



# Who are the Underrepresented Citizens

We Hope to Engage in Transportation  
Planning

## GUIDEBOOK 3

VERSION 2

*Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens We Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning*

Version 2, 6/2021

The full series of *Transportation Equity Toolkit* resources is available online at:

*Suggested Practices for the Transportation Planning Community*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/suggested-practices-for-the-transportation-planning-community/>

The *Transportation Equity Toolkit* is a component of:

*Place & Health in West Virginia and underrepresented populations:*

<https://placeandhealthwv.com>

The website and its contents seek to reframe the way West Virginians think about and address population health less automatically as individual responsibility shaped by access to healthcare and more as the outcome of intentional policy decisions that leaders make about the places where people live, work, and play.

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# Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens We Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning

## Introduction to *Who are the Underrepresented Citizens We Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning*

Transportation planners may have limited experience interacting or working with the underrepresented citizens this *Transportation Equity Project* addresses, such as low-income, minorities, and people with disabilities or people without shelter. This guide offers information about who underrepresented citizens are, how lack of access to transportation services and amenities create daily challenges in securing basic necessities like food and medicine, as well as getting to work, school, appointments and other important places. *Guidebook 3* also discusses why underrepresented citizens may not understand the importance of getting involved in transportation planning

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## Who are the Underrepresented Citizens we Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning



This Transportation Equity Project considers an underrepresented citizen as someone who is defined as vulnerable according to selected health care categories and lacks accessible, reliable, and affordable transportation.

For the purposes of this *Transportation Equity Project*, an underrepresented citizen lacks transportation that is accessible, reliable, and affordable and is further defined as vulnerable using several health care categories, including: the economically disadvantaged, racial and ethnic minorities, the uninsured, low-income children, the elderly, the homeless, the disabled, those with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), and those with other chronic health conditions, including severe mental illness. These materials have been developed with these underrepresented citizens in mind particularly as they are rural residents, who often encounter barriers due to poverty and a lack of opportunities and resources similar to low income urban residents.

## What are Underrepresented Citizens' Challenges and How Do They Think About Transportation Planning



**H**ow do underrepresented community members think about transportation planning? The short answer is: they don't. Their primary transportation focus likely has to do with meeting daily needs and how transportation is involved or needed.

Many underrepresented and low-income community members cannot afford an automobile and do not have one at their immediate disposal. Automobile insurance can be cost prohibitive. If people do have a car, there are times when they cannot afford maintenance or gas. To get to daily destinations, they often rely on buses and other public transportation, share a car with family members, borrow a car or request a ride from neighbors and friends, or walk or bike.

Without a car, getting to work, getting children to school, getting to food and other stores for basic necessities, and getting to medical, dental, and other appointments can become a daily ordeal.

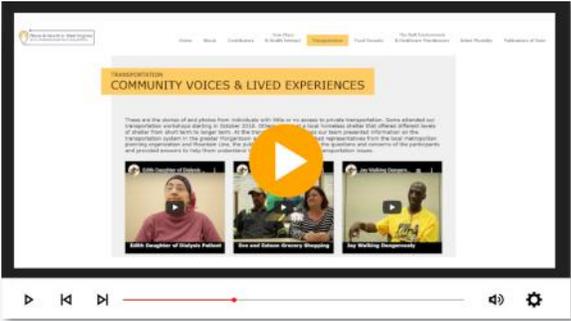
Relying on public transportation means, for example, that you're at the mercy of the bus schedule. You need to know and track bus routes, times, and transfers. The bus may or may not stop near your home. In fact, the further you live from town (where housing costs are usually more affordable) the less likely you live near a bus route. If you work the late shift or on weekends, busses may not be running when you need a ride. Transferring from one bus to another to get where you're going can mean spending a lot of time waiting for the next bus and likely travelling an indirect and longer route to your destination.

All in all, taking the bus can increase amount of time and level of effort required to get around town. The undertaking is even more difficult if you're sick, in a wheelchair, or have other medical, physical, or mobility challenges.

Poor people have many other priorities at the top of their list, in addition to getting where they need to go. Earning an income, working two or three jobs, paying bills and buying food on a limited income, keeping up with childcare and family obligations, negotiating with government and other agencies for assistance—are all immediate and acute needs, and all take concerted time and effort.

The following videos developed for this *Transportation Equity Project* offer stories of local citizens who lack private transportation.

**View Photovoice Videos from “Community Voices and Lived Experiences” at <https://placeandhealthwv.com/transportation/transportation-community-voices-lived-experiences/>**



-  Edith, Daughter of Dialysis Patient (4:55)
-  Karen, Dialysis Patient (1:53)
-  Eve and Esteon Grocery Shopping (2:12)
-  Jay, Walking Dangerously (1:35)
-  John, Homeless and Working (1:48)
-  Amanda, Single Mom (2:23)
-  Michelle Single Mom (1:54)
-  Eve and Esteon, Persona Rapid Transit (2:41)
-  Eve and Esteon, Shooberoos (2:41)
-  Jasimine, Homeless and Pregnant, Walking with Her Small Child (3:14)

## Understanding Trade-offs Low-Income and Other Underrepresented Citizens Often Make



When engaging and working with underrepresented citizens, it's important to understand the trade-offs these community members may need to make—trade-offs that can impact their transportation challenges. For example, low-income residents likely need affordable or low-cost housing, which may only be available outside of town. Living outside of town—especially if a person cannot afford a car, does not live near the bus route, or needs to walk on busy highways with no sidewalks—can drastically impact that person's transportation challenges.

Living outside of town can negatively impact the ability to find a good-paying job or get to work on time, or get to work at all, if a person relies on public transportation or rides from friends. It's a "Catch 22" situation. A low-income person living outside of town needs reliable, affordable transportation to get to a decent-paying job in town. But because they can't afford a car and there's no reliable public transportation near their home, it's difficult to get to and keep a job. It's a tough cycle to break.

## Some Characteristics of Underrepresented Citizens in Morgantown and Monongalia County



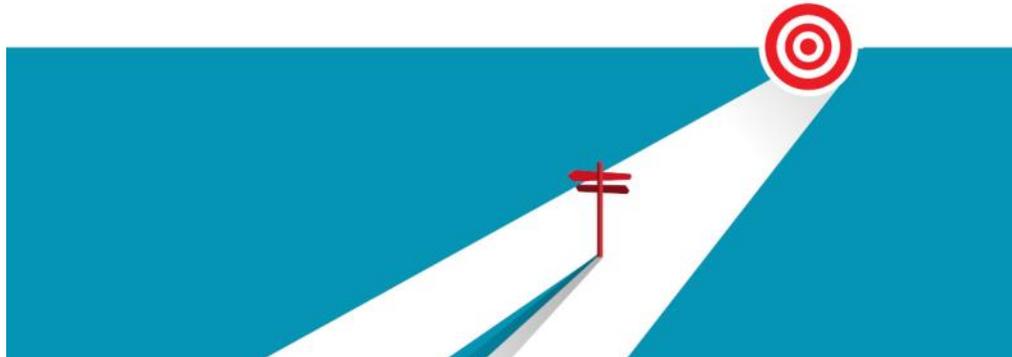
**B**elow is a summary of underrepresented citizens' characteristics that may impact their participation in transportation planning, as identified by Morgantown and Monongalia County participants in this project's research. Underrepresented citizens:

- May not own a car and instead rely on public transportation or friends;
- Live under or near the poverty level;
- Have little experience with local government, other than interacting with social service agencies;
- May be intimidated by local authority figures and hesitate to voice their opinions in public;
- May not trust authority figures or those perceived "to be in charge";
- May feel as though they have been let down by those in authority;
- Experience daily/monthly challenges that leave no time for civic involvement;
- Have little knowledge about transportation planning and why their involvement is important or desired.



Be sure to keep these characteristics and attitudes in mind while teaching or engaging underrepresented citizens about the transportation planning process. Acknowledging and addressing them can help you be more realistic and effective in meeting people "where they are," and ultimately help you engage in more meaningful interactions.

## A Key Challenge of this Transportation Equity Project: Engaging Underrepresented Citizens in Transportation Planning with a Horizon of 10, 15, 20 Years



A main challenge of this *Transportation Equity Project* is to encourage underrepresented citizens to engage in the long-term planning process. The long-term planning process focuses on major transportation projects to be undertaken in Monongalia County, such as building, repairing, or expanding roads; enhancing or fixing intersections; constructing sidewalks; repairing bridges; and similar large undertakings. These projects can take 10, 15, or 20 years to implement. The long-term planning process is not designed to address the daily acute needs of citizens (although there are options for citizens to raise these needs to local leaders, which is addressed in another section).

It's likely difficult for any citizen to understand how their input and participation can have an impact on such long-term processes. Hence, they may hesitate to engage in a process they will not see come to fulfillment for 15 or 20 years. However, it is essential that they get involved if they want to see transportation improvements that benefit their communities, families, children, and themselves down the line.

At the same time, acknowledging and allowing underrepresented citizens to register the short-term needs they may be dealing with during a meeting or interaction, including those dedicated to long-term planning, is important. It can help signal your concern for the full array of transportation challenges they face. Although the difference between short-term and long-term needs may be understood to transportation planners, it is not clear to the general public.



*Guidebook 3: Who are the Underrepresented Citizens we Hope to Engage in Transportation Planning* provides an overview of the characteristics and daily challenges experienced by Morgantown and Monongalia County citizens who lack access to sufficient transportation resources and services. It is important for transportation planners, who may have little experience interacting or working with local underrepresented citizens, to understand these characteristics in order to conduct more meaningful engagement and obtain more accurate input.

Underrepresented citizens' challenges include:

- Living under or near the poverty level;
- Lacking a personal vehicle or resources for fuel and maintenance if they do own a vehicle;
- Relying on bus services that run on limited schedules and to limited locations;
- Dealing with competing priorities including jobs, bills, limited incomes, child care, family obligations, negotiating with government agencies, etc. without reliable transportation;
- Walking or biking along busy roadways with no sidewalks, bike lanes, or safe shoulders;
- Living outside of town in order to access affordable housing, which can mean living far from a bus route or having to walk or bike long-distances along unsafe roadway conditions;
- Having limited experience or lacking trust in local government, being intimidated by local authority figures or about voicing opinions in public settings;
- Having little knowledge about transportation planning and the importance of their involvement.

*Guidebook 3* suggests that transportation planners keep in mind that the long-term nature of the planning process and subsequent implementation of transportation projects may be a barrier to underrepresented citizens' involvement. Identifying strategies to help citizens recognize the importance of their input and the fact that it can help improve transportation for their children and communities over the long-term may increase their interest and willingness to participate.

It may also be helpful to offer opportunities for underrepresented citizens to register their short-term and daily transportation needs during the course of any meeting or interaction, even those dedicated to identifying long-term needs. While the difference between short-term and long-term needs may be understood by transportation planners, the differences are not clear to the general public. Recognizing citizens' full array of transportation needs signals your concern about their challenges and your intention to take them under consideration.