

# Growing Transit Communities Equity Grant Program Regional Equity Network

Final Report , January 2014



*We help build and sustain vibrant  
neighborhoods in underserved  
communities throughout Washington*





## GROWING TRANSIT COMMUNITIES EQUITY GRANT PROGRAM

The Equity Grant Program provided small grants to nonprofit organizations located or working within the three transit corridors in central Puget Sound—South: Seattle to Tacoma, North: Seattle to Everett, and East: Seattle to Redmond. Meaningful community engagement and local leadership in planning and decision-making is a core component to achieve equitable transit communities. Grants to community-based organizations provided resources to organize and increase participation of underrepresented communities to shape the future of transit station areas and surrounding neighborhoods. The program was part of the Growing Transit Communities Partnership, supported by a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant through the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.

### PROGRAM SUMMARY

The Equity Grant Program invested \$450,000 in community organizations along the transit corridors in King, Pierce, and Snohomish counties to support a range of organizing, research, and outreach projects (see Map). There were four rounds of funding through the Growing Transit Communities Partnership in 2011-2013. In total, 37 grants were awarded to 29 organizations, ranging from \$5,000-\$15,000. The grant investments leveraged an additional \$574,500 in community resources. In addition, 14 mini-grants were awarded to community-based organizations to support community convening and organizing leading up to the Puget Sound Equity Summit in November 2013 ([www.pugetsoundequity.org](http://www.pugetsoundequity.org)). The convening grants were awarded to 11 new community-based organizations and allowed some smaller organizations that might not have been ready to do a year-long grant project to be involved and organize their community. See Appendix A for a full list of grantee organizations.

Equity Grant Program Rounds 1-4

Geography	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4	Total Grants	Grant Dollars	Leveraged Dollars
Pierce County	2	3	1	2	8	\$86,000	\$80,925
South King County	2	4	1	1	8	\$94,520	\$61,945
East King County	1	2	0	1	4	\$48,854	\$26,799
Seattle/ North King County	2	4	4	3	13	\$150,500	\$378,370
Snohomish County	3	0	1	0	4	\$41,500	\$26,457
Totals:	10	13	7	7	37	\$421,374	\$574,496

There were four general categories of eligible activities for the Equity Grant program.

- **Outreach and education:** Outreach activities targeting historically marginalized communities, culturally relevant outreach strategies, involving communities in local and regional conversations about housing, transportation, economic development, land use, health, and community development issues in the light rail corridors.
- **Community organizing and engagement:** Learning who the key players are and points of influence within planning and policy processes, mobilizing community members to participate in public meetings or actions, cultivating community leadership.
- **Community-based research and recommendations:** Conducting focus groups or surveys with targeted constituents to inform planning processes, mapping to better identify community needs

and priorities, particularly in communities of color and low-income communities that live and work along the light rail corridors.

- **Involvement in the program:** Participating on the corridor task forces or project work groups that were part of the Growing Transit Communities work program, influencing policy development and related activities, and coordinating with other elements of the program.

The Equity Grant Program successfully brought new voices to the table. Three grantees participated on a corridor task force and others were engaged with the Equity Network Steering Committee. Multiple grantees did presentations to the task forces, emphasizing key issues and priorities they were hearing from their communities and preliminary recommendations for the task forces to consider in their discussions. The Equity Network continues to support grantees to think about next steps to engage in local and regional planning, even as their projects have wrapped up, to further build upon the capacity developed through the program.

- Somali Community Services Coalition did some research with the Somali community living near the Tukwila and SeaTac light rail stations. Their report “Equity for All: Including East African Voice in Future Development” documented priorities for their communities and provides some recommendations, such as a focus on affordable family housing and safe places for young people. They organized a community forum to report back to the community and used this as an opportunity to reach out to other stakeholders, including city staff and local elected officials. As a follow up from the forum, SCSC was invited to meet with the Mayor of SeaTac to further discuss engagement of the local East African community. The report has also been an effective tool to communicate with policymakers, planners, and funders and was used as a model for other grantees.
- Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest conducted a series of outreach workshops with cultural communities along the north corridor, between Lynnwood and Everett. They identified “natural leaders” to represent their communities in upcoming processes and several of these leaders attended a north corridor task force to discuss some of their experiences and ideas with task force members.

