

Mobilizing Justice Community of Practice Workshops: Findings and Recommendations

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BACKGROUND

In November 2022, The Centre for Active Transportation (TCAT) hosted a series of workshops convening a Mobilizing Justice Community of Practice of community organizations working to support transport equity and increase modal choice. The goals of the workshops were to:

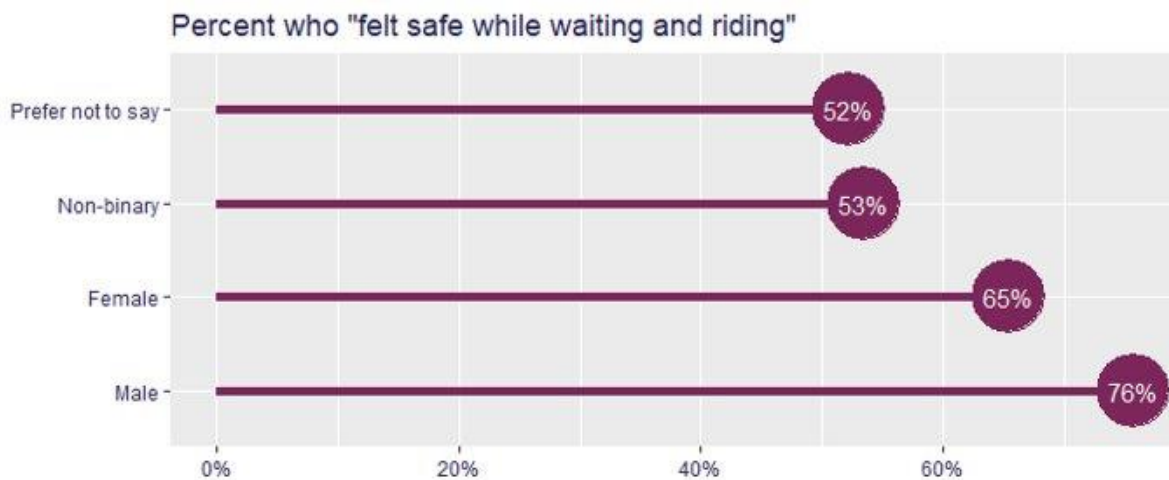
1. Improve our understanding of experiences of Canadians facing transport poverty and the current on-the-ground priorities, gaps, and community initiatives developed in response.
2. Build two-way communication between community organizations and Mobilizing Justice researchers and partners.
3. Provide value to participating community organizations and leaders.

The workshops were held every Thursday in the month of November from 12:00pm EST – 1:45pm EST. Invitations to participate were sent to 266 community organizations identified in the [Catalogue of Canadian Initiatives Addressing Transport Poverty](#). Over 100 organizations, individuals, and Mobilizing Justice partners registered to attend.

Held virtually over Zoom, each workshop featured presentations from Mobilizing Justice partners or Community of Practice organizations. Workshops were organized around a key theme and topic, and provided opportunities for larger group discussions, as well as smaller breakout sessions where Community of Practice members could share their work and learn about other initiatives taking place across the country. An optional open networking session was held at the end of each workshop for participants who wished to continue discussions informally.

WORKSHOP #1 – NOVEMBER 3RD

The first workshop explored common barriers to transportation equity and featured Dr. Matt Palm, Mobilizing Justice Research Coordinator, presenting [A Review on the Implications of COVID-19 for Delivering Equitable Transportation](#). Matt shared data on how the global pandemic has impacted access to mobility in Canada. Much of what Matt shared aligned with the lived experiences of Community of Practice participants working directly with communities and individuals grappling with transport poverty. In particular, the data Matt presented on how racism, ableism, and gender-based violence creates significant barriers to accessing mobility resonated deeply with many in the Community of Practice.



Percentage of Canadian Transit App survey respondents who "felt safe while waiting and riding" on transit during October 2021 (n=9,400)

Workshop participants discussed how individuals respond when faced with transport inequity. Many shared stories of clients, community members and loved ones missing socio-economic opportunities, having to choose between food or transportation, or being subject to racist institutions like law enforcement because of a lack of equitable mobility options.

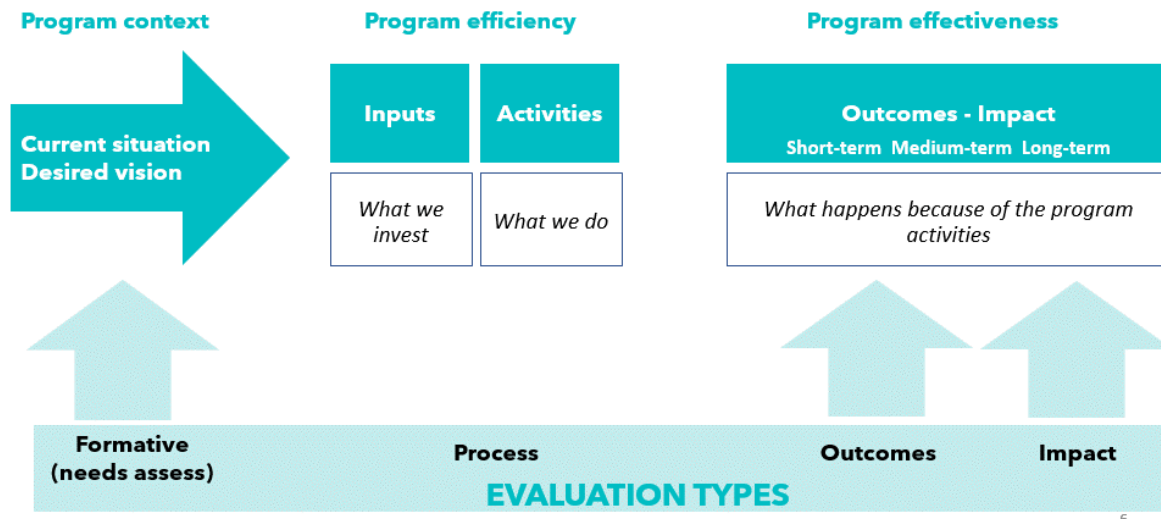
"They have to see less families and friends so they could afford the bus ticket to see the doctor or get groceries. They have to 'choose' social exclusion or things they need to survive. They have to develop strategies like sharing a monthly pass. They have to chose which member of the family can go out for an activity this evening."

WORKSHOP #2 – NOVEMBER 10TH

The second workshop focused on the challenges Community of Practice members face in evaluating their programming and advocacy efforts. Dr. Meghan Winters, Professor at Simon Fraser University and Mobilizing Justice Transportation Modes Working Group Academic Lead, and Dr. Stephanie Sersli,

Research Affiliate at Simon Fraser University, presented on tactics for community organizations seeking to improve their evaluation practices.

Types of evaluation



Different approaches for community organizations to consider when conducting evaluation.

Dr. Winters and Dr. Sersli provided a wealth of valuable information in their presentation including why evaluation is important, the different types of evaluation, how to develop a theory of change, what data to collect depending on the range of outcomes and impacts you’re interested in, and the need for ongoing reflection to build equity into evaluation practices. This workshop responded to the frustration that many community organizations had shared about a lack of resources and training needed to conduct rigorous program evaluation. Funders often look for the next new programming approach and as a result, it can be challenging for organizations to justify expending a lot of time evaluating existing programs.

WORKSHOP #3 – NOVEMBER 17TH

The third workshop was focused on the non-infrastructure barriers to safe mobility. Christine Brouzes of [Ikwe Safe Ride](#) spoke about how emotional and mental safety impact transport equity. Christine highlighted why women, 2SLGBTQ+, neurodivergent people, people with a disability, people in various sizes of bodies, and racialized people might have a sense of fear, mistrust, and anxiety when engaging with mobility systems. Ikwe Safe Ride, an organization founded by Indigenous women that provides transportation using personal cars and volunteer drivers to women in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was founded because of a lack of emotional and mental safety many women experience when using licenced taxi cabs.

How does emotional and Mental Safety Impact Transport Equity?

It causes unsafe feelings and these feelings lead to

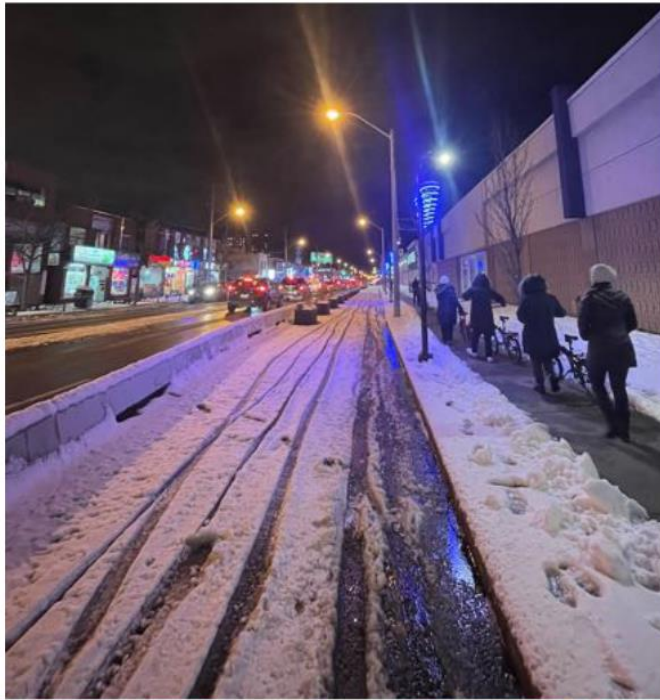
- unwell mental states, decreased mental health
- avoidance of transportation, 'just not go'
- social isolation,
- job loss,
- missed medical appointments,
- economic hardship.

There are many negative impacts that arise from a lack of mental and emotional safety in mobility systems.

Workshop participants discussed the need to bring these kinds of lived experiences and testimonials into conversations around transportation planning and infrastructure design. Just because something is technically safe does not mean everyone feels safe, welcome, or comfortable.

WORKSHOP #4 – NOVEMBER 24TH

The final workshop featured speakers from five community leaders working in rural and suburban communities. First up, Renata Tweedy ([Sou'West Nova Transit](#)), Antonio Illas ([Migrant Farmworkers Project](#)) and Colleen Doyle ([Kootenay Carshare](#)) all spoke to the unique challenges and barriers to equitable mobility faced by *rural* communities. Their organizations are based in three different provinces (Nova Scotia, Ontario, British Columbia), and provide three different types of transport (public transit, cycling, carshare). The Migrant Farmworkers Project provides bikes, DIY repair classes, and cycling education to migrant farmworkers working in the Niagara region. Kootenay Carshare provides low cost and low barrier access to carsharing services in three small communities in the interior of British Columbia. Sou'West Nova Transit provides door to door wheelchair accessible transportation to all residents of Shelburne County, Nova Scotia. A major recurring theme amongst all three speakers was how essential mobility is to health, wellness, and a sense of personal dignity.



Barriers: Policy/Political

- Bureaucracy, coordination, political leadership still matter



Winter mobility was identified by many Community of Practice members as a key area for improvement. Many people become isolated due to badly designed and maintained winter infrastructure.

Next, Emile Frémont-Cloutier ([TRAAQ](#)) and Marvin Macraig ([Scarborough Cycles](#)) presented about their work in *suburban* communities of Quebec City and Toronto. A coalition of 16 community organizations, TRAAQ advocates for low income transit users, improving transit accessibility, and defending mobility rights in Quebec City's suburban neighbourhoods. Scarborough Cycles is a community bike hub and space for residents of all ages and skill levels to learn about cycling, get on bikes, and meet others who are interested in cycling. Scarborough Cycles implements programs that address the barriers to everyday cycling in suburban Toronto. Both presentations highlighted the economic, political, social, and infrastructure barriers that create massive transport inequities for lower income and racialized suburban communities.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 2022 COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Throughout these first Community of Practice workshops, we identified some recurring themes about engaging community organizations more fully in research initiatives, and transportation equity research gaps. The following are some reflections on what we've learned and heard from the Community of Practice over the course of 2022.

Building Equitable Relationships Between Researchers and Community Organizations

In advance of planning the Community of Practice workshop series, we conducted a series of interviews with community leaders and a survey of community organizations. We wanted to understand how we could make the workshops useful for community leaders, and to understand their experiences of working with researchers in the past. We heard about projects and positive outcomes arising from past collaborations with academics, but some key areas for researchers to improve when engaging community organizations arose as well:

1. **Identify power imbalances** – Before reaching out to community groups, be conscious that more often than not, academics are coming to the conversation with greater resources and power than the organizations they are connecting with. Recognizing that power imbalance and being prepared to share power is an important first step for researchers seeking to equitably engage community organizations.
2. **Co-create agendas and topics for investigation** – Gaps in data are something community organizations grapple with on a daily basis. Researchers can respect the knowledge and expertise that community groups bring to the table by providing opportunities to shape agendas and directions of research investigation. In so doing, this increases the likelihood that academic research will be useful and applicable to folks working on the ground.
3. **Create Actionable Data** – Community organizations are hungry for data that will help them deliver more impactful services and advocate for stronger policies and programs. However, they often do not have a lot of spare capacity to comb through long, dense reports to find nuggets of useful information they can easily apply to their work. Researchers can help by writing report summaries in accessible, easy to understand language that identifies not only key findings, but actionable items with graphs and visualizations that community organizations can operationalize.
4. **Provide Compensation** - Community organizations are often heavily dependent on volunteers, donations, and short-term funding. If they are taking the time to share their expertise and wisdom, researchers should reciprocate and compensate them in some way, whether financially, with recognition in the final report, or through a knowledge exchange.
5. **Listen and Adapt** – While most of the organizations we spoke with reported positive experiences working with researchers, some did describe projects where academics were not willing to change direction when faced with lived experiences from communities that did not align with the researcher's existing priorities. Community groups felt the most successful collaborations with academics were ones where researchers value lived experiences, and adapt approaches based on feedback they are receiving. When faced with new information, it's better to change course and adjust mid-project than to continue down the path of least resistance.

Transportation Equity Data Gaps Identified by the Community of Practice

Throughout the Community of Practice workshops, participants discussed the barriers they face in addressing transport poverty and identified several areas where they face knowledge gaps and have research questions.

1. **Best Practices for Universal Wayfinding** – Language-based barriers often prevent newcomers and those whose primary language is not English or French from accessing and successfully navigating public transit. Organizations working with these communities would find benefit in research that identifies best practices for universally accessible wayfinding and signage for mobility systems.
2. **Suburban Transit Equity Data** - Organizations working in suburban communities noted that suburban transit and bus routes are often the first on the chopping block when budget cuts strike. Data that focusses on suburban transit equity and highlights the negative impacts of cuts to suburban transit would be useful for advocates and organizations fighting against cutbacks.
3. **Mobility-related Costs of Centralizing Services in Rural Communities** - Rural based community organizations face a lot of challenges that often are under-investigated in comparison to urban mobility challenges. In rural communities, transportation organizations are often left to fill the gaps when local community services, like health clinics and hospitals, are closed and residents are forced to travel for several hours to access health care. This centralizing of services is often done in the name of cost-efficiencies. Rural organizations question how much savings this actually amounts to after factoring in the greater travel distances to access services and would be interested in research that captures these transportation-related costs.
4. **Non-infrastructure barriers to safe mobility** – The Community of Practice explored the non-infrastructure barriers that prevent people from accessing safe and welcoming mobility. Just because infrastructure (e.g. bike lanes) exist doesn't mean everyone will feel safe or comfortable using it. What are the additional factors that need to be present, and what are the factors that need to be removed for everyone to feel welcome using different mobility systems?
5. **Impact of Transportation Costs on the Underhoused** – A significant portion, (25% by some estimates) of all people experiencing homelessness have full time jobs but are still unable to afford first and last month rent. Organizations who work with the underhoused would like to investigate, for those experiencing homelessness, what percentage of their income is spent on transportation and how does that affect their ability to move out of shelter systems and secure permanent housing?
6. **Independent Mobility and Personal Dignity** – Access to safe, comfortable, and affordable independent mobility is a critical aspect of maintaining a strong sense of self and personal dignity. Community organizations report that a lack of independent mobility negatively impacts their clients, particularly vulnerable groups such as migrant workers, and newcomers. However,

it is difficult to know how to capture those negative impacts. Can researchers measure how independent mobility, or a lack thereof, can impact personal dignity and sense of self?

The first convenings of the Community of Practice provided a lot for us to consider and reflect upon as we move into the new year. It is clear we have only begun to scratch the surface of the benefits in bringing together community organizations from across the country working to address transport poverty. We look forward to diving deeper and building stronger connections between community organizations and Mobilizing Justice partners over the next three years.

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Towards Evidence-Based
Transportation Equity Policy