

How to Engage Farmworkers in the Housing Element Process



ASSOCIATION
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Technical Assistance
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HOUSING

Introduction

An analysis of the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) comments on draft Housing Elements from Southern California and the Sacramento region showed that two-thirds of communities had inadequate public engagement.

There are many common barriers to engaging community members in the housing planning processes. These include language and cultural differences; lack of a car or transit access; lack of childcare; accessibility barriers for those who have physical disabilities or who are sight or hearing impaired; and timing barriers for workers who cover non-traditional shifts.

As diverse as these challenges are, perhaps the most universal barrier is the distrust of powerful institutions. This is a challenge that cannot be overcome simply by providing language translation, a transit pass, a free meal or on-site daycare.

Lack of trust in participating in public planning processes lies in the historic harms that many communities have experienced, often at the hands of the public institutions that have denied them access to the amenities that typically make up a “good” neighborhood (quality schools, access to healthy spaces for recreation, etc.) Some community members have not been consistently or widely included in previous development processes, and often have been deliberately excluded from weighing in on neighborhood changes.

As a result, any engagement process should begin with a public acknowledgement of the historic inequities that the convened community members have faced, and an invitation from impacted community members to share reasons they may have to distrust the public process. You must make a concerted effort to listen empathetically to earn the trust of historically disenfranchised communities. As the author Adrienne Maree Brown says, it’s critical that equitable community processes “move at the speed of trust.”

In addition to broader public engagement in the Bay Area, HCD is looking closely at each community’s outreach to farmworkers. The Department recommends that even jurisdictions without farmland consider the housing needs of farmworkers at the county level, and that they add or modify Housing Element policies and programs as appropriate to address farmworkers’ unique needs. **HCD considers farmworkers a [special needs population](#) and requires jurisdictions to conduct outreach to these groups and perform an analysis of their needs.** HCD is also asking for demographic and other data on farmworker populations. Some of that information can be found in RHTA’s [Farmworker Housing Toolkit](#) and [Housing Needs Data Packets](#).

Farmworkers are essential workers. They provide abundant food and nourishment to our communities; without them, we would not eat. Farmworkers housing needs must be met. However, farmworkers and their families are often overlooked in engagement processes for Housing Elements. There are several reasons for this: farmworkers can be hard to identify and difficult to reach; and like other “special needs” groups, farmworkers can be reluctant to participate in government-led public planning

processes. One of the primary reasons for this reluctance can be explained by the fact that more than [half of California’s farmworkers are undocumented](#).

In some ways, the needs of farmworkers differ from other residents of your community — farmworkers may need housing that also provides supportive services, or employer-provided family housing; or, given the nature of farm work, may have an increased need to live near their jobs, or on site.

Who is a farmworker?

Farmworkers work in many different branches of agriculture, from cultivation and dairying to growing and harvesting commodities, including livestock, poultry, bees and furbearing animals. Farming also includes practices such as forestry.

Farmworker communities are dispersed throughout the Bay Area, including in Santa Clara, San Mateo, Napa and Sonoma Counties, with some located in Contra Costa County and Alameda County.

Purpose

The following guide is intended to provide practical advice to cities, towns and counties for conducting outreach and engagement — even if there are not farms or farmworkers living within your community.

It is important to develop a deep understanding of the farmworker community in or near your jurisdiction, so that you can tailor your approach to effectively engage farmworkers and keep them involved in the Housing Element process. Even if farmworkers don’t live in your city, town or county, you must consider them in your Housing Element if there are farmworker communities nearby.

This guide provides recommendations on how best to identify and engage members of the farmworker community, as well as detailed tips and “How-Tos,” which must be tailored to the specific needs of your community.

The [Best Practices for Equitable Engagement Primer](#) and the [Communications Guide for Local Government](#), published by the Regional Housing Technical Assistance Program (RHTA), provide more detail on how to engage with all members of your community throughout the Housing Element process.

Where to start — do your homework!

Agriculture is an integral part of the Bay Area economy and farmworkers are essential workers. There are many different types of agriculture throughout the region, including row crops, fresh meat and dairy products, vineyards, orchards and more, produced by family-owned farms, farming cooperatives or large-scale agribusinesses. Because housing needs may vary from farm to farm and industry to industry, outreach efforts should be tailored specifically to the kind of agriculture and farmworkers that are in your area.

