

Towards Equitable Electric Mobility

Samikchhya Bhusal¹, Isa Gaillard²

¹*Forth, 2035 NW Front St. Portland, Oregon, USA, 97211, samikchhyab@forthmobility.org*

²*360 14th St, Oakland, California, USA, 94612. isa.gaillard@greenlining.org*

Executive Summary

This paper demonstrates how organizations can partner to advance equitable electric mobility. The current transportation system presents challenges; for many, poor access to transportation and disproportionate exposure to transportation emissions stem from racially discriminatory policies. Innovative programs utilizing electric transportation can address some of the air quality, public health, and transportation challenges. Partnerships between racial equity advocates and traditional environmental organizations are vital to ensure that such programs are implemented successfully. To address this, Forth and the Greenlining Institute are partnering on the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice which launched in 2021. This project aims to build capacity for equity-focused organizations and traditional organizations to work together and effectively achieve shared policy objectives.

Keywords: Partnerships, Capacity building, Peer learning, Equitable electric mobility, State strategies

1. Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice

The transportation system presents challenges for racial equity, mobility, and climate change goals. Transportation is the largest source of air pollution in the US [1], with environmental and health implications disproportionately affecting low-income communities of color. For many, poor access to transportation stems from racially discriminatory policies. Today, transportation is the second-highest household expense for most people [2], and a person's commute time is the most critical factor in their chances of escaping poverty [3]. Innovative mobility programs—such as carsharing, micromobility, and electric transit— that utilize electric mobility are a potential solution to many of these challenges.

Moving forward, it is critical to demonstrate how transportation electrification can improve air quality and enhance access for the most impacted communities. Partnerships between racial equity advocates and traditional environmental organizations will be vital to ensure that innovative programs are implemented successfully. When transportation programs are designed to serve historically underserved communities, the benefits of electrification are maximized.

To address this, Forth and the Greenlining Institute (Greenlining) are partnering on the TEEM Community of Practice which launched in the US in January 2021 and includes cohort states in Colorado, Illinois, Michigan, North Carolina, and Virginia.

1.1 Goals and Outcomes

The main goal of TEEM is to build capacity for equity-focused organizations and traditional environmental advocacy organizations to work together more effectively at the state level. A secondary goal of TEEM is to build a strong network of practitioners working on advancing equitable electric mobility. We see strength in sharing best practices, asking questions, and creating relationships among groups from all over the country. A third goal is co-developing state-level and national-level strategies to influence equitable electric mobility.

1.2 Community of Practice Model

TEEM utilizes a community of practice model which creates a strong network of practitioners motivated to learn and work together on a specific issue. A community of practice is a group of people that share a collective overall view of an issue and bring their individual perspectives to create a learning system.

TEEM Model:

- A *Facilitation Group* consisting of staff from Forth and Greenlining—with consulting and facilitation support from Upright Consulting—manage the Community of Practice and provide ongoing administrative and program management support such as hosting calls and sharing resources.
- *Participant Teams* were recruited from 5 states to form the TEEM cohort. Each team includes at least two equity and three environmental advocacy organizations, with a total of 5-9 representatives per state.
- *Seed Grants* between \$25,000- \$100,000 to enable equity organizations to participate in TEEM and sustain the work. Seed grants offer multi-year unrestricted funding, helping equity organizations to participate and grow their in-house transportation electrification capacity.
- *Group learning* is facilitated through peer consulting and national calls. Peer consulting allows state cohorts to share dilemmas and receive peer feedback. National calls and topic area calls help teams learn about various topics within transportation electrification, such as workforce development and charging infrastructure.
- Each state will identify a *policy or programmatic strategy* that aligns with the cohort's values, strengths, and interests.
- *Annual convening* brings all TEEM cohort states together to meet in-person, share best practices, strengthen relationships, and discuss strategies to advance equitable electric mobility.
- *TEEM equity principles and commitments* ground the decision-making processes and relationships within the cohort. The TEEM equity principles and commitments were developed with the cohort's support; TEEM believes practicing equity means recognizing and transforming behaviors, systems, and institutions that cause injustice and disproportionate harm for communities of color. TEEM equity principles and commitment reference the impacts of racist policies for many communities of color, respect for different types of expertise, and center the needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities.
- *TEEM community agreements* were developed to encourage a respectful learning environment amongst cohort members. Cohort members agreed upon the TEEM community agreements: Call in not out, Make space for others, Avoid jargon, Use I statements, Embrace different perspectives, Assume best intention, Recognize power dynamics, Step up, step back.