The grant program was administered by the Equity Network Manager and Impact Capital, under the oversight of the Equity Network Steering Committee. Impact Capital is a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) providing credit, financial, and technical assistance services to non-profit community development organizations in underserved communities across the State of Washington ([www.impactcapital.org](http://www.impactcapital.org)).

## **Outreach and Evaluation Process**

Grant guidelines were posted on the websites for Impact Capital and the Puget Sound Regional Council, distributed through email and various lists by Equity Network Steering Committee members and the Growing Transit Communities Partnership, through direct outreach by community partners and current grantees, and shared at several monthly meetings of community groups (e.g. South King Council of Human Services, Pierce County Coordinated Transportation Coalition, Cross Cultural Collaborative). The Equity Network Manager and steering committee members reached out individually to partner organizations and those identified through outreach and worked with potential grantees to develop project ideas. Public information sessions were held with potential grantees across the region in Everett,

Tacoma, Tukwila, Bellevue, and Seattle. A total of 40-60 individuals attended these information meetings each funding round.

Grant proposals were reviewed by a regional Grant Review Subcommittee of the Network. The subcommittee included nonprofit representatives from all three counties, Puget Sound Regional Council, Impact Capital, and at least one community-based organization partner. Proposals were reviewed based on the following criteria.

- The applicant has a track record working effectively with underrepresented communities, e.g. low income communities, communities of color, limited English communities.
- The proposed project engages underrepresented communities in a culturally appropriate way.
- The proposed project seems to be a strong fit for the organization and is in line with the organization's larger mission.
- The proposed project recognizes and addresses a community need.
- The project will have an impact within the Growing Transit Communities program.
- The project is realistic and can be completed with the grant period (12 months).
- There is a thoughtful work plan.
- The amount requested is in line with proposed scope of work.

The Equity Network Steering Committee reviewed the recommended group of grantees and took action to send the recommendations to the Oversight Committee for final approval. The Equity Network Manager/ Impact Capital then worked with grantees to finalize a work plan and get each organization under contract.

## **Capacity Building**

Capacity building and peer networking have been very important components of the program. The Network understood we were not only trying to get community input for the Growing Transit Communities regional planning process, but that this was an opportunity to invest in building capacity in low income communities and communities of color to influence local planning processes in their communities in the long-term to ensure more equitable outcomes. The grants were leveraged by the Network to build relationships with new partners, including service providers working with immigrant and refugee communities, community-based organization in Tacoma, and grassroots neighborhood groups in Shoreline and South King County. Small grants without these capacity building components and organizing framework provided by the Network, would not have been as effective a strategy.

Grantee workshops: Network partners organized a Planning 101 workshop and grantee orientation at the beginning of the grant period for each funding round. The workshop focused on why planning is relevant, how to get involved, and key points of influence in processes using local and national case studies, role playing, and presentation and discussion. These workshops emphasized building peer connections among grantees and creating opportunities for peer learning, so grantees shared about their projects and key issues they were trying to address. In one workshop, El Centro de la Raza (an equity grantee) provided a case study on their community-inspired transit oriented development in Beacon Hill in Seattle known as *La Plaza Roberto Maestas*. They emphasized community organizing that has made this project a possibility and how they are engaging the broader Latino community to provide

input.

Regional convenings: The Equity Network Steering Committee organized regional gatherings every 3-4 months, to bring together grantees, steering committee members, and some task force members to create a space to build peer community, strengthen the equity voice on the task forces, and to collectively better understand the key issues and opportunities along the transit corridors. For example, one gathering featured community partners who had been active in previous planning processes sharing their experiences and lessons learned as peers, another grouped participants by corridor (South, North, East) to jointly identify key issues and strategies to elevate equity considerations. Grantees and steering committee members gathered for a planning retreat in summer where we revised and ratified the Principles of Equitable Development that was used as an equity framework for the Growing Transit Communities Partnership.

Leading up to the Equity Summit in November 2013, Network partners organized sub-regional convenings in Tacoma, South King County, Seattle, East King County, and Snohomish County. Grantees led these efforts in many instances (with support from Equity Network partners including Forterra and Puget Sound Sage) and organized their communities to participate in these discussions that then informed the regional summit. The first ever Puget Sound Equity Summit brought together over 350 community members, policymakers, public agency staff, philanthropy, and other stakeholders to share strategies, connect with other organizing efforts, and discuss next steps for a more equitable region ([www.pugetsoundequity.org](http://www.pugetsoundequity.org)). The Summit was a launching point for the next phase of the Equity Network and emphasized community-led work underway (including many grantees), including organizing around education, jobs, youth voice, preventing displacement, environmental justice, and multiple neighborhood-based efforts that are getting off the ground and/or maturing.

