



Social Equity and Ecology: A cross-system partnership promoting transportation as a transformative tool for client mobility

Crutchfield, J.
Harrell, D.
Amekudzi-Kennedy, A.



FINAL REPORT

Social Equity and Ecology: A cross-system
partnership promoting transportation as a
transformative tool for client mobility

FINAL PROJECT REPORT

By:

Jandel Crutchfield
Danielle Harrell
University of Texas at Arlington
Adjo Amekudzi Kennedy
Georgia Tech University

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Center for Transportation, Equity, Decisions and Dollars **(CTEDD)**
USDOT University Transportation Center
The University of Texas at Arlington
Wolf Hall, Suite 325
Arlington TX 76019 United States
Phone: 817-272-5138 | Email: c-tedd@uta.edu

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Abstract

The primary objective of this educational project was to improve the personal mobility of homeless individuals experiencing transportation and other disadvantage in Tarrant County Texas by developing effective ecological-based equity training of the homeless workforce involved in their care. This project resulted in a nationally accessible online training series (housed within Tarrant County Homeless Coalition's learning management system) for member agencies, individuals supporting local homeless coalitions, and the local community. Through the collaborative partnership between the University of Texas at Arlington, Georgia Institute of Technology, and Tarrant County Homeless Coalition, targeted training for each institutional level was developed, including for directors, program managers, frontline staff, and community members. This project was completed under CTEDD's Focus Area 3 on community and workforce development to educate the homeless workforce in its efforts to improve mobility through a social equity and ecology framework.

Chapter I: Background/Literature for the Project

Transportation disadvantage is among the top contributors to homelessness for individuals living in the United States (Baek, 2016; Hui & Habib, 2017). It is also one of the largest barriers to successful reintegration into the economy for these individuals. Homeless coalitions across the country often attempt to crowdsource transportation resources for over 1.4 million clients experiencing homelessness (Olivet et al., 2021). While helpful for short-term needs, these attempts to provide for immediate transportation needs, such as bus passes, taxi vouchers, and uber/lyft resources, often fail to mitigate the long-term structural barriers to improving the quality of life and mobility for this environmental justice population.

As local homeless coalitions develop cross-system teams to tackle homelessness, a focus on socially equitable transportation infrastructure development (Amekudzi-Kennedy et al., 2020) can lead to more permanent solutions in promoting the quality of life of persons experiencing homelessness, as well as contribute to preventing more people from becoming homeless. Transportation access is not only linked to mobility, but also linked to improved access to healthcare needs, decreased food insecurity, improved personal fitness, higher likelihood of obtaining work, and higher quality of life for those who are homeless (Scott et al., 2020; Andrews et al., 2012). Additionally, quality of life related to mental health can be positively impacted through transportation access, with those having access to affordable and sustainable transportation exhibiting less symptoms of depression and loneliness and more consistent access to counseling services (Reinhard et al., 2018). Not only can these crucial outcomes be improved by reliable transportation access, but also things not always associated with homelessness like completing chores, social engagement, and simply exploring the local community (Scott et al., 2020).

Failure of homeless coalition agencies to build socially equitable transportation infrastructure prevents homeless individuals from effectively re-integrating into society (HUD, 2010). This manifests in significant race, class, and gender gaps whereby those already marginalized in society, experience worse quality of life as a result. Thus, transportation policy and practice within homeless agencies must go beyond a piecemeal approach to help people exit from chronic poverty to more holistic approaches to provide sustainable transportation for individuals and populations that need improved mobility and accessibility.

Unlike short-term solutions to transportation barriers, a transformative approach to transportation requires the underlying knowledge that transportation is a part of social ecology. Social ecology includes family and lifestyle, as well as societal structures and cultural perspectives that shape transportation outcomes. When it is viewed through the lens of social ecology, its potential to transform the lifestyle outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness is more actionable (Stodolska et al., 2020).

Much training for homeless coalition agencies focuses on needs assessment and knowledge of existing social services and transportation resources/infrastructure. This awareness of resources is helpful but lacking when meeting homeless clients' needs because it does not view

transportation through the broader social equity lens. The social equity lens centers transportation as an integral component of homeless client mobility and quality of life. To understand transportation as a structural barrier rather than an individual client need is key to improving systems of care within homeless coalitions, that most often include city planners and transit agencies. It is at times challenging to gain knowledge of how extensive structural barriers to homeless transportation access might be, but several common barriers often include lack of transportation, stigma attached to homeless transportation usage and access, costs, limited routes, and safety concerns. These go well beyond the individual person's needs and are far beyond barriers that can be mitigated by providing a few bus passes. Coalitions of homeless agencies sometimes have funded their own transportation services, relocated their programs to be more accessible near bus lines, provided services at home or on the go in local homeless shelter areas or various other agencies that homeless people frequently visit. Still others have established multiservice centers where clients could access behavioral and physical health services, laundry, showers, and public benefits applications all at one physical location. Some communities have even attacked structural transportation barriers by changing the requirements for in person interviews needed to qualify for certain benefits. These types of actions are the result of understanding the structural and transformative nature of transportation for individuals experiencing homelessness (HUD, 2010).

