Built Environment Listening Sessions
Engagement Summary Report

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State of Oregon
DEQ Department of Environmental Quality

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Foreword

The built environment is a vast network of encompassing and intersecting spaces, systems, structures, infrastructures, as well as sub- and supra-structures, that shape our lives in more ways than we consciously attend to. We live, play, learn, teach, gather, support, aspire and dream in spaces that are built and maintained by humans, including cities, parks, schools, hospitals, and much more. We grow food and many other forms of nourishments including those that feed our spirit, beliefs, ethics, values, and that shape our poetic and moral natures. We bathe in the waters and in the bounty of nature; cherish wild places and the wild inhabitants. All this intertwines to form the special bonds and affinities that determine the spirit of a place, its placeness, that form the active attachments for our individual and collective placemaking. We all seek to belong and be part of our own special place, the dwelling, the neighborhood, the city, state …. our place in the world.

Unfortunately, the reality of the built environment is intertwined with the history of inequitable and unjust public planning and development that have imposed burdens upon long marginalized peoples and their communities, spanning generations. For example, many of our infrastructures still hold the traces of slavery, of poor labor conditions, of uprooting people from their places, of poverty and disenfranchisement that continue to affect large groups of diverse people and their ability to participate in the making of their own places, affecting the just futures we might envision together.

The Built Environment Strategic Plan begins by acknowledging these and many other failings of public planning, engagement, and responses to the needs of complex groups of people living in a geographically diverse state. The plan takes a whole systems approach and consider where the materials we use come from; what their environmental impacts are, and who benefits and who are burdened by the choices we make. The plan enables a bold agenda for purposeful placemaking organized around three ideas: to center equity, environmental and racial justice; to invite co-creation and prioritize fostering relationships; and to be iterative and actively anticipate emerging issues.

These organizing principles shaped the objective of the initial community engagement described in this report. Our objective for this engagement was simply to give voice to communities, and center people and places in the early days of standing up a new program and work area at the Department of Environmental Quality. This engagement itself serves as a demonstration of how participation and input is solicited with deeper commitment to inclusion and listening, and of growing connections and trust for authentic ongoing interactions. The findings will shape and guide future efforts to be more responsive to the actual needs of people with varied lived realities in the State of Oregon. To do so authentically, with presence, and without a predetermined outcome. To embrace diversity and participatory relation making, and to create a safe and respectful space founded in presence rather than process efficiency. I feel we fulfilled the purpose earnestly.

The core team travelled a thousand-mile loop three times from Portland, traversing the coast, central and eastern Oregon, and back to along Columbia River. We met people in their places, in their time, in their language. We shared a meal, listened, learned, laughed, and had heartfelt difficult and personal discussions. I felt a sense of familiarity, conviviality, and openness in dialogue. Several participants said: "I felt like I was heard, and my time was valued and respected." We even received an insider tour of a charming "tiny town," accompanied by their unofficial ambassador, Oliver the Cat, a prominent resident. These meetings validated a truism that what divides us is an illusion. That the aspirations to meet essential needs, to thrive in place, with community, feeling secure in play and living, and having dignity of work, are common threads among Oregonians. The impressions of what good governance and policy ought to do for Oregonians, however, diverged from mild optimism to dire cynicism. We must demonstrate other ways to grow together. This is a central tenet of DEQ's Built Environment program. Onward.

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Executive Summary

In 2022, State of Oregon Department of Environmental Quality published the [Built Environment Strategic Plan](#) to help inform the Materials Management Program's decision making, prioritization of work, and establishment of principles for how to do the work collaboratively. The Strategic Plan identified "listening sessions" as a priority project to help set the course for the Built Environment team's future work. The listening sessions had three goals:

1. Share with a broad audience information about DEQ's Built Environment program: What is it? Why is the built environment important? How to engage with and inform the program's work?
2. Connect with people from three constituencies – communities, governments, and industries – to learn about their built environment experiences, needs, and priorities.
3. Build relationships and trust with these groups.

DEQ's Built Environment (BE) team hired a consultant, EnviroIssues, to support and facilitate community listening sessions. A "community advisor" was recruited for each community group to help design and host the sessions, and recruit ten local participants. Advisors and participants were paid for their time as a way to lower the barriers to participation and in recognition of their knowledge and expertise. The team prioritized diverse representation of backgrounds, geographies, race and ethnicity, and age. The six participating community groups were: Euvalcree (Ontario); Aging in the Gorge (Hood River, The Dalles, and Dufur); Black Rural Network (Tillamook County); and NextUp, Coalition of Communities of Color, and Central City Concern (Portland Metro).