Contact county Housing Element staff to see how they have addressed agricultural workers in the unincorporated areas of a county, and how farmworker housing needs are addressed in the Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice for your county. Don't go it alone! Reach out to your County Collaborative to determine what outreach has already been done at the regional or county level.

A region-wide farmworker housing workgroup will be forming in early 2023. It will focus on farmworker policies and programs for Housing Element implementation. For more information contact Ada Chan, MTC-ABAG Regional Planner, at achan@bayareametro.gov.

Getting started

- Once you have established the information above, take a hyperlocal approach by collaborating with local businesses, community groups and other organizations that are already well-connected to and trusted by farmworker communities. This allows you to determine specific language translation and interpretation needs; develop partnerships with community-based organizations (CBOs); and tailor communications tools and engagement forums to farmworkers' needs. If your jurisdiction does not have these relationships, work with your Collaborative Coordinator to access RHTA resources.
- Identify farmworker communities in and near your jurisdiction by analyzing census data and by reaching out to the local farm bureau, farmworker union halls, farmworker employers, organizations like the California Rural Legal Assistance, community-based organizations (CBOs), and nonprofit organizations that serve farmworkers. A list of CBOs that serve farmworkers is included on [page 10](#) of this guide. Please note that, because these groups are often used as a resource to connect with their stakeholders for many projects within a community, "participation fatigue" can be an issue. When possible, team up with County Collaboratives, other jurisdictions, nonprofits or CBOs working on projects in your community so the same groups are not being approached for the same information by different entities.
- Work with these organizations to confirm other important information, such as language needs and barriers and best practices to engage farmworkers. What to find out:
 - Origin of farmworker communities in your jurisdiction
 - Barriers to reaching these communities
 - Trusted community leaders
 - Languages.

Example questions that address these topics include:

- How did farmworker communities in your area form?
- Does the population you serve live in this community year-round?
- Do most of them work full-time, or do they work multiple jobs?
- How do they generally receive their information? What are the barriers to communicating with farmworkers in your community?
- What are the best ways to reach your community/peers? Who are their trusted community leaders?
- What language(s) are they most comfortable speaking/reading?

- To assist with this outreach, RHTA has developed [sample event templates](#) and suggestions for an outreach toolkit starting on p. 7 of this document. This toolkit contains sample materials and meeting items you may need for your outreach. If you need assistance with translating these outreach materials, you can [contact RHTA](#) for free translation services.
- Identify members of your staff or individuals at [CBOs](#) who can partner with you to conduct outreach to local farmworkers — preferably someone who is trusted in the community and fluent in the language(s) spoken.
- If you don't have community members fluent in these languages, [contact RHTA](#) to access free translation services.

Be aware

There may be challenges with reaching farmworker communities within any public engagement process. Some may include:

- **Lack of trust/credibility:** immigrant populations may distrust government agencies due to a long history of inequities, including access to safe, affordable housing. There may also be an impact due to unfair labor and employment practices.
- **Language barriers:** not all farmworkers speak Spanish. Some speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Tagalog and indigenous North and Central American languages, among others. Translation into multiple languages may be needed. RHTA resources can help with free translation services. [Request translation or interpretation services here.](#)
- **Literacy barriers:** there may be low levels of formal education amongst farmworkers, and literacy may be limited.
- **Immigration status:** undocumented workers may be reluctant to participate in government-led planning processes.

Bridging the barriers

Engage trusted messengers

Work with CBOs and nonprofits that already have the trust of farmworkers. Specific organizations may include farm bureaus, farmworker unions, farm owners and employers, health clinics, faith-based communities and schools.

How to collaborate with CBOs

CBOs, nonprofits and community leaders are key to building trust and reducing barriers to participation. Ideally, CBOs and other community ambassadors should be identified and enlisted as full, **compensated** partners during the earliest phases of the engagement process — beginning by seeking input on what an equitable engagement process may look like in your community and co-creating measurable goals. These ambassadors may continue to serve as sounding boards and messengers throughout the public engagement process, helping to further define and address the specific barriers to participation. The ambassadors' role also ensures authentic and effective messaging, leveraging their relationships with farmworker communities to help deploy the most locally- and culturally-appropriate communication tools.

Community engagement efforts by CBOs generally go beyond their regular services. The work of the organization in assisting with outreach, facilitation and translation, should be appropriately compensated, and differentiated from the stipends, gift cards or other forms of payment provided to meeting participants.

More information about working with CBOs is available in the [Let's Talk About Housing: Communications Guide for Local Government](#) and the [Best Practices for Equitable Engagement document](#).

Talk to farmworkers in their native language

Start by checking the demographics of the population you are trying to reach but know that demographic data do not tell the whole story. As mentioned above, work with community partners to understand what languages are spoken by farmworkers in your community and develop materials in those languages. This may require gaining a deeper understanding of specific languages/dialects spoken in your community.

Reach undocumented workers

Different approaches are needed for identifying and reaching undocumented workers. Engaging them through individuals and organizations they trust is important.

Go where the people are

Some places where you may connect with farmworkers include:

- Community healthcare sites
- Churches/places of worship
- Ethnic markets/grocery stores and other retail locations (local mercados, Asian markets, community grocery stores, flea markets)
- Day laborer sites
- In the field/at the work site (during breaks)
- Existing farmworker housing
- Rural transit hubs, and on rural buses and other forms of transit
- County fairs and community festivals/events
- Union hall/farm union meetings

Planning, publicizing and documenting farmworker outreach

Community relationships matter in planning and implementing successful farmworker outreach events. Team up with partners to find existing events and meetings where you can set up a table. CBOs and nonprofits may also be able to co-facilitate farmworker meetings and workshops to discuss housing. Be clear on what you are asking and what they are receiving — spell out how participation is going to help improve their housing options in the future.

Getting the word out

Reaching farmworkers about upcoming meetings, workshops or events requires tailoring your message. You can work with CBOs, nonprofits and community leaders to help spread the word.

Outreach tips

- If you visit a farm site, you will need to clear your visit with the farm owner / employer / day labor site manager first.
- Piggyback on existing events where farmworkers already gather. Try to schedule your visit during a worker break/lunchtime and provide food. Farmworkers are often paid by quantities and may be reluctant to take time off work and potentially lose revenue.
- Provide incentives, such as gift cards, if possible, to encourage farmworker participation.
- Consider renting a food truck or another way of providing a meal.

Possible outreach tools

- Translated into appropriate languages:
 - Flyers at existing farmworker housing sites
 - Door hangers
 - Radio announcements
 - Newspaper ads
- Paid digital advertising via social media channels popular among farmworkers, like WhatsApp or Messenger
- Text (SMS)-based engagement platforms
- Food truck signs
- Roadside produce market signs
- On-site signage.

Planning your event

We recommend developing a toolkit in advance, so that you are prepared to conduct outreach on short notice and plan interactive activities and incentives that attract event participation. Your toolkit can contain the items below, and others that are important to your community outreach efforts. It is

also a good practice to create an event staffing plan. It is recommended to have two team members staffing a booth or table at an event, with a change of shift and staffing after four hours.

Event equipment you may need

- Folding table and chairs
- Canopy or pop-up tent
- Water and snacks
- Giveaways, such as pens, stickers, water bottles, candy, etc.
- Coloring book or other activity for kids
- A supply box: scissors, clear tape, duct tape, markers, pens, pencils, blank nametags, electrical power cords, tissues and sunblock.

Make your table, booth or workshop interactive

- Have signage reflecting which agency/nonprofit/CBO you represent
- Ask a question on a poster board to start the conversation, such as, “How can your housing be improved?”
- Provide incentives, such as gift cards or raffle prizes
- Display maps showing where more housing is needed
- Use flipcharts and markers
- Bring a laptop or tablet for collecting data
- When possible, conduct the event entirely in the language spoken by the community.

Communications materials for events

- Flyers
- Fact sheets
- Facilitation guidelines for staff members attending
- Surveys/questionnaires (in-language)
 - We recommend keeping surveys and questionnaires anonymous to help address potential concerns about privacy, citizenship status, etc.
 - CBOs/nonprofits can ask survey questions and help participants complete the surveys.

Building trust and long-term relationships

We have identified ways to reach farmworkers and to navigate the complexities of engagement with this community. We have also outlined some common participation barriers that may exist in your own community along with recommendations for tools tailored to specific audiences.

Equitable engagement is a two-way street: not only must you gather input, but you must also demonstrate how the community feedback impacts the resulting housing plans. To successfully create meaningful dialogue, it is critical to clearly show in your Housing Element that your farmworker audience felt heard. This can be communicated back through community leaders and other ambassadors, illustrated through public meeting graphic notation or through traditional methods such as meeting summaries and notes.

As required by HCD, it is vital to document and communicate how and from whom community input was gathered, how it is being synthesized, with whom it is being shared, and how it is helping to inform the next phase of the housing planning process. The [Housing Element Completeness Checklist](#) is a resource to catalog and develop the required reporting of outreach activities. Ideally, community input will be shared with staff at your jurisdiction, with elected officials and policy makers, with key stakeholders, and with the agricultural community. Reporting on community engagement in the Housing Element is also an HCD requirement.

All staff reports to policy-making boards should include a summary of comments heard and recommendations from the community, along with a section showing how the input helped shape staff recommendations. In cases where community input cannot be incorporated, the staff writeups should explain why the comments weren't incorporated and outline how those comments may be used to shape housing policies and programs. Likewise, CBO participants should hear directly about how their comments are being used through some of the same channels used to encourage their participation.

Taking the next step

Returning to the community to review how their input informed the planning process is essential for trust-building and continued, deeper engagement in future planning efforts. The more people see their perspectives reflected in current plans, the more likely they are to participate in the future. Clearly and transparently explaining the evaluation process within the context of farmworker housing and community development requirements is key to cultivating trust and partnerships between members of the farmworker community and public institutions charged with developing housing plans.

Measuring success

The goals and objectives of farmworker community outreach that you define with their trusted leaders early in the process must be consistently monitored, measured and reported. Ideally, these community leaders will become trusted partners to ensure equitable engagement at all phases of the planning process.

This work does not end once your Housing Element is complete. Consider how you can maintain and enhance the new community connections you will be making. The neighborhood relationships you form can lead to increased trust in government and more comprehensive community outreach in the future. Please note that this is a long-term goal and that building trust within a community takes time. Persistence and transparency are key.

Resources

Below are links to several resources that may provide additional information on reaching farmworkers.

- [California Farmworker Foundation](#)
- [California Institute for Rural Studies](#)
- [National Center for Farmworker Health](#)
- [RHTA Farmworker Housing Toolkit](#)

Farmworker outreach community-based organizations & resources

Organization	Contact Information
Mid-Pen Housing	https://www.midpen-housing.org/ 303 Vintage Park Drive, Suite 250 Foster City, CA 94404 (650) 356-2900
Mercy Housing (Bay Area Office)	https://mercyhousing.org/category/california/ 1256 Market Street San Francisco, CA 94102 (415) 355-7100 (TTY) 800-877-8973 or 711
California Rural Legal Assistance	https://crla.org/ 1430 Franklin Street, Suite 103 Oakland, CA 94612 (510) 267-0762
Burbank Housing	https://www.burbankhousing.org/ 1425 Corporate Center Parkway Santa Rosa, CA 95407 (707) 526-9782
California Human Development Corporation	https://californiahumandevlopment.org/ 3315 Airway Drive Santa Rosa, CA 95403 (707) 523-1155
La Luz Center	https://www.laluzcenter.org/ 17560 Greger Street Sonoma, CA 95476 (707) 938-5131
Corazon Healdsburg	https://www.corazonhealdsburg.org/ P.O. Box 1004 Healdsburg, CA 95448
California Rural Housing Coalition	https://www.calruralhousing.org/ 717 K Street, Suite 400

Organization	Contact Information
	Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 443-4448
Dayworker Center of Mountain View	https://www.dayworkercentermv.org/ 113 Escuela Avenue Mountain View, CA 94040 (650) 903-4102
La Cooperativa	http://www.lacooperativa.org/ 1107 9th Street, Suite 420 Sacramento, CA 95814 (916) 388-222
ALAS	https://www.alasdreams.com/ 636 Purissima Street Half Moon Bay, CA 94019 (650) 560-8947
Casa Q by Darlene	https://farmworkercaravan.blogspot.com/ (408) 280-1065
Catalyst Kids Dixon Migrant	https://www.catalystkids.org/locations/dixon-migrant/ 7290 Radio Station Road Dixon, CA 95620 (707) 678-2113
California Farmer Justice Collaborative	https://www.farmerjustice.com/
Center for Ethical Land Transition	https://centerelt.org/
Lideres Campesinas	https://www.liderescampesinas.org/ 2101 S Rose Avenue A Oxnard, CA 93033 (805) 486-7776
North Bay Organizing Project	https://www.northbayop.org/ 1717 Yulupa Avenue Santa Rosa, CA 95405 (707) 843-7858
North Bay Jobs with Justice	https://www.northbayjobswithjustice.org/ 600 B Street Santa Rosa, CA 95401 (707) 293-2863
Puente	https://mypuente.org/ 620 North Street Pescadero, CA 94060 (650) 747-0248

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