In addition to this awareness of structural transportation barriers, many agencies also provide training in cultural competence for frontline workers serving homeless clients. Increasingly, trainings for social service agencies and others serving marginalized and environmental justice populations focus on cultural humility training to center the clients' lived experiences in transportation access and barriers as opposed to the sometimes culturally discriminatory perspectives of case managers and program managers who fail to understand the added barriers presented to their clients by lack of transportation.

Tarrant County Texas is home to over 3 million people and is receiving an influx of people from California, which is currently driving up home prices. This is contributing to an already costly housing market that forces an increasing number of people to experience homelessness. Point in Time Counts for 2020 reveal that more than 27,000 individuals experience homelessness in Texas on any given day, with over 200,000 children and youth being reported as homeless (HUD, 2021). This represents a five percent increase from the previous year. Just over 2,500 of these individuals live either sheltered or unsheltered in Tarrant County. Racial and ethnic disparities in homelessness abound in Texas as well, where African Americans represent 12.9% of the populations but nearly 40% of the homeless population.

The Tarrant County Homeless Coalition (TCHC) has more than 150 member agencies spanning local churches, to city governments, to school districts, to local businesses, to transit agencies, to housing agencies, to faith-based services, and other social services. Each employee within these agencies provides services with varying levels of knowledge and skills related to addressing structural transportation issues as described in this proposal. TCHC provides ample training for members regarding homelessness resources to address homelessness, including

experiential learning such as poverty simulations related to transportation access. However, TCHC continues to report a need for agency members to understand the transformative nature of transportation for the homeless populations including ways to address the structural barriers outlined in this review.

Chapter II: Methodology/Process

Through this education project the project team created a cross-system approach to develop an online training program that focuses on transportation equity to promote equitable practices and strategies of service providers involved in the care of homeless populations.

Building from theory, a cross-system council (CSC) was assembled at the beginning of the grant period. This inaugural group included representatives from the grant team and stakeholder agencies--University of Texas at Arlington [PI, CoPI, and 2 students], Georgia Institute of Technology [CoPI, 1 student], and Tarrant County Homeless Coalition [2 representatives]. The purpose of the CSC was to cultivate partnerships committed to the development of an effective ecological-based equity training program for the homeless workforce.

The CSC met virtually via zoom for regular monthly meetings, beginning August 2021. The initial tasks of the CSC were to: (1) meet to discuss professional needs of the homeless serving agencies and to (2) meet with the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition advisory council (former system service recipients) to gain insight on structural transportation issues from the clients' perspective to assist with outlining the training program. The monthly meetings were semi-structured; targeting information sharing regarding transportation equity to promote client mobility yet allowing for continued adaptation in response to system conditions and evolving client needs. After the needs assessment was conducted on the current training objectives and the desired objectives, the research team proposed training outlines and received feedback from the CSC. Appendix B presents the notes from one of the CSC meetings to demonstrate the types of content and feedback provided for what should be included in the trainings.

UTA PI and CoPI were responsible for organizing and convening the CSC monthly meetings and assisting with recruiting new members as deemed necessary. Students on the project met weekly to initiate content for an overview (the Big Why of the importance of transportation in homeless discussions); and three trainings each geared to one level of worker (executive, managerial, and frontline). Students developed powerpoint slides with scripts for the work and met with PI to review content. Final powerpoint slides were uploaded to the Talent Learning Management System by the TCHC partners on the project. Students were able to access the LMS system to ensure the trainings were operational and pilot them as potential future employees of agencies within the TCHC coalition. After the initial pilot, researchers determined a system of grading was needed to ensure the trainings could be taken independently, without the need for a grader. As such, the student researchers developed a self-graded review available at this link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1QmWBo45hRkrEO2Oia6f_gSiZwCrFc_MF_P6eozj0UVA/edit

After one year of follow up the TCHC reports using the trainings successfully and integrating them within several of the coalition member agencies.

The following table demonstrates the tasks proposed in the project. Notably, the amazing race components that are highlighted in red were delayed by TCHC due to difficulty ensuring a timely completion for participants in this training. All other components were completed on schedule.

Tasks	P1 Aug.-Oct.	P2 Nov.-Jan.	P3 Feb.-Apr.	P4 May-July	Post- funding
Engage in Backwards Planning	X				
Draft Training Module Outline	X				
Restructure Amazing Race components	X				
Collect Needed Materials for In Person Components	X				
Concept Check with TCHC Advisory Group	X				
Write Training Modules	X				
Concept Check with TCHC Advisory Group		X			
Incorporate Feedback		X			
Create learning materials		X			
Load completed training into Talent LMS			X		
Pilot training			X	X	
Address challenges				X	
Disseminate trainings to TCHC and CCHC member agencies				X	X
Draft Final Report				X	X

Chapter III: Final Products/Recommendations

The project supported CTEDD's mission of education and training with the development of a widely accessible, online training program targeting the homeless workforce and community stakeholders. The development process supports equity in transportation planning and provides reachability of important topics such as structural barriers to transportation, cultural competence within organizational structures to promote equitable practices, and transportation as a mechanism to promote homeless individuals' reintegration into society through the coalition's network of over 150 member agencies and the broader community. The final products include a web-based training program housed on Tarrant County Homeless Coalition's Learning Management System (see Figure 1 for outline of the training topics within the completed project) and educational aids.

Appendix A presents a general overview of the training products developed from the project including 3 different trainings targeted to the frontline, mid-level, and executive staff of each of the TCHC coalition members.

Appendices C-E are the training products for each of the three levels of staff across the members agencies of the TCHC.

Each training offers not only a local context for homelessness and transportation access in Tarrant County but also a state and national context. Additionally, the trainings can be followed by a self-graded battery of knowledge checks as well as built in reflection points for staff doing these trainings independently and on a rolling basis.

The research team recommends additional follow up after the 1 year implementation of the trainings across the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition member agencies.



Figure 1. Final CTEDD Trainings

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Appendix A: Training Overview

Center for Transportation, Equity, Decisions and Dollars (CTEDD) 1 PAGE Training Summary Pg 1 of 4

Big Why		
Training Overview		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Purpose -- Sate of Homelessness Nationally and Locally -- Race Based Disparities of those experiencing homelessness -- Transportation and mobility concerns of the unhoused -- Transportation as a transformative tool to improve mobility and quality of life 		
Background		
Impact of client’s unique traits. Impact of local institution. Impact of social structures		
Frontline Staff	Mid-Level Staff	Executive Level Staff
Objectives	Objectives	Objectives
3 objectives including: - Recognize clients' unique structural (e.g., costs, routes, schedules, safety, and stigmatizations) and institutional barriers (e.g., demographic traits) to transportation and housing.	4 objectives including: - identify potential structural, systemic, and individual barriers faced by clients experiencing transportation and housing concerns	4 objectives, including: - Identify structural and institutional barriers faced by clients and understand which services most effectively remove these obstacles.
Client focused Data	Collaborative Data Focused	Organizational focused Data
3 Data Levels Working for One Goal		
Frontline collects demographic data	Managers analyze, combine, and share data.	Executives establishes partnerships for integrated data sharing platform.
General Best Practices	General Best Practices	General Best Practices
Work directly with clients to understand struggles and needs, then communicate and collaborate with multidisciplinary and diverse teams to effectively serve clients.	Frame how partnership efforts align with reducing barriers to individuals/ families experiencing homelessness, enhancing mobility and transportation access, and fostering collaboration and resource-sharing as a tool in building equity.	Ensure agency’s access to resources in manpower, finances, technology, and facilities to eliminate clients’ transportation and homeless related challenges.
Homelessness and Transportation Best Practices.	Homelessness and Transportation Best Practices.	Homelessness and Transportation Best Practices.
Work directly with clients to create unique service plans based on lived experiences and comprehensive data collection to reach racially equitable outcomes in transportation access.	Form worker, client and partner collaborations to work together to ensure clients’ lived experiences (including instances of structural racism) are improved long-term (Aras, 2021).	Clarify and standardize department roles necessary to develop skills and knowledge for reaching racially equitable outcomes in transportation access for homeless clients.
Organizational Change Strategies, Actions, & Interventions	Organizational Change Strategies, Actions, & Interventions	Organizational Change Strategies, Actions, & Interventions
Work towards increasing equity in client transportation and homeless services delivery.	Train all staff working in the homeless services sector on understanding racism and the intersection of racism and homelessness, so they can target resources toward and develop/adapt programs for people of color.	Become leaders in applying best practices to encourage change for racial equity in the homelessness arena.
Individual Change Strategies, Actions, & Practices	Individual Change Strategies, Actions, & Practices	Individual Change Strategies, Actions, & Practices