1.3 TEEM Cohort

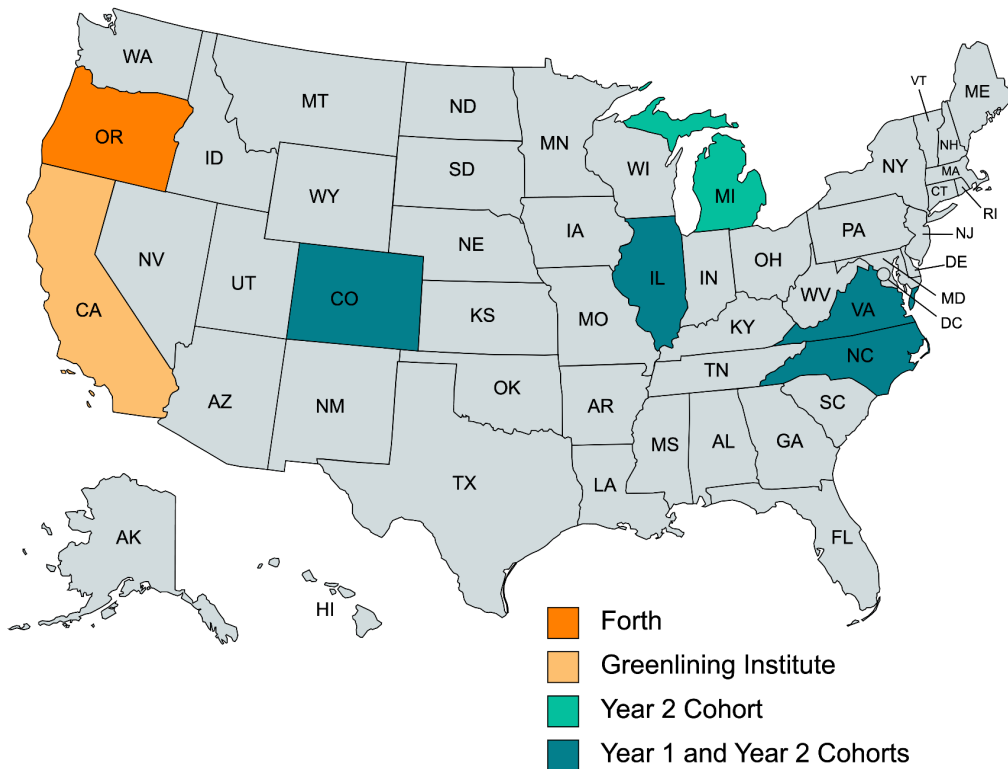
Currently, TEEM consists of 33 organizations representing 5 states. The facilitation group prioritized diversity of organizational expertise in each cohort. When recruiting traditional environmental organizations, it was important to identify organizations committed to racial equity. Additionally, TEEM recruited equity-serving organizations that worked in racial and climate justice, even when these entities may not have previously worked in electric transportation. Equity-serving organizations received

multi-year grant funding to participate in TEEM. Based on cohort feedback, new groups were also added to the original cohort to increase grassroots representation. Table 1 illustrates the list of TEEM cohort organizations, and Figure 1 illustrates the geographic location of TEEM organizations.

TEEM organizations bring expertise in a wide range of topics related to equitable electric mobility, including environmental justice, public transportation, active transportation, disability rights, workers' rights, urban planning, and environmental policy. Given the breadth of organizational expertise, cohort members joined TEEM with varying levels of understanding about transportation electrification. As such, TEEM facilitators created learning opportunities about transportation electrification through peer-learning and discussion with external speakers. Peer learning allowed members to socialize the practice of asking for guidance, and this practice also helped members learn from each other's varied perspectives and experiences. External speakers shared insights about topics such as climate resilience, workforce development, data equity, and federal transportation policies.

Table 1: List of TEEM cohort organizations

TEEM Community of Practice Cohort				
CO	IL	MI	VA	NC
-Colorado Center on Law and Policy	-Active Transportation Alliance	-Grand Rapids NAACP	-Virginia Organizing	-Sol Nation
-Colorado Cross-Disability Coalition	-Center for Neighborhood Technology	-Transportation Riders United	-NAACP Virginia State Conference	-North Carolina Justice Center
-Conservation Colorado	-Warehouse Workers for Justice	-BlueGreen Alliance	-Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative	-Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance
-Energy Outreach Colorado	-Respiratory Health Association	-Ecology Center	-Southeast Energy Efficiency Alliance	-Sierra Club
-Southwest Energy Efficiency Project	-Illinois Citizens Utility Board	-Groundwork Center for Resilient Communities	-Generation 180	-Southern Alliance for Clean Energy
-Northeast Transportation Connections	-Elevate Energy	-Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision	-Ceres	-Natural Resources Defense Council
	-Bronzeville Community Development Partnership	-Eastside Community Network		
		-Clean Fuels Michigan		
		-Michigan Clean Cities Coalition		