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From August to November 2023, the BE team, EnviroIssues, and community advisors collaborated to host a series of three in-person sessions with each of the six community groups, engaging 56 participants statewide. Initial sessions focused on understanding participants' experiences and needs regarding the built environment. In the second sessions, the team synthesized that input into 24 main issues and asked each participant to prioritize them using a structured approach. The third sessions presented the results, followed by discussions about potential demonstration projects to address high-priority issues in each community.

The listening sessions offered three primary takeaways:

1. The listening session format was very well received. Nearly all participants shared that they felt respected and heard over the course of the three in-person meetings.
2. Many participants found it difficult to deprioritize issues during the sorting exercise because every identified issue is important. This suggests that the issue statements that participants sorted as low priorities are still indeed priorities but should be considered longer-term priorities.
3. Although there was variability and nuance within each community, all six community groups aligned on the need to prioritize access to basic needs—affordable housing and food, workforce development opportunities, fair pay and better building codes.

In 2024, the Built Environment team will be working with each community to plan and implement a demonstration project that addresses at least one of their top priorities. Demonstration projects aim to strengthen relationships, address community needs, gather feedback, and demonstrate the effectiveness of concepts that may be able to be implemented at a larger scale in the future. DEQ will allocate $25,000 for the development and implementation of each demonstration project in addition to support and expertise from the project team.

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Purpose of engagement

The Built Environment team at Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Materials Management Program held a series of listening sessions with impacted communities across the state to build relationships and guide the implementation of the priorities outlined in the Built Environment Strategic Plan.

"Impacted Communities" includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as one or more, and community-based organizations which represent one or more, of the following identities: BIPOC, low-income, rural, LGBTQIA2S+, disabled, elders, youth, renters, houseless, refugees, immigrants, undocumented, and frontline.
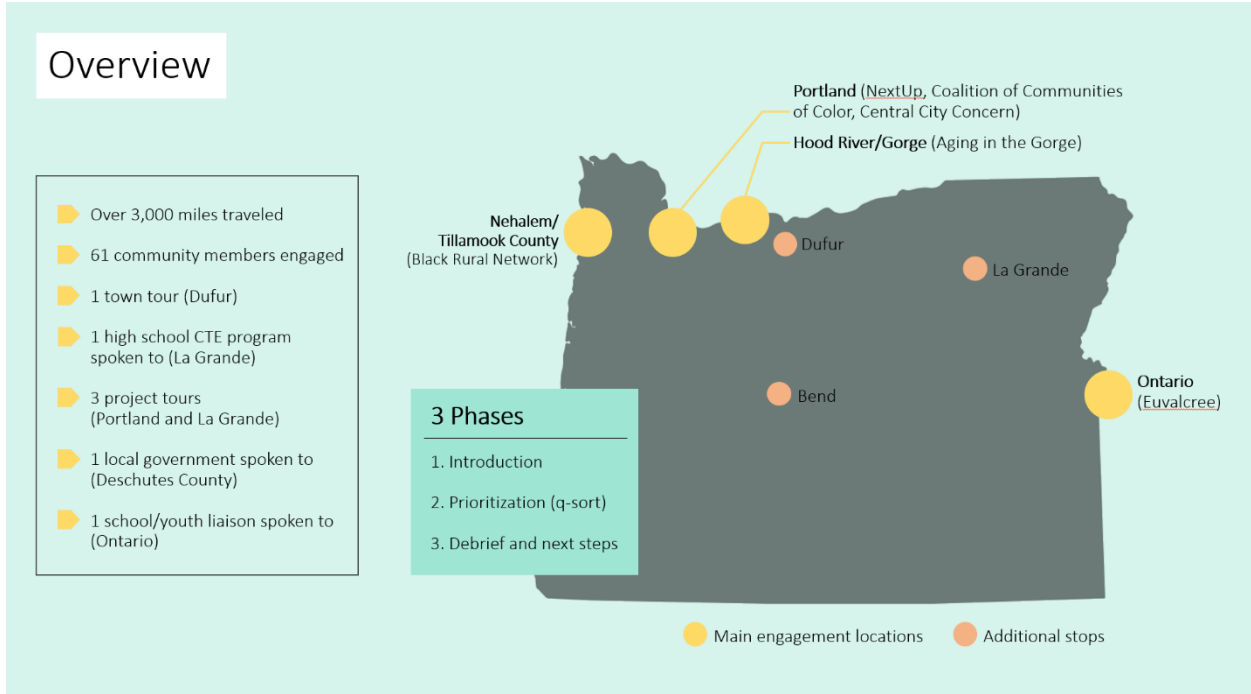
The sessions provided quantitative and qualitative data about the lived experiences and needs that people and communities in Oregon have in, and because of, Oregon's built environment. The sessions also provided insight into the opportunities for the BE team's projects to address these needs directly or through partnerships with industry professional and government agencies. The feedback gathered in these sessions will directly influence the priorities, projects, and resource allocations of the BE team in 2024 and beyond.