Technical Assistance and individualized grantee support: The Equity Network Manager worked closely with each grantee to develop a work plan and support them to meet requirements for reimbursement. She also facilitated connections among various grantees to promote peer learning. For example, several grantees worked on community survey projects so we were able to share examples of surveys developed by other grantees and connect second round grantees with those from the first round. An exciting collaboration emerged among equity grantees in Tacoma with Network facilitation (especially by Forterra), resulting in jointly organizing a Tacoma Equity Summit that brought together 125 people to talk about what equity looks like in Tacoma and some priority next steps. The Network has facilitated conversations among grantees on community leadership development, connected organizations with expertise working with Sound Transit and those trying to navigate the regional transportation agency, and shared outreach strategies among partners working in various communities. Forterra provided individualized support for many grantees, including technical assistance to a grantee to provide input on a draft Environmental Impact Statement, assistance planning and facilitating a community forum, and facilitating meetings with city staff.

## KEY LEARNINGS

**Resources matter.** Outreach and engagement of low-income communities, communities of color, immigrant and refugee communities is time-intensive, people-focused work. The community grants

brought new partners to the table and also allowed grantees to do some creative work to outreach and engage historically underrepresented communities. Community outreach is time intensive work and the most effective outreach is done in culturally relevant ways and through trusted relationships. Community-based organizations and service providers can be well positioned to do some of this work when it aligns with their mission, but are also operating at (and often over) capacity and need additional resources and support to do this work. Grant funds allowed organizations to hire community members to do outreach or data collection, covered some of their staff time to outreach and support community members with barriers to participation such as language, income, transportation, and not feeling empowered, and/or allowed them to provide incentives to community members to participate.

- Solutions HCE used stipends to engage youth from low income communities and communities of color in public processes. They identified adult mentors from youth serving organizations in Tacoma to provide workshops on civic engagement and to support individual youth to attend a series of public meetings and debrief about the experience. Youth developed a series of recommendations on how to better engage young people in planning processes which they shared in a video (<http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ3jPZDV8qEUsI4QGkAISyA>).
- Several grantees used some grant funds to provide incentives to community members for participating in workshops or forums. This included gift cards to local grocery stores, ORCA cards, raffle prizes, food, etc.

**Relationships, Relationships, Relationships.** Building relationships is a worthwhile investment and a fundamental component for meaningful community engagement. The grant work emphasized the value of existing relationships to bring people and organizations together. Several grant projects included building bridges with their communities and decision makers, creating forums for community members and city staff to directly communicate, and opportunities for policy makers to better understand key priorities in their communities. For some grantees working with cultural communities, particularly those newer to this country, it was important to work with people connected and trusted in that community and to also understand some of the dynamics within specific cultural communities. Accountability and feedback loops were critical to building and sustaining relationships with diverse communities and this work will be ongoing.

- Cross Cultural Collaborative in Tacoma worked through their coalition of community-based service providers to conduct focus groups with targeted communities as one component of their grant project. They identified a lead organization for key target populations, e.g. low-income, African American, Latino, Asian/ Pacific Islander, Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer, Native American. They also emphasized the importance of accountability and knowing how input is being used, so that they can communicate this back to their communities. They are using their relationships as an intermediary and are accountable to their community members that are trusting them enough to participate.
- Peer networks among community organizations and other Network members has been a valuable outcome of the grant program and the broader regional organizing through the Network. This has included sharing lessons learned organizing around light rail development among peer communities, sharing strategies and tools, and connecting grantees and other partners addressing similar issues.

**Making planning relevant to people's lives.** In many instances, grantees found creative ways to talk to their communities about planning issues to try and make them more relevant. In some instances, this

meant not starting with the light rail in areas that do not know when they will see this investment. Refugee and Immigrant Services Northwest, working in Everett and Snohomish County, shifted their outreach workshops with their clients to have more targeted conversations about what they want to see in their neighborhoods as they grow and develop. Refugee Federation Service Center did a series of focus groups with different ethnic and cultural communities and issues of public safety and safe neighborhoods were a priority for many of their communities. We therefore included this as a focus area for recommendations in the Growing Transit Communities Strategy, to show how various community development strategies and design might support the goal of safe neighborhoods. As one grantee expressed, “people cannot provide input to something that is not relevant to them.” Similarly, community members are experts in their experiences and provide community expertise that is critical to any planning or economic development project. It may not be packaged to fit neatly into a particular planning process, but with ongoing communication, planners and policymakers can become equally adept at listening and creative in how to connect community input with ongoing processes.