Created with mapchart.net

Figure 1: Locations of TEEM states and the facilitation group

1.4 Lessons learned and challenges

- Cohort members want to *align their state strategies with community priorities*. Community input is often overlooked during the priority-setting phase of new projects and investments. Given this context, TEEM states organized community listening sessions in 2022 to better understand priorities of the residents and to identify state strategies. Community listening sessions resulted in conversations about community priorities, transportation barriers and state strategies. In 2023, TEEM states are using input from these listening sessions to develop state and national strategies. Aligning state strategies with community priorities will help ensure that new projects and investments deliver tangible benefits to under resourced communities.
- Community listening sessions highlighted *key lessons on centering residents' needs in the engagement process*.
 - Setting the table. Who is in the meeting room shapes how community members engage. Similarly, where a community meeting occurs shapes how community members participate. Organizing meetings at spaces that are familiar and accessible to residents can help them feel comfortable sharing their ideas.
 - Maintaining transparency about data gathering. Recognizing and respecting the preferences and hesitations of community members about data collection is essential. In addition, transparency with community members about how data gathered will be used to inform the next steps is also essential.

- *Level setting enabled meaningful engagements among TEEM members.* In the first year of TEEM, facilitators created space for cohort members to learn shared vocabulary about equity and transportation electrification. In this process, environmental groups learned about mobility equity and equity groups learned about electric transportation policies. To support level setting, the facilitation group organized learning calls and peer to peer consulting. Learning calls included topics such as equitable charging infrastructure, electric school buses, climate resiliency, and workforce development. Dedicated time for level setting allowed cohort members to have a shared knowledge base about key topics, equipping them to engage meaningfully in discussion about state strategies. Level setting also helped create alignment and trust across members of the cohort.
- *TEEM annual convening and continued cohort interest in relationship building.* In 2022, the TEEM facilitation group organized an in-person TEEM annual convening. The convening brought state cohorts together to deepen relationships, share lessons learned, and strategize collectively. While the convening created space for cohort members to reflect on partnerships between environmental organizations and EJ groups, members expressed interest in additional time and space to connect in vulnerable spaces and build trust [4].
- *The facilitation group faces an ongoing challenge of addressing the power differentials within the cohort.* While TEEM is grounded in principles of equity, the power difference between environmental and equity organizations persists in some ways. Environmental organizations tend to be more established on electric transportation and have stronger access to information and resources about the topic. On the other hand, equity organizations may have less established networks and limited access to information about electric transportation. This unequal access to information and resources creates power differences amongst cohort members. Disrupting these power dynamics and unequal access to decision making is essential to advance equity. Without addressing these dynamics, the same old pattern in which environmental organizations shape policy and program outcomes will continue. To address these dynamics, TEEM facilitators worked closely with individual EJ groups to identify and address barriers for their participation. For example, we met one-on-one with EJ cohort members to collect feedback on how to improve our strategies so that they better align with their organizational priorities. This way we were able to better understand how equitable electric mobility directly intersects with their organization's work, enabling us to offer more effective technical assistance and better integrate their vision into TEEM.
- *Capacity constraints and continued support:* Grassroots organizations face capacity constraints that may limit their participation in new coalitions and initiatives. For this reason, all equity organizations in TEEM receive multi-year funding to participate in TEEM. This funding is non-restrictive, and equity organizations can use this funding to build overall organizational capacity and expertise in transportation policy.

While funding is critical to bring in equity organizations, financial support in itself is not always enough. Even when funding is available, capacity constraints persisted and created some challenges for state project planning and implementation. To address this challenge, TEEM facilitators provided additional resources that would help build capacity for organizations to participate in TEEM. For example, TEEM facilitators provided communications support by drafting outreach materials and providing logistical assistance for community listening sessions. Addressing capacity constraints enabled Environmental Justice (EJ) groups to actively engage in state strategy decision making and implementation.

- *The varied geographic and areas of focus of cohort organizations created some challenges in project planning and relationship building at initial stages.* Geographic diversity sometimes made it difficult to identify the appropriate scale of work for TEEM strategies. Additionally, while some neighborhood based organizations held expertise in place-based hyperlocal work, policy based organizations were interested in state-level policy campaigns. Clear conversations amongst the

cohorts about each other's strengths, capacity, and interest level helped determine the appropriate scale of project plans. In general, consensus based voting mechanisms were used to make decisions about areas of focus for state strategic plans.

- *TEEM partnerships helped achieve tangential wins.* Relationships built through TEEM helped develop new partnerships between cohort organizations. For example, an environmental organization and an EJ group submitted a joint proposal for the Department of Energy (DOE) grant in 2022. Similarly, Forth was invited to partner with one of the TEEM organizations for a DOE proposal. Greenlining was able to partner with three of the EJ TEEM Cohort members on its Greenlining the Block Project. These partnerships demonstrate that strong collaborations between equity-focused and environmental advocacy organizations can result in greater outcomes.
- *Recruitment of EJ organizations once the community of practice is already established is challenging.* When recruiting new EJ organizations to the cohort in Years 2 and 3, the facilitators learned that most EJ groups are operating at capacity, making participation in TEEM challenging. Due to this challenge, the process of new recruitment of EJ groups required additional time and effort from cohort members and TEEM facilitators. Some TEEM states dedicated a lot of their meeting times to discuss considerations and brainstorm potential EJ recruits. Although this process created a slight delay in project planning, these steps helped ensure that new cohort organizations brought complementary and relevant expertise to the existing cohort.

1.5 State project plans and strategies

In 2022, the facilitation group introduced state project planning templates to the TEEM community of practice. These templates were tools for the cohort to identify specific state strategies for 2023 and beyond. Given the cohort had built significant relationships with each other, each project plan incorporated cohort organizations' strengths and expertise.

In order to make progress with state project plans, each state also identified a project coordinator to manage and lead the work. Forth and Greenlining dedicated resources to support the role of the project coordinator. In some states, cohort organizations hired a new staff for the coordinator role, whereas some states brought in existing staff to do the work of the coordinator. For all states, cohort members led the hiring and onboarding of the coordinator. Bringing in a coordinator at each TEEM state helped streamline the project planning process.

Once the project plan templates were rolled out, all cohort states identified their areas of focus. Project focus varied by the organizational expertise, geographic diversity within states, and interest of cohort members in each state. Descriptions of state project proposals are listed below:

Michigan: The Michigan cohort developed a community values-based framework centering equity, justice, sustainability, and accountability as a lens through which to evaluate state infrastructure spending. The group will use this framework in analyzing proposed and actual state spending of transportation, climate, and electrification funding and will develop recommendations based on their findings. The framework, recommendations, and spending critiques will then be shared with state officials to urge them to prioritize climate equity in their investments. The project's overall goal is to help ensure that state spendings advances climate equity and addresses the inequities that Michigan faces. This framework will be a part of an iterative process; based on feedback from community members and CBOs, the framework will be revised and adjusted accordingly.

Illinois: The Illinois cohort is working on a project concerning community-owned EV charging stations at charging deserts. For this project, local residents and businesses would share private chargers, and local communities would derive the income from charging infrastructure. This project

involves peer to peer engagement with community destinations (such as churches and community centers) to support EV charging installation. In addition, the cohort will also share learnings from this project through communication materials (toolkit) about the approach.

North Carolina: The North Carolina cohort's project plan focuses on local and statewide efforts to advance equitable and clean transportation. At the local level, the cohort will work towards developing a neighborhood-level e-mobility project such as an electric shuttle service or e-bike or scooter share. At the state level, the cohort will work on developing strong partnerships and equipping 3 to 4 partners to submit equitable and clean transportation proposals for federal and state funding. In addition, the cohort will also organize a state-level convening and produce a set of storytelling series to share lessons learned and best practices from TEEM efforts.

Virginia: The Virginia cohort will advance a campaign focused on increasing access to electric transportation and infrastructure in three localities of the state through education and targeted funding. This project aims at providing communities and local governments the information they need to request and access the available federal fundings (Inflation Reduction Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act) to support equitable electric transportation.

Colorado: The Colorado cohort recently recruited a sixth member (Northeast Transportation Connections) that focuses on providing equitable Transportation Demand Management (TDM) services to disadvantaged communities in Denver. Together, the cohort plans to provide technical and programmatic support to strengthen these TDM services, while gathering learnings from the programs to inform policy campaigns that aim to scale equitable clean mobility options throughout the state.

2. Conclusion

TEEM is a unique program focused on transportation electrification and equity. TEEM highlights the power of partnerships to take collective actions and make meaningful changes. This program also demonstrates that building trust and alignment amongst equity and environmental organizations takes patience, time, and resources. An investment in this type of collaboration has a great potential to advance equitable electric mobility at local, state, and national levels.

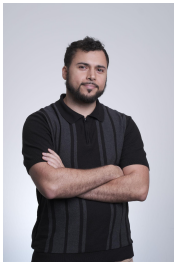
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Authors



Samikchhya supports the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice project. She previously worked as a Project Policy Analyst and a Graduate Student Researcher at the UCLA Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies on the access to opportunities initiative. She holds a Master's of Urban and Regional Planning from UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and a B.A. in Liberal Arts from Soka University of America, Orange County.



Isa Gaillard is an urban planner and environmental justice advocate who is passionate about creating a future in which all communities have the knowledge, resources, and power to thrive. As a Program Manager at the Greenlining Institute, he helps facilitate and lead the Towards Equitable Electric Mobility (TEEM) Community of Practice. Isa supports Greenlining's capacity-building efforts so that the organization can scale its racial and environmental equity approaches. He holds a Master's degree in City Planning from the University of California, Berkeley, and a Bachelors in Public Policy from the University of Michigan.