Rural Climate Outreach Without a Big Budget: A Trust-Based CBO Partnership Model

YOLO COUNTY 2030 CLIMATE ACTION & ADAPTATION PLAN (CAAP) · COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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Yolo County's CAAP outreach reached rural and unincorporated communities through **82 engagement events** - including **21 in-person workshops**, virtual sessions, satellite participation, tabling, and partner-supported outreach - all delivered by a small internal team using a single **USDN microgrant** and a **trust-centered community-based organization (CBO) partnership model. No consultant-led outreach. No dedicated comms team. Just trust, targeted funding, and the right partners.**

THE CHALLENGE

Reaching Rural & Unincorporated Communities

Yolo County's unincorporated communities are spread across an agricultural landscape home to farmworkers, renters, and residents who face real barriers to participating in government planning: **language access, work schedules, geographic distance**, and limited trust in institutions.

The CAAP required meaningful engagement with exactly these communities - but with a small staff and minimal discretionary budget.

TEAM & RESOURCES

A Small but Mighty Team

- 2 — Full-time sustainability staff managing the full engagement process
- 2 — CivicSpark Fellows supporting outreach & coordination
- \+ — Equity & Engagement TAC guiding partner recruitment & process design
- \+ — Yolo County Climate Action Commission (YCCAC) steering outreach
- $ — USDN microgrant targeted to translation, food, materials & CBO stipends

Why This Matters for Other Jurisdictions

Rural outreach is different. It requires in-person presence, trusted messengers, and meeting people where they are. CBOs are not vendors, they are equal collaborators. **Paid upfront, trusted fully**. Small grants punch above their weight when targeted to the right needs. This model is replicable for any jurisdiction with limited staffing, geography challenges, and a tight budget.

Three Pillars of Trust-Based Rural Engagement

TREAT CBOS AS EQUAL PARTNERS, NOT VENDORS

- Recruited local CBOs through the **Equity & Engagement Technical Advisory Committee (E&E TAC)** as co-designers, not subcontractors
- **Paid partners upfront** - no reimbursement delays or bureaucratic friction
- Partners led outreach in their own networks in languages and spaces where community members trusted them
- Accessible contract language and scopes built for small orgs
- Recruited 5 CBO partners - CLBL, Cool Davis, Davis Odd Fellows, De Colores Resource Center, and YFB

💬 *If you're asking a CBO to do the work, pay them like a partner, not a vendor. Reimbursement models exclude the orgs you need most.*

MEETING COMMUNITIES WHERE THEY ARE

- Events at community-trusted venues: schools, fire stations, community centers, libraries, etc., distribution through Yolo Meals on Wheels
- Bilingual materials in Spanish, English, and Russian
  - Offered bi-lingual workshops (+ 2 solely in Spanish)
- Satellite participation options for hard-to-reach demographics
- Scheduling around agricultural work calendar (e.g. coordinating with migrant housing centers) + providing evening & weekend workshop opportunities
- Reduced barriers: food, childcare, gift cards, language support provided

💬 *Every barrier you remove - a meal, a Spanish-only option, a Saturday timeslot - is a community member who shows up instead of opting out.*

SPEND SMART -FLEXIBLE TARGETED FUNDING

- USDN micro grant directed to highest-impact items: food, materials, CBO stipends, participatory gift cards
- County retained ownership of the process while partners expanded reach
- Demonstrated a replicable, low-cost model for jurisdictions with minimal or no allocated budget

💬 *If you have a microgrant, a food budget, and a CBO you trust, you have enough to start. Outsourcing engagement to a consultant is not the only path.*

"We have to work in bad weather, dust, smoke, rain, and high temperatures. We work fewer hours and we don't earn enough to support our families and we stress a lot. All this makes us work in unsafe conditions." - Yolo County Farmworker

LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Build trust before you build the plan**. Relationship-building with CBOs started before formal engagement - partners needed to see genuine commitment to using input. Start 3–6 months before your first public event.
2. **Translate the process, not just the words.** Budget for bilingual facilitation before you budget for a flyer. Someone who can explain why climate change affects a family's rent or a farmworker's health is worth more than a translated PDF.
3. **Flexible formats reduce friction.** Mixing workshops, satellite options, and partner-led tabling expanded reach without the County being everywhere at once, and allowed CBOs to do what they do best - connect with their communities.
4. **Small grants are most powerful when targeted.** Food, translation, and CBO stipends - not overhead or consultants - produced the highest engagement return per dollar spent.
5. **Understand the constraints you staff capacity.** With 2 FTEs + 2 Fellows, CBO delegation was not just equitable - it was necessary and strategic.

THE CBO PARTNERSHIP MODEL

STEP 1 - Recruit via TAC
E&E TAC identified and vetted trusted CBO partners across unincorporated communities + additional TAC membership.
→ *Start here if you don't know who to call - equity advisory groups likely do.*

STEP 2 - Co-design the process
Partners reviewed and shaped engagement methods, formats, and materials - not just delivery.
→ *Co-design produces buy-in. Partners who are allowed to shape the process trust their input is valued.*

STEP 3 - Accessible contracting
Simple, flexible scopes. Upfront payment. No bureaucratic barriers to partnership.
→ *Upfront payment signals trust. Reimbursement models exclude the small orgs you need most.*

STEP 4 - Partner-led outreach
CBOs hosted and co-facilitated events in their networks, reaching people government alone could not.
→ *You can't build trust for a community you're not from. Let those who have it lead.*

STEP 5 - Shared ownership
Community input shaped the final CAAP. Partners and residents saw their voices reflected in outcomes.
→ *Close the loop. When people see their input in the final plan, they become your advocates.*

2024–2025 OUTREACH METRICS

Yolo County CAAP Engagement Summary

82 TOTAL ENGAGEMENT EVENTS

21 IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS	**37** COMMUNITY TABLING EVENTS
1,200+ COMMUNITY MEMBERS ENGAGED	**1,000+** SURVEY RESPONSES
2 LANGUAGES (EN + ES)	**5** CBO PARTNERS

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Cool Davis · Center for Land-Based Learning · Yolo Food Bank · FOLT · De Colores Resource Center

FUNDING APPROACH

A **USDN microgrant** funded translation, food, materials, childcare, and CBO stipends, strengthening partner capacity and expanding reach instead of **relying on a consultant to lead outreach**. A replicable approach for jurisdictions with minimal discretionary funding.

YOU CAN DO THIS TOO IF...

✓ You have 1–2 CBOs who already serve your hardest-to-reach residents.
✓ You're willing to pay partners upfront and trust them fully
✓ You can access even a small flexible grant (USDN, etc.).
✓ You design your schedule around community life, not a M-F, 9-5 office calendar.
✓ You treat language access as a prerequisite, not an afterthought