

Comment from Lorrie Walker

Hello and thank you for this opportunity. I attended each of the public meetings and was eager to submit a comment about the need to reduce disparities and increase community participation in underserved communities where traffic safety is often overlooked. The definition of an underserved community is probably different now after our experience with COVID when many families found themselves in lines for food, removed car seats from their cars to make room to sleep, lost health insurance and other situations unknown to them before 2020. The definition of "underserved" needs to be reevaluated and defined before work begins. Many of the families in the food lines had never considered themselves underserved. After decades in the child passenger safety field I found that the best way to work in diverse communities was to build capacity from within the community to be served. Working through established, trusted gatekeepers who often go unrecognized outside the community, they are generally not the mayor or other public figure but rather the parish nurse, food pantry volunteer, childcare worker at the aftercare program or librarian who manages story time. The local paid or volunteer workers have invested in the community and have credibility beyond what an outsider may offer. It takes a long time to build credibility without them. They are the core to success in the community. They often have great people skills and can assemble the community faster than any outside contractor. Please avoid the "hit and run" programs where there is a press conference with one or two local people, they participate at the surface level, tour the community, have a fair or teen program, take pictures and leave. The best programs in underserved communities thrive when local talent is trained, equipped, supported and recognized. Local volunteers may need additional resources and perhaps extra time to acquire new skills in an already busy day when meeting basic needs always comes first. Meeting times may have to occur at the convenience of community volunteers. Grant timelines that expect results in a year or two are short-sighted because building expertise that embraces a culture of safety where none existed is worth the investment of time. We always learn more from the community volunteers who have managed to make much from little as they embrace the problems and successes in their communities. They guide us towards implementing community improvement. Thank you for this initiative. It is valuable!