**Cultural competency.** Not all nonprofit organizations are positioned to do the outreach and community organizing work they may aspire to do. An organization may have the policy expertise, but not the reach or direct relationships with community members. Conversely, some smaller cultural and/or service organizations have relationships with community members and can be well positioned, with support and some resources, to engage these community members in meaningful ways. Peer networks and direct connections between grantees helped build cultural competency.

- Cascade Bicycle Club Education Foundation struggled initially with their project when their expanded outreach strategies were not yielding the results they wanted in terms of sustained participation of underrepresented communities in the Rainier Valley Bike Group. They were able to reach out to other grantee organizations in south Seattle to talk further about the goals and how a neighborhood bike group could be responsive to their issues.

**Community organizing and investing in community capacity.** Several projects highlighted the importance of community organizing and building community capacity to be able to more fully engage in local planning processes. In several instances, this allowed some communities or groups to have a more organized voice to engage with the city or a shared vision to guide some decisions that impacted the neighborhood. A few grant projects focused on organizing small, ethnic businesses

- Friends of Little Saigon in Seattle spent a year organizing that community, largely comprised of independent businesses and service providers that serve the broader Vietnamese-American community. Initially concerned about potential impacts from the redevelopment of a large subsidized housing development, they convened a leadership committee to develop a neighborhood core vision and held two community forums to inform a neighborhood vision document. They shared this with city officials and planning staff resulting in a commitment from the city for a more formal neighborhood planning process.
- El Centro de la Raza worked through an existing relationship with the Rainbow Haven community in Tukwila to cultivate and support community leadership. They formed a leadership council and held key meetings with the city of Tukwila planning, economic development, zoning, and Mayor’s office. As a result, the city reached out when they were developing their strategic plan and the community will provide input to the upcoming Comprehensive Plan update that includes a chapter on redeveloping the nearby corridor.



- East African Community Services organized African owned businesses along the south corridor, between Beacon Hill in Seattle and Tukwila. They completed a needs assessment of businesses and had intended to organize a regional business alliance. They adjusted the project to work with groups of businesses in more targeted geographic locations and then brought businesses together for a forum with stakeholders from the city and elected officials to share the results of the needs assessment and discuss priorities from the small business community.

**Experimenting with communication tools and graphics can be very effective to communicate complex processes and get information to diverse audiences.** The Planning 101 workshop included a visual handout to summarize the planning process. Other groups translated documents into multiple languages or used visuals of their community showing faces and places that were relatable. Other groups used video to highlight community voices.

- Capitol Hill Champion has been organizing around the light rail station for several years now and the planning process has entered a new stage that will include an RFQ to select a developer. Their project emphasized engaging underrepresented groups in their community and developing new leadership capacity while also influencing the planning process to be responsive to community priorities. To bring new people into a process that has been ongoing for years, they used several strategies including an orientation meeting before a community gathering, developing a website to consolidate planning documents and to communicate community priorities to potential developers, and are experimenting with some graphics including a timeline and a graphic showing progress on community priorities and where additional advocacy is needed.

## Challenges

- It was a significant opportunity to re-grant a portion of the regional federal grant, but reimbursement grants and documentation required for federal funding was challenging for smaller CBOs with fewer resources. Impact Capital did more frequent reimbursements as needed for organizations and ensured timely reimbursement to mitigate this challenge. There was a lot of individualized support provided to meet these documentation requirements and some organizations needed more grant management support than originally anticipated.
- Capacity of community partners in some parts of our region to even apply for the grants, e.g. South Snohomish County and some parts of South King County. Often smaller organizations are looking for operating dollars and these funds do not fit that need. One possible recommendation to consider is partnering with a local funder to provide a match grant for operating dollars.
- Organizational capacity is an ongoing challenge, to both manage grants and engage in a sustained way. A related challenge is staff turnover. Similarly, turnover of elected officials is a challenge for community grantees trying to build relationships with decision-makers.
- Community engagement timeline did not necessarily sync up with the overall project timeline. The Growing Transit Communities Partnership included an ambitious work plan in a three year grant period. However, it took time to outreach, get the grant program in place, do some capacity building, etc and meanwhile, the regional planning was almost a year into its process.

## RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

- Technical language and jargon can be very alienating. Limit how and when this language is used and try to talk with people in everyday language with which they can connect.
- Resource community-based organizations and invest in community organizing. Community outreach work is time intensive and this is magnified when working in communities with barriers to participation. Community-based organizations and organizations of color can be very effective partners due to trusted relationships with community members and it may align with their mission to help their community shape a local project or plan, but it does not happen without an investment of time and resources (and since an organization is generally not funded for that work, it can take resources away from the provision of core services).
- Accountability to community input is critical to build long-term relationships. It may not be clear to community members how project timelines shift and priorities they identified might not resonate in technical language. Similarly, CBOs are accountable to the community members they have outreached to and/or brought together to provide input. As trusted intermediaries, they might be able to provide opportunities or ideas for communication and can articulate this as an expectation of their partnership.
- Several grantees felt overwhelmed by the sheer number of meetings and processes to keep track of and were challenged to prioritize where they should spend their time and limited resources. For community organizations, reaching out to peer communities and partners who have been through some of these processes can help navigate this maze. For public and private partners, clearly communicating the process timeline and providing clarity about when key decisions are going to be made can be helpful.
- Being organized as a community and having a shared vision (or working towards one) resulted in communities being in a stronger position to engage with and influence public and private processes as opportunities arose, for example, through redevelopment around a light rail station or additional investment in a particular neighborhood to mitigate disruption. This is long-term work and requires resources but there are some great examples of community organizing in many parts of our region and the work of the last three years means communities are not starting from scratch.
- Community expertise is essential for any successful planning or transportation infrastructure project. For public agencies and private partners, tap into your relationships and call up community leaders and reach out to community groups, etc to check in before key decisions are made and/or to vet where things are going. Assume that not everyone can be at every public meeting and plan accordingly to check in, just as one would check in with a project consultant. Local foundations might have a role to facilitate some of this relationship building and/or share community priorities they have documented through their programs.
- Individualized technical assistance and capacity building activities can really leverage the grant investments. Build in support and technical assistance for grantees to document their projects

and to present and share community priorities and organizing. Especially for some of our partners working primarily in other languages, the community conversations and priorities identified could easily get lost without support to document and facilitate relationships with decision makers.

Final reports and presentations developed by grantees are available at

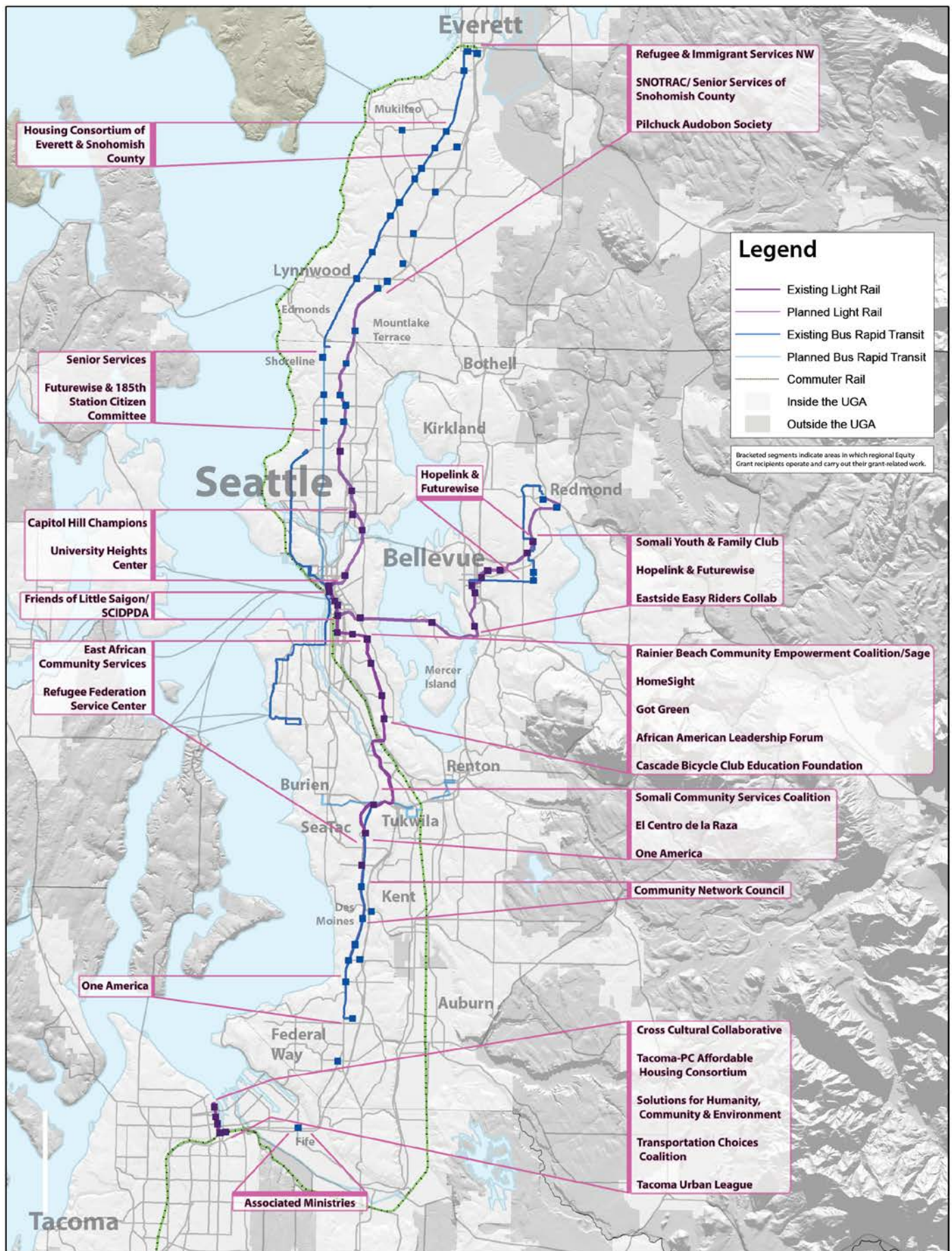
<http://www.psrc.org/growth/growing-transit-communities/regional-equity/equity-grantee-reports/>.

## **APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Principles of Equitable Development and Summary of Equity Grants awarded

Appendix B: Equity Grantee Project Profiles

# EQUITY GRANT RECIPIENTS





## Puget Sound Regional Equity Network: Principles of Equitable Development



**Social Equity** means all people can attain the resources and opportunities that improve their quality of life and enable them to reach their full potential. Addressing the history of inequities in the systems we work in and their on-going impacts in our communities is a shared responsibility. Social equity also means that those affected by poverty, communities of color, and historically marginalized communities have leadership and influence in decision making processes, planning, and policy-making. Together we can leverage our collective resources to create communities of opportunity.

### Principles of Equitable Development and Planning

- **Advance economic opportunity.** Promote local economic development and entrepreneur opportunities, enhance community-serving establishments, and increase quality living wage jobs for people in all neighborhoods.
- **Prevent displacement.** Develop policies and programs that allow anyone who wants to live in the community to do so, especially current residents, and discourage displacement of viable small businesses that serve community needs.
- **Preserve and expand affordable housing options.** Create healthy, safe and affordable housing for all family sizes and incomes in all neighborhoods.
- **Understand and respond to local context.** Respect local community character, cultural diversity, and values. Preserve and strengthen intact neighborhoods, building upon their local assets and resources.
- **Promote broader mobility and connectivity.** Prioritize an effective and affordable public transportation network that supports transit-dependent communities and provides equitable access to core services and amenities, including employment, education, and health and social services.
- **Practice meaningful community engagement.** Require local community participation and leadership in decision-making to reflect a diversity of voices, including targeted strategies to engage historically marginalized communities. Build cultural competence and responsiveness among all stakeholders, and structure planning processes to be clear, accessible and engaging.
- **Develop healthy and safe communities.** Create built environments that enhance community health through public amenities (schools, parks, open spaces, complete streets, health care and other services), access to affordable healthy food, improved air quality, and safe and inviting environments.
- **Promote environmental justice.** Eliminate disproportionate environmental burdens and ensure an equitable share of environmental benefits for existing communities. Secure resources to mitigate and reverse the effects of environmental hazards past and present.
- **Achieve full accessibility.** Ensure any development that results from investments in the built environment is accessible and welcoming to people regardless of age, physical condition, or language.

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**For more information please visit: [impactcapital.org](http://impactcapital.org) or [psrc.org](http://psrc.org)**

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