Who we engaged with

Impacted communities

The project's overarching goal was to actively engage and foster relationships with communities that have historically and presently been underserved and underrepresented in DEQ's programs and processes. A deliberate effort was made to ensure the inclusion of as many impacted community identities as possible. The project team acknowledged that many individuals within these communities have challenging or nonexistent relationships with government agencies, particularly regulatory bodies like DEQ. To establish a foundation of trust, the team collaborated closely with trusted community advisors, deferring to their insights and connections to reach individuals within these communities and foster meaningful engagement.

Overview

- Over 3,000 miles traveled
- 61 community members engaged
- 1 town tour (Dufur)
- 1 high school CTE program spoken to (La Grande)
- 3 project tours (Portland and La Grande)
- 1 local government spoken to (Deschutes County)
- 1 school/youth liaison spoken to (Ontario)

3 Phases

1. Introduction
2. Prioritization (q-sort)
3. Debrief and next steps

Portland (NextUp, Coalition of Communities of Color, Central City Concern)
Hood River/Gorge (Aging in the Gorge)
Nehalem/Tillamook County (Black Rural Network)
Dufur
La Grande
Ontario (Euvalcree)
Bend

Main engagement locations   Additional stops

Advisor model

The project team used a community advisor model to connect with impacted communities across the state. Community advisors provided the trusted local voice, helped design the outreach strategies, review materials, and connect the project with participants. Community advisors were compensated for their time.

The BE team started from an inventory of existing relationships with community leaders and organizations across the state. The team catalogued the type of work and the communities that each group served. Connections that served underrepresented or marginalized communities were prioritized. The team also considered which communities were missing from the inventory and researched additional organizations that could help fill in these gaps.

Priority organizations and leaders were contacted for 1:1 stakeholder interviews. During the interviews, the team reviewed the concept of the built environment, discussed ideas about the best ways to engage with communities, and invited the organizations or individuals to serve as community advisors during the engagement process. The team held seven interviews and confirmed six advisor organizations.

Advisors provided input on the overall structure of the listening session series, session materials, and accommodations for their communities to help ensure that the outreach was done in a culturally responsive way. They also recruited participants for the events and sent reminders before each event using the methods that worked best for their communities including emails, phone calls, and text messages.

Organizations designated one to two advisors and signed partnership agreements that outlined the expected tasks and guidance about how to allocate the available hours. Each advisor was responsible for tracking their time and level of effort throughout the project. Advisors were given the option to invoice the project on a rolling

basis or at the end of the engagement period. All advisors chose to receive payment in full at the end of the project.

Advisors were compensated at $125 per hour for up to 36 hours for a total of $4,500 per organization. This hourly rate was selected based on similar projects conducted with other Portland-based agencies such as Oregon Metro and the City of Portland and prior to agency guidelines established by DEQ. Hourly compensation rates were higher for advisors than individual participant rates in recognition of a higher level of responsibility to help design, recruit for, and host the listening sessions.

There were three instances where the team adjusted their strategy while recruiting advisors:

- The team initially connected with AARP to have representation of the elder community. AARP referred the team to Aging in the Gorge Alliance, a smaller, local organization based in Hood River with closer ties to the community and with available capacity.
- The team confirmed a partnership with StreetRoots to include representation from the houseless community. The team was able to engage with two representatives during the early planning phases, however StreetRoots had to dissolve the partnership due to capacity constraints and individual circumstances. The team pivoted and was able to connect with representatives from Central City Concern to continue engagement with a similar audience.
- Coalition of Communities of Color signed on to help plan the engagement, review materials, and provide feedback, but didn't have the capacity to recruit individual participants. They helped connect the project team with some of their coalition organizations and the project team managed recruitment from that point. Participants from this recruiting effort attended joint sessions with NextUp.

