

# Building Equitable Communities: Righting the Wrongs of the Planning Past

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How far you need to travel to obtain fresh food, check out a library book, swim at the community pool, or stroll through a park depends on where you live. But where you live is often influenced by factors out of your control and, sometimes, by [historical systemic discrimination](#). Transportation and city planners have, in the past and often inadvertently, been a part of systems that contribute to inequitable circumstances; today, they are rising up to take responsibility to right these wrongs in our communities.



Six individuals featured in the project (clockwise from top left): Maria Cortez, Oscar James, Javier Rodriguez, Faye Wilson Kennedy, Ivory Chambeshi, and Rocina Lizarraga.

In one such effort, the California Planning Roundtable ([CPR](#)) collaborated with the Mineta Transportation Institute ([MTI](#)) to uplift six unique voices to identify how past planning practices have impacted communities of color in the words of those who have experienced the impacts. The [Voices of Impact](#) project shares stories to raise public awareness and investigate how planning professionals and policymakers can change their practices for a positive impact. The film explores the damaging effects of [redlining](#), the discriminatory practice that systematically denied financial services—such as mortgages and insurance loans—to residents of [certain areas](#), based on their race or ethnicity. Such discriminatory practices often denied communities of color access to public services and quality of life. In the Voices of Impact film, two individuals, [Oscar](#) and [Ivory](#), point out that where their families have lived was not

determined by proximity to work or school, but by safety and affordability that came only in certain places because they are Black.

An individual's neighborhood also influences access to resources such as fresh food, places for exercise and clean air, and books—all of which can have greater impacts on mental and physical health. Voices of Impact includes stories of food deserts and unsafe walking conditions remedied when the community came together with city planners and other professionals to install speed bumps and create spaces for gardens. Still, [white flight](#) and [gentrification](#) often create division in communities and price out people who have faced systemic discrimination and can no longer afford to live in neighborhoods they have long called home. Planners must work together with other professionals, governments, and with the communities they serve to foster fairness and equity in practices.

Creating opportunities for honest conversation and uplifting the voices of those impacted is a step in the right direction. Engaging communities through workforce development is another important aspect of shaping equitable communities with equal access to resources like safe transportation options, food sources, and amenities. Every year, MTI invites Bay Area high school students to learn about transportation careers in a free, three-week on-campus session at [San José State University](#) in the [Summer Transportation Institute](#) program. For younger students across the U.S., MTI sponsors the [Garrett Morgan Sustainable Transportation Competition](#) to encourage middle schoolers to consider careers in transportation. Both of these programs push back against systemic discrimination and lay the groundwork for creating a more diverse, inclusive workforce that can design and implement effective transportation policies that will create the changes communities need.

Although it can be painful to acknowledge and discuss the deep-rooted injustices people of color experience in our country, we must continue to bring the most painful truths to light. And in so doing, we can find the most effective ways to rise up and find sustainable solutions, to create the future we want in transportation, and to put equity first in every city, town, and neighborhood.

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