Appendix B: Selected Meeting Minutes from Advisory Council Meeting

Advisory Council Meeting – Member Feedback

Friday, December 10, 2021 10:16 AM

Question Posed for Feedback: **What would you like the homeless workforce to know about how transportation has affected your homeless experience?**

- Council Member 1
 - Had a car; wished she had access to mechanical services
 - Ride share services are essential
 - Considerations for Individuals with children
 - Collaborating with rideshare agencies
 - Equitable for everyone using transportation (ride share) services
- Council Member 2
 - I had a car; but did not always have gas • Gas cards are needed
 - Access to maintenance services is a plus
- Council Member 3
 - One of my greatest challenges being homeless was transportation
 - Transportation was vital; if I didn't have transportation to get to the shelter I was exposed to extreme temperatures
- Council Member 4
 - Affordable bus access
 - Accessibility - getting to a location
 - Especially when a bus route isn't close to desired location
- Council Member 5
 - Access to bus passes
 - Veterans attempting to get to VA for services faced difficulties • Training individuals on bus routes
- Council Member 6 - Pass
- Council Member 7
 - Learning how to navigate the bus route
 - Inequities with expediency of the bus routes • Using ride share services can be expensive

Information gleaned from Council meeting to include in training

- Micro - understanding clients' unique transportation barriers
- Mezzo - Maintaining partnerships to secure free transportation specific services
(free/affordable gas cards, rideshare vouchers/services, bus passes)
- Macro - Establishing partnerships with rideshare and transportation agencies

What would be helpful to know:

- Org-chart of target audience participating in the training
- Intake Forms

During the Council Meeting on 12/10, Erica and I captured notes (click here for complete notes) and incorporated the feedback in the training table.

The Question posed to the Council Members:

- What would you like the homeless workforce to know about how transportation has affected your homeless experience?

From our notes, we found the collective concerns regarding transportation encompassed accessible and affordable transportation. This quote from one of the council members stood out: "One of my greatest challenges being homeless was transportation." After reviewing the council members' feedback, we noticed commonalities among their sentiments.

- Access to Affordable and Accessible Transportation is Essential
 - Reliable transportation is vital in ensuring timely arrival to shelters (necessary to secure a bed)
 - Reliable transportation can avoid interruption in accessing medical care
 - Transportation supports/services were vital when experiencing homelessness:

- Public Transportation (Ex, Dart):

- Free bus passes are essential
- Training on how to navigate bus routes was critical
 - Rideshare (Ex, Uber, Lyft, etc.)
- Rideshare services are expensive but necessary when a bus route was not available in certain areas
- Rideshare service vouchers/partnerships are essential

- Personal Vehicle

- Affordable mechanical/maintenance services are vital
- Access to gas cards would be beneficial

Information gleaned from Council meeting to include in training

- Micro - understanding clients' unique transportation barriers
- Mezzo - Maintaining partnerships to secure free transportation specific services

(free/affordable gas cards, rideshare vouchers/services, bus passes)

- Macro - Establishing partnerships with rideshare and transportation agencies

Appendix C: Frontline Training
[CTEDD Training Front Line.pdf](#)

Appendix D: Manager Training
[../Documents/Zoom/TCHC Preview CTEDD Training Managerial.pdf](#)

Appendix E: Executive Training
[../Documents/Zoom/CTEDD Training Executive.pdf](#)

Appendix F: Technology Transfer

The Tarrant County Homeless Coalition consists of 34 local agencies serving the homeless population in Tarrant County Texas, a county with a population of over 2 million with more than 2,000 experiencing homelessness on a given night. A cross-system council was assembled at the beginning of the grant period to include representatives from each stakeholder and included representatives from member agencies with expertise in transportation equity, planning, policy, or engineering. The council will meet virtually once a month for the duration of the project to fulfill the identified goals of the project.

The technology readiness level for the proposed project at the time of submission was a level 6, according to the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) guidelines. Thus, the learning management system that was used to house the training program at the end of the project was already deployed in a relevant environment with current staff across the agencies of the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition. It currently uses the learning management system called Talent LMS. The team was able to verify access and usage within this system at the end of the project, thus proving an appropriate interface in their operational environment. Now, can disseminate the training to identified stakeholders and their member agencies and should they choose to share it, to an even broader audience.