Table 1. Community based organizations and community advisor(s)

Advisor Organization	Meeting location
Aging in the Gorge Alliance	Hood River
Black Rural Network	Nehalem
Central City Concern	Portland
Coalition of Communities of Color	Portland
Euvalcree	Ontario
NextUp	Portland

Participants

The project aimed to involve about ten participants from each organization. To establish continuity and build relationships, participants were encouraged to attend all three listening sessions. To help with recruitment, the project team provided advisors with email and flyer templates with information about DEQ and the BE program.

These materials outlined the purpose of the listening sessions, specified the session dates, and included information about stipends.

Advisors played a crucial role in the recruitment process, connecting with their respective networks and actively selecting and confirming participants. Leveraging the credibility of advisors as trusted sources helped community members recognize the authenticity of the opportunity. This approach helped individuals feel more at ease reaching out to advisors for clarification and requesting any necessary accommodations, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and accessible participation process. Through these partnerships, the BE team was able to engage with individuals representing BIPOC, immigrant, low-income, houseless, rural, urban, elders, and youth communities, among others.

To recognize the value of participants' experiences and to reduce barriers for participation, DEQ provided participant stipends at a rate of $100 per hour. Participants who attended all three listening sessions received a total of $450 in Visa gift cards. This hourly rate was selected based on similar projects conducted with other Portland-based agencies such as Oregon Metro and the City of Portland and prior to agency guidelines established by DEQ.

Table 2. Outreach events, languages, and number of participants for each advisor organization

Advisor organization	Location	Language(s)	Number of participants
Euvalcree	Ontario	Spanish	12
Aging in the Gorge Alliance	Hood River	English and Spanish	11
Black Rural Network	Nahalem	English	9
NextUp/ Coalition of Communities of Color	Portland	English	17
Central City Concern	Portland	English	7
		Total participants	**56**

Government and industry groups

One of the BE team's goals was to also connect with government and industry groups. Because government and industry have long held a seat at the table, it was most important to focus on impacted communities. Sessions were designed around engaging impacted communities and then adapted for government and industry outreach. It was crucial that the number of community voices match or exceed those from government and industry combined. With available funding, 60 community members could participate, so BE team

restricted government and industry stakeholders to about 30 each, except for Tribal governments, which had no set limit.

Government stakeholders were defined as governing bodies including agencies, commissions, Tribal governments, and local governments of all scales, regions, and constituencies of the state. In identifying which governing bodies to engage, the BE team held two acknowledgements:

1. Rural communities tend to be underrepresented in government decision-making and have differing needs related to the built environment than urban communities.
2. Nearly half of the state's population resides in the Portland Metro area and almost three-quarters reside in the Willamette Valley.

Understanding both of these to be true, the BE team aimed to find a balance of rural and urban governing bodies to receive invitations to the sessions. It was also important to aim for geographic diversity including coastal, central, and eastern parts of the state.

Inequities also persist in the built environment industries. For example, line workers and subcontractors who are directly interacting with and experiencing impacts from the built environment, are underrepresented in decision-making. Additionally, these groups tend to include more BIPOC individuals, while owners and decision-makers are overrepresented by white men. Across built environment industries, BIPOC and women are largely underrepresented. For instance, in architecture, women comprise only one-quarter of registered architects and only 11 percent self-identify as BIPOC. Black women make up only 0.2 percent of architects. These figures are compounded at the intersections of identities.

Acknowledging the factors addressed above, the BE team sought to engage people from a diversity of built environment sectors (infrastructure, vertical/buildings, materials) and across all stages of the life cycle. This could include owners, developers, architects, designers, engineers, contractors, subcontractors, procurement staff, specifiers, workers in the material supply chain, and more. Additionally, the BE team aimed to balance the voices of "traditional decision-makers" with underrepresented voices.

Engagement with government and industry groups followed a similar three-session structure as engagement with community groups, however, sessions and activities were held virtually.

- Session one: Two time options held each for government and for industry.
- Session two: One virtual session was held. Participants were also sent a link to the online version of the prioritization exercise to be completed within two weeks.
- Session three: Yet to be held.

Invitations were extended to 30 government and 30 industry stakeholders. Session one had seven government and 10 industry representatives. Only 14 participants across industry and government combined completed the sorting exercise. The low levels of participation meant that the participation thresholds for analysis were not met for these cohorts.

Lessons learned:

- The difference in engagement between the community and industry and government led to a significant difference in participation. Community engagement occurred with the support of trusted community advisors and in-person sessions while industry and government outreach were held virtually or self-led.
- Government stakeholders who participated were either Metro or state agencies, indicating a need for building relationships with more rural local governments.
- No Tribal governments chose to participate. This may have been due to multiple factors:
    - Lack of existing relationships and trust.
    - Outreach occurred through DEQ's tribal liaison sending an email to all members of "Tribal clusters" which is a relatively impersonal way to connect with this group.

Recommendations:

- Begin Tribal and rural outreach earlier and emulate more of the relationship-driven outreach that was used for impacted community outreach.
- Work on developing relationships outside of listening sessions to build trust.
- Consider expanding engagement beyond virtual settings.

Table 3. Government stakeholders

Location/ jurisdiction	Invites	Number of participants
Coastal	3	
Central	4	
Eastern	6	
Metro	5	4
Counties	3	
Statewide	5	3
Tribal	17	
	Total participants	7

Table 4. Industry stakeholders

Sector	Invites	Number of participants
Designers	5	1
Material producers	6	3
Education institutions	6	2

Developers/owners	6	1
Builders/workforce	6	2
Planning/landscape/urban design/transportation	5	1
Total participants	10	

How we engaged with impacted communities

Listening sessions

Over four months, the project team conducted 15 listening sessions across five different communities and connected with 56 individual community members.

Engagement was broken down into a series of three listening sessions with approximately six weeks in between each session. Topics for each session were:

- Session 1:
    - Introduce the team and concept of the built environment
    - Discuss how participants interact with the built environment
    - Understand the main issues participants had with the built environment
- Session 2:
    - Introduce 24 statements corresponding to the main issues discussed in the previous session
    - Prioritize the 24 statements according to each participant's individual values using a structured sorting technique called Prioritization exercise
- Session 3:
    - Share results of the Prioritization exercise prioritization exercise including the patterns that emerged across constituents and locations based on analysis using the Q-methodology
    - Share draft 2024 work plan as it relates to top priorities and other guiding factors including the BE Strategic Plan and legislative directives
    - Share and discuss ideas for potential demonstration projects to address the top priorities in each community

All community sessions were held in person except for two online makeup sessions using Zoom and two one-on-one phone calls for Session 2. The use of small groups allowed each participant to contribute to the conversations, and in instances of larger or bilingual groups, further breakout sessions were used to ensure effective communication. The team worked to create a welcoming environment by providing meals and refreshments at all sessions and holding the sessions at familiar locations including a local restaurant in Ontario, the senior center in Hood River, a church in Nehalem, and the NextUp and Central City Concern offices in Portland. Attendees were invited to arrive half an hour before the sessions started to share a meal with the project team and fellow participants, fostering a sense of community and providing opportunities to socialize.

The project team collaborated with advisors during the planning stages to offer accommodations that supported attendees in participating fully. For example, sessions in Ontario with Euvalcree were held entirely in Spanish and sessions in Hood River with Aging in the Gorge Alliance were bilingual in English and Spanish. All materials were fully translated into Spanish, and a bilingual facilitator and project team member were present during these sessions. The project team also extended additional accommodations upon request, such as childcare, transportation, and materials presented in larger font sizes. Stipends were distributed to participants at the end of each session.

Communication methods and materials

Meeting materials and reminders

The team aimed to maintain regular communication with participants to build trust and keep momentum between sessions. Follow-up emails were sent after each session and advisors played a crucial role in supporting regular communication by sending timely reminders before each session via email, phone calls, and text messages.

Materials included presentation slides and printed materials including an agenda, topic-specific handouts, and a meeting evaluation form for each session. Prioritization exercise materials included a printed board with 24 open spaces and 24 individual statement cards that participants were asked to prioritize. This interactive exercise allowed participants to consider all the statements at once and make adjustments.

To accommodate participants who were unable to attend the prioritization session two makeup sessions on Zoom sessions allowed participants to complete the Prioritization exercise with an online link. The team also conducted two individual phone calls in Spanish to ensure meaningful participation for those with limited technology skills. This multi-faceted approach aimed to inclusively cater to the various needs and circumstances of the participants.

Online website

In the planning phase, brainstorming sessions were conducted with community advisors to gather insights on effective communication strategies and the review of background information for participants. Several ideas were generated, including suggestions to simplify language, the development of a website, and the production of informational videos.

The BE team created a website to publish [information about the program and outreach goals](#) where people could learn more about the work. This website included details about the ongoing listening sessions, additional project-related information, team backgrounds, and testimonials.

In addition, bilingual videos in English and Spanish were produced to provide contextual information about the built environment and the listening sessions.

What we heard/learned

Session outcomes

Throughout the listening sessions, the BE team heard themes that were specific to each community, but there were also themes that were shared across all groups. During the prioritization exercise, all communities shared that they believed every statement presented was important and that many participants used a scale of urgency to help them sort their priorities. This means that statements that ranked lower are still indeed priorities but should be considered longer-term priorities. Another overarching theme was the importance of addressing basic needs as a foundation. Most people only consider other topics after securing basic needs including shelter, affordable food, and clean water.

The results from the Q-methodology were grouped into three categories based on geographic density:

- Rural: Nehalem and Hood River
- More Rural: Ontario
- Urban: Portland metro area

Highlights of conversations with rural communities included:

- **Climate change adaptations and impacts:** There were discussions concerning climate change adaptation, particularly focusing on the challenges posed by increasing wildfires and the health impacts of inhaling smoke. Coastal flooding and sea level rise were also concerns, hindered by limited government resources for necessary upgrades. Some suggested learning to endure electricity shortages, while others highlighted financial strains from extreme weather, forcing families to prioritize warmth over saving money.
- **Lack of affordable housing:** Concerns were raised about the rising cost of housing, attributed in part to short-term rentals driving up prices without adequately benefiting the community. Tensions between renters and landlords highlighted the need for improved protections for both parties. Additionally, insufficient resources to support individuals during difficult times have contributed to homelessness.
- **Exposure to Pollution:** There was also concern about individuals resorting to burning plastic or rubber for warmth, posing health risks from inhaling toxic chemicals.
- **Lack of healthcare services:** Participants also discussed the challenges related to accessing healthcare services, with some individuals unable to qualify due to their employment or legal status. Limited access to healthy and affordable food further exacerbated health issues, increasing costs and perpetuating a cycle of health challenges.
- **DEQ's level of influence:** Though many participants felt heard, others were pessimistic about DEQ's ability to meaningfully affect the wide range of issues.

Highlights of conversations with more rural communities included:

- **Chemical exposure in the agricultural and construction industries:** Many participants in Ontario worked in the agricultural and construction sectors. Several discussions revolved around concerns regarding chemical exposure and emissions and their impacts on the local community.

- **Lack of affordable housing:** Many talked about the increased cost of living and how houselessness was becoming an increasing problem in the area. Participants shared that government regulation could help solve some issues, but also felt like the parameters used to determine aid were often too restrictive and did not account for the cost of living. For example, participants talked about being denied by government assistance programs for earning too much, but still being unable to afford rent or a mortgage.
- **Lack of livable wages:** Many people expressed that they needed multiple jobs to afford housing and bills and felt some resentment towards unemployed people who were able to receive aid. Participants felt like they could either work two jobs to subsist or be unemployed and receive government assistance to live comfortably.
- **Lack of educational and childcare services:** Many expressed a need for more resources and assistance programs for young people to continue their education or find career options, more resources for disabled people in education and housing, and more childcare services.
- **Prioritizing well-being without retribution:** The group shared a collective belief that the government should prioritize the well-being of its residents. However, there was also an underlying fear of speaking out against injustices. Instances of unfair treatment by landlords or employers created a silent understanding: voicing discontent might result in being labeled a "rat" and facing potential retaliation.

Highlights of conversations with urban communities included:

- **Systemic change:** This group focused the most on fostering systemic change. Participants recognized the interconnectedness of various issues and vocalized their commitment to prioritizing actions based on their broader impact, acknowledging the disparity in experiences between Portland and more rural communities.
- **Addressing houselessness and drug use:** Participants expressed a strong desire to tackle homelessness and drug use. Many people felt that these issues significantly affect safety and livability, particularly in downtown Portland and on public transportation. Participants favored restorative justice over punitive measures, calling for increased resources to address homelessness nationally. Substance abuse was acknowledged as a factor but not the sole cause, with many houseless individuals open to assistance if barriers to access were lowered. Conversations centered on providing job training, access to healthy food, and adequate housing. Participants noted that just because shelter options are available does not mean that they guarantee satisfactory living conditions. Overall, participants stressed the importance of addressing basic needs as the most urgent priorities.

Table 5. Most urgent priorities identified by one or multiple community group categories

Number of community group categories that shared the most urgent priorities	Most urgent priorities
All three groups	• Build affordable homes that fit community needs
Two groups	• Require fair pay

	• Access to healthy, