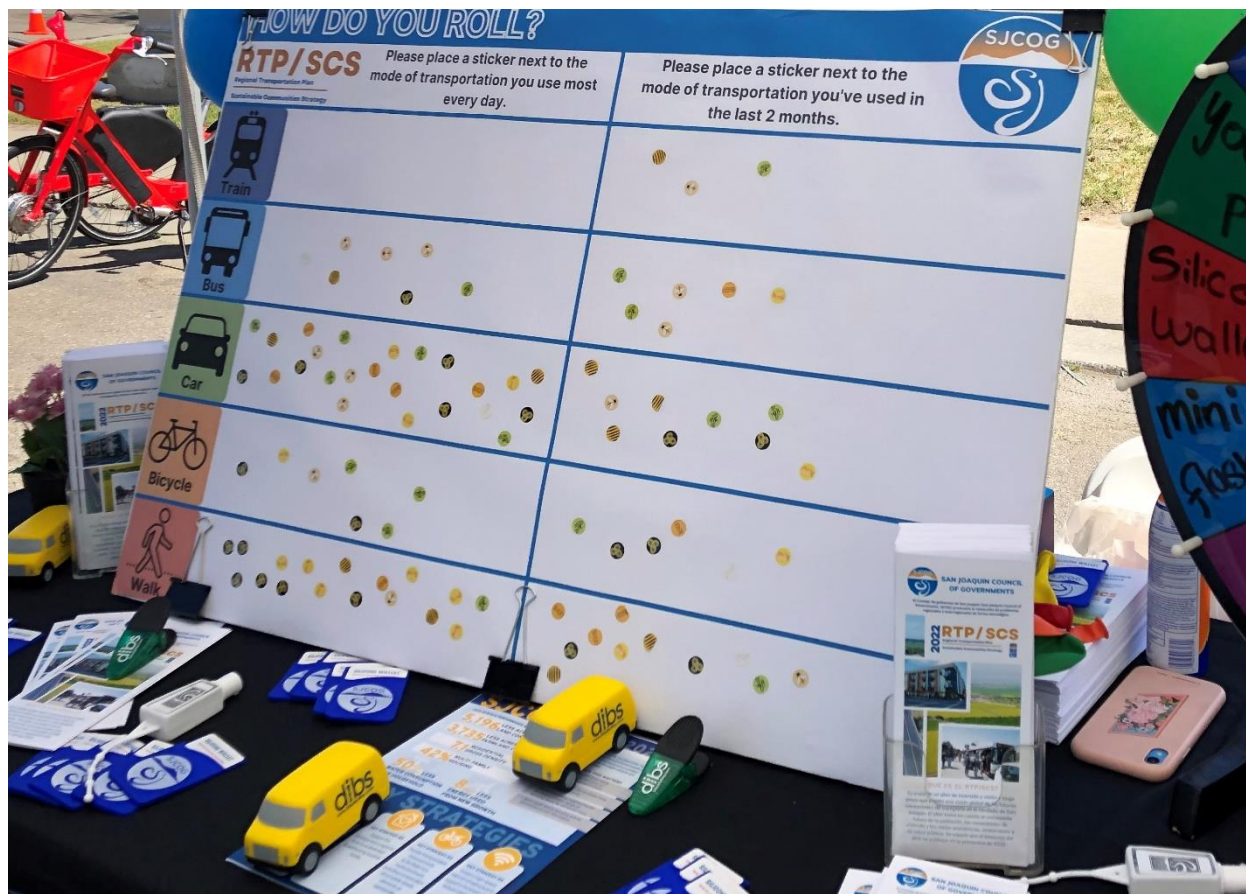


Figure 4: Photo from Ride and Drive outreach event, courtesy of Regional Transit District

V. BEST PRACTICES, CHALLENGES, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following best practices, challenges, and recommendations are based on feedback from the TA team and the three Implementation Grant recipients. To collect qualitative grantee feedback, CARB conducted informal interviews via Zoom with each of the three Implementation Grant recipients. No members of the TA team participated in these interviews to allow for more candid conversation. In addition, the TA team held follow-up interviews with the three grantees via Zoom, without CARB present, to create a space for grantees to share any additional feedback and to provide input on the draft report recommendations.

Estolano Advisors recognizes that grantee feedback is limited to the experiences of just three respondents with unique needs and challenges that may not be applicable for future funding rounds or awardees. Where possible, EA identified general themes in the feedback to suggest recommendations with broader applicability. Further, given that this is the initial round of STEP, CARB and future TA providers and grantees will be able to identify more best practices and lessons learned during subsequent funding rounds. Therefore, where feasible, CARB and SGC should continue to vet these recommendations with broader groups of grantees prior to implementation.

A. Reduce the grant administration resources required from grantees

Challenge: STEP grant administration was burdensome and required significant grantee resources

STEP grant administration requires extensive staff time. Administration includes meeting the state's list of requirements prior to agreement execution, preparing quarterly status reports and funding disbursement requests, developing data collection and community engagement plans, collecting and submitting sub-consultant invoices and backup documentation, and managing the grant overall to ensure that the team meets the state requirements. Further, after submitting requirements to the state, grantees often went through several rounds of revisions with CARB that compounded the administrative burden. Two grantees shared that the level of administration needed for this grant far exceeded the team's expectations and proposed administrative budget. In addition, two grantees stated that grant administration is taking up time that they would spend on implementing the project.

Given the work required, grantees typically needed additional resources for grant administration. One grantee hired a consultant to support with this work, while the other two grantees noted that they needed more hands-on administrative resources through dedicated administrative TA or in-house support. Though the TA team provided administrative assistance for discrete tasks, such as creating plan templates or setting up project folder systems, the team did not take on ongoing administrative tasks such as status report development since the TA team could not lead these tasks for the entire grant term.

Best Practice: CARB provided administrative flexibility for grantees, where possible

CARB staff provided needed support and flexibility to help grantees meet administrative requirements. For example, one grantee noted that by working one-on-one with grantees, CARB representatives could identify challenges and develop solutions more nimbly, such as facilitating an expedited community engagement plan approval process to allow outreach to start more quickly. In addition, two grantees appreciated that CARB allowed for fund disbursement through advance pay rather than reimbursement, as this structure made it feasible for smaller jurisdictions to make large purchases with grant funds, which is not always allowable through other state programs.

Recommendation: Reduce the grant administration resources required from grantees***Simplify STEP grant administration, where possible***

The need for grant administration support among all grantees points to the complexity of CARB's STEP grant protocols. To reduce the reliance on technical assistance and streamline the grant implementation process, CARB should simplify STEP administrative requirements. For example, grantees pointed out that the data collection and tracking requirements could be simplified to help reduce the resources needed from grantees. CARB staff could take on some of the data collection and tracking reporting, with support from grantees rather than the other way around. In addition, one grantee pointed out that CARB could combine the reporting for advance pay and status reports to streamline these processes.

Provide dedicated resources to support awardees with remaining administration

In addition to simplifying grant requirements, CARB should allocate more resources for grant administration to support grantees. This may include increasing the percentage of requested funds allowable for grant implementation during the application phase. Allowing for these additional funds could enable grantees to hire new staff to manage grant administration or to hire external consultants with experience administering state grants, as one grantee suggested. Alternatively, if TA is available through the entirety of the TA contract—for example, through a long-term state-funded TA provider or a funded local TA provider—the state could also scope the TA team to complete these administrative requirements for grantees during the TA contract. Lastly, CARB and SGC could dedicate a portion of the state TA provider's scope of work to providing capacity building workshops on grant administration to share best practices, templates, and other resources to help expedite these processes. With any of these options, there should be flexibility for grantees to choose the support that works best for them.

B. Extend the Grantee Support TA period

Challenge: The Grantee Support TA period was too short

Grantee Support could not begin until June 2021 because grantees needed executed agreements to begin implementing STEP funds. CARB finalized grant agreements in May/June 2021, nine months after the STEP solicitation closed. CARB originally anticipated that Grantee Support TA would end in December 2021; however, since this would limit TA to just six months, CARB and SGC agreed to extend support to early April 2022. Further extension was limited by the legislative expenditure deadline for the contract funds. Even with the April extension, grantees had only approximately nine months of TA from the launch of their STEP grants.

Nine months proved too short given the length of time required for project launch. Project launch typically involved contracting activities for grantees, such as securing final City Council approvals, finalizing sub-grantee agreements, organizing internal teams, and updating staffing. Given the internal nature of these activities, most grantees needed more time to ramp up their projects to be able to identify uses for TA resources. The time needed for project launch, combined with a short TA period, led to a rush to use TA support at the end of the contract term.

Recommendation: Extend the Grantee Support TA Period

Providing an extended Grantee Support TA period would allow grantees to access TA when it will be most supportive for their projects and prevent a rush to use resources at the end of the contract. The support period should be long enough—one grantee suggested 18 months—for TA providers to work with grantees beyond project launch. However, there should also be flexibility within this timeline. Though CARB recently released a new competitive solicitation for TA providers to continue the Grantee Support TA, this two-contract approach may present additional challenges. For example, grantees may need to bring new TA providers up to speed and may not be able to leverage the benefits of a consistent TA provider for both the solicitation and grant administration phases. Including extension options in the original TA contract could help address these coordination challenges while maintaining flexibility.

C. Provide more flexibility in the TA contract, scope of work, and timeline to allow TA providers to reallocate resources when necessary

Challenge: Though TA needs differed from expectations, reallocating TA resources was challenging within the existing TA contract and limited timeframe

The scope of TA services needed for Implementation Grant recipients differed in practice from the scope that the state outlined in the original Request for Proposals for TA providers. For example, across grantees, the data collection and tracking resources in the original scope of work were greater than those needed. This resulted in additional TA resources that could be used elsewhere. Further, variations in staffing capacity, team size, and areas of expertise led to diverse TA needs across grantees. While some grantees needed TA to supplement staffing capacity, others felt that

additional review from TA providers slowed down the process and did not find that TA resources provided services that were above and beyond what their staff could do. Variable TA needs also resulted in some additional TA resources.

Despite these variations, the existing scope of work did not provide enough flexibility to facilitate flexible reallocation of resources. As a result, the TA team spent a considerable amount of time proposing alternative uses for these resources without certainty that such changes were permissible. For example, the TA team proposed to provide capacity building support to unsuccessful STEP applicants based on interest, but this required a contract amendment that SGC could not approve for logistical reasons.

Recommendation: Provide more flexibility in the TA contract, scope of work, and timeline to allow TA providers to reallocate resources when necessary

Given the limited flexibility in the TA contract and scope of work and the restricted period for TA, there were few opportunities to pivot TA resources to provide different types of support. To utilize TA resources more efficiently, the TA team needs the flexibility to provide other types of support, as needed. This includes increasing flexibility in the contract amendment process and TA scope of work. First, allowing for scope revisions to the original contract would enable TA providers to change their approach if necessary. Further, the state should consider including an option in the original scope for additional contract extensions where needed. In this case, it may have been helpful to provide more time for the TA team to identify strategies to reallocate these resources and support grantee requests that came after many of the preliminary coordination tasks were complete. This includes things like working with grantees to identify opportunities to leverage additional California Climate Investment funding or supporting workforce development program implementation. In addition, one change to the scope of work that could make it more flexible is to allow the TA team to support unsuccessful applicants with trainings that would prepare them to apply for future rounds of STEP or other programs. This could be an optional task dependent on the resources needed by grantees or a larger segment of the scope. A more flexible scope of work from the start would enable TA providers to better adjust their approach based on grantee need.

D. Provide funding for local TA providers to support awardees through the end of the grant term

Best Practice: Local TA providers offered unique support

Estolano Advisors and Investing in Place, two Los Angeles-based TA providers, supported the two Los Angeles County grantees, the City of Commerce and the Los Angeles Department of Transportation. These grantees shared that they benefitted from working with members of the TA team with extensive experience with their region and/or agency. By collaborating with an LA-based TA provider, the City of Commerce had easier access to local and regional programs such as Metro's Bicycle Education and Safety Training. Estolano Advisors facilitated this connection through

the firm's existing partners in LA County to help Commerce host several Metro-funded bicycle education events. Through technical assistance, the Commerce team was able to collaborate with Metro staff and the community-based organizations conducting the bike safety education courses, which helped prepare residents for the forthcoming active transportation investments under STEP.

In addition, both EA and Investing in Place have worked with the Los Angeles Department of Transportation through various collaborations. As a result, these TA providers could leverage this experience to advise the agency on strategies for integrating its STEP data collection into a broader data collection and tracking approach.

As these examples demonstrate, TA providers with local experience can contribute additional benefits to grantees' projects.

Recommendation: Provide funding for local TA providers to support awardees through the end of the grant term

Grantees should have the flexibility to select a local TA provider of their choosing to support the implementation of their projects through the end of the grant term. CARB should provide the funds and contract with the TA providers to lighten the administrative burden that a grantee-led contracting process would create. This structure would ensure that grantees can work with TA providers that are familiar with their regions and potentially with their agencies or organizations, which can provide several benefits. Given the numerous agencies and community organizations that applied for the STEP grant, it is not feasible for the Grantee Support TA team to have experience with all possible awardees. To achieve this recommendation, the state should ensure that there is an overlap period when state-funded TA providers can hand off their responsibilities to funded local TA providers after grantees select them.

E. Guide grantees through grant administration, with support from TA providers

Challenge: Distinguishing TA tasks from CARB tasks was difficult

During the Grantee Support phase, CARB was available to support grantees on an ongoing basis. Therefore, during this phase, some of the TA team's previous tasks became more appropriate for CARB to lead. As a result, CARB and the TA team needed to divide up work for each grantee. This process was challenging for a few reasons. First, TA needs differed across grantees, meaning that there was not a consistent list of services that CARB and the TA team could divide. Second, TA needs shifted over time, requiring the agency and TA providers to change their approach. Third, given the short TA period, there were fewer opportunities to reflect on how the division of labor worked and to identify areas for improvement. Ultimately, CARB and the TA team divided up tasks on an as needed basis, but more clarity about roles and responsibilities up front would help streamline the TA process.

Challenge: Grantees needed more direction from CARB about upcoming requirements, expectations, and deadlines

Grantees shared that given the complexity of grant requirements, it was challenging to identify their needs early on. Though CARB provided information on grant requirements during the project kick-offs, grantees shared that they felt unclear about what was required as implementation progressed and needed guidance on what to complete next. This information would have helped grantees better prioritize TA resources.

Recommendation: CARB should guide grantees through grant administration, with support from TA providers***Guide grantees through grant administration***

CARB should take the lead in guiding grantees through grant administration, including alerting them to upcoming deadlines, the agency's expectations, and helpful strategies for meeting them. CARB, as opposed to the TA team, is best suited for this role given the staff's intimate knowledge of the grant requirements and the agency's expectations. CARB, TA providers, and grantees can host regular check-ins to keep track of requirements in a way that best supports the grantee. The team can also utilize a shared spreadsheet to help track CARB, TA provider, and grantee requests and deadlines. Serving in this active role would help CARB develop a strong relationship with grantees, which CARB can maintain after the end of the state-funded TA. Further, providing grantees with this direction would support them with identifying areas for technical assistance.

Provide a clear breakdown of requirements, expectations, and deadlines

CARB should provide clear guidance about requirements as early as possible, even by the time of the solicitation release. As part of this, CARB should provide a clear, detailed checklist of grant requirements with affiliated deadlines and state protocols to help grantees keep track of upcoming assignments during grant implementation. There should also be a checklist for the state's requirements for grant execution to support grantees with the work required before finalizing the grant agreement. This transparency would provide helpful guidance for applicants and also help them more accurately budget the resources needed for administration. CARB can build on the Grantee Implementation Resource that the agency developed during this first round of STEP to develop this checklist.

In addition, TA providers and CARB should work together to develop more and improve existing templates for grant administration requirements. Existing templates such as for the data collection and community engagement plans could be improved to include more detailed guidance. CARB and the TA team could also create new templates for disbursement requests, status reports, and invoicing templates. All templates should be clear and easy to complete. TA

providers should develop these templates and obtain CARB approval during the grant agreement negotiation period and prior to Grantee Support TA launch.

F. Work with grantees to create and implement a clear communication protocol between CARB, TA providers, and grantees early in the TA process

Challenge: Developing a communication protocol between CARB, TA providers, and grantees took time

During the solicitation period, STEP applicants were not able to speak directly to CARB, and TA providers served a critical role communicating with applicants. After grant awards, CARB could interact directly with grantees, meaning that the three parties needed to coordinate their communication. Identifying preferred methods of communication between CARB, TA providers, and grantees took time and experimentation. Ultimately, the approach varied by grantee.

In addition, while primary TA providers made introductions between grantees and other members of the TA team, primary TA providers did not always attend subsequent check-ins to utilize TA resources more efficiently. Grantees shared that having direct communication with other members of the TA team added some confusion to the process and that having the primary TA provider in all calls with consultant team members would have been helpful.

Best Practices: Clear points of contact and regular meetings helped support communication

Despite these challenges, CARB and the TA team implemented several communication-related best practices during the Grantee Support phase:

One CARB staff person dedicated to each grantee

To provide grantees with a point-person at the agency, CARB appointed one designated staff person to manage each contract. This provided grantees with a clear CARB representative to contact when needed. One grantee mentioned that this form of direct communication was particularly helpful, especially for grant administration questions.

Regular meetings between TA providers, CARB, and grantees

Communication approaches varied by grantee, though the approach with one grant recipient proved to be especially productive. The grantee hosted bi-weekly, one-hour meetings with CARB and the primary TA provider, which allowed the group to raise issues efficiently. The primary TA provider and grantee connected during the first half of the meeting, and the CARB representative joined the group for the second half-hour. This model of joint meetings could be adapted to help other grantees stay connected with CARB and the TA team on an ongoing basis.

Regular meetings between TA providers and between TA providers, CARB, and SGC

Primary TA providers serve a critical role in sharing lessons learned between grantees. Early in the Grantee Support process, the TA team identified that regular bi-weekly check-ins between primary TA providers created a dedicated space to share resources, templates, grantee updates, and common issues and to develop aligned recommendations. In addition, Estolano Advisors and some members of the TA team met quarterly with CARB and SGC during the Grantee Support TA phase. These calls provided an opportunity for the TA team to share updates on grantee support and for CARB to share upcoming requirements.

Recommendation: Work with grantees to create and implement a clear communication protocol between CARB, TA providers, and grantees early in the TA process

To streamline communication and ensure that all parties are up-to-date, CARB, TA providers, and grantees should develop a clear communication protocol that takes into consideration each grantee's individual staffing capacity and TA needs. Though this approach may vary across grantees, key elements of a communication protocol include:

Assign one point-person at CARB to manage each grantee

CARB should continue to assign one point-person to each grantee to help streamline communication.

Assign one dedicated representative from the grantee team to communicate with CARB and the TA team

Just as for CARB, identifying one dedicated representative for each grantee can help to streamline communication among the parties. In practice, some grantees identified a main point of contact from the lead grantee organization, while others identified a representative from a sub-grantee.

Ensure that primary TA providers participate in all grantee calls with the TA team

Primary TA providers should participate in all grantee calls with members of the TA team to provide a consistent point of contact.

Host regular meetings between primary TA providers to share resources

Primary TA providers should meet regularly to share best practices, challenges, and lessons learned.

Host regular meetings between TA providers, CARB, and SGC

The TA team, CARB, and SGC should meet regularly to share updates on grantee support and any upcoming deadlines.

G. Connect grantees with one another early in the Grantee Support phase to facilitate information and resource sharing

Best Practice: Direct connections between grantees encouraged peer-to-peer information exchange

During the Grantee Support phase, two grantees connected for technical support on a shared project type. Through this connection, both grantees shared and received helpful insights for their projects as well as CARB's administrative requirements. Given that grantees are undertaking similar grant administration processes with CARB and may also be implementing similar project types, this form of connection can provide a third helpful resource in addition to CARB and the TA team.

Recommendation: Connect grantees with one another early in the Grantee Support phase to facilitate information and resource sharing

Connecting grantees with one another facilitates communication about ongoing challenges, lessons learned, and best practices. To ensure consistency after the end of the TA contract, CARB can facilitate this introduction, with support from TA providers. To conserve grantee resources, one short phone call or Zoom meeting would provide a sufficient introduction for grantees to reach out to one another throughout grant implementation.