

Challenge Statement

Client-Partner: Los Angeles County



How might we engage more effectively with grassroots communities on matters of sustainability?

The small bet:

develop a new community engagement strategy prototyped in a disadvantaged area and focused on green mobility.

County Goals:

#7B, Create a zero-emission transportation system.

#8A, A convenient, safe, clean, and affordable transportation system that enhances mobility and quality of life while reducing car dependency.

Client Partner:

The County of Los Angeles, Internal Services Department. In collaboration with the Southeast Los Angeles Collaborative and City of Cudahy.

Background and Need:

Green mobility solutions are proliferating, especially in relation to electric vehicle (EV) systems. They include everything from street light chargers and electric bicycles to rideshare and car share programs (similar to BlueLA), along with syncing clean transportation programs to computer/mobile apps or tap cards. But even as possibilities roll out at impressive speed, deploying them in disadvantaged communities can be a challenge.

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This is especially true for Los Angeles County. As one of the largest and most diverse populations in the country, no single community engagement strategy for sustainability initiatives is suitable. Furthermore, traditional methodologies are often inadequate to capture what's really happening at the street level. Oftentimes, criticism is made that community engagement involves little more than checking off appropriate boxes, as opposed to deep, accessible, and mutually understandable engagement. Real engagement is especially important when dealing with change, where resistance may come from fear of the unknown rather than community reality and needs.

Hence, a new approach to community engagement is needed, one which does a better job of understanding communities, along with their interests and needs; provides a means of continuous feedback to green system designers as they propose and implement solutions; and offers effective communication and educational outreach opportunities appropriate to the communities they serve.

It is hoped that a new community engagement methodology will play a vitally important role in the County by making its sustainability planning and implementation more responsive and engaging to the residents it serves. This will allow resources to be more efficiently and effectively allocated and provide the greatest possible opportunity for positive impact on livelihood and quality of life at the neighborhood level.

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Location:

The target area is the City of Cudahy, in Southeast Los Angeles County, largely working-class, and challenged by a high pollution burden. Cudahy's median income is \$43,000 annually as compared to the national average of \$57,000; 28% of residents are below poverty level. Some 90% are Spanish-speaking.

The Challenge:

Create a new method of community engagement, prototyped in Cudahy, that relates to EV charging, micromobility (bikes, etc.), rideshare and car-share programs, and syncing clean tech programs, and includes these key elements:

- Community-based needs assessment strategies: new approaches to reach and connect with residents where they live and collect and assess key data;
- Community-based feedback model: a model by which new community-based content will continue to inform the roll-out and implementation of sustainability solutions;
- Communication and educational outreach strategy: to introduce residents to clean mobility options and benefits based on community needs, and continue to encourage meaningful engagement with them.

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We expect this challenge will appeal to college and university teams across the arts and sciences including departments of communications, design, public education, behavioral sciences, library sciences, software development, public policy, and sustainability.

More information, deliverables, and assessment criteria:
see Pando Days '21 webpage.

<https://pandopopulus.com/programs/pando-days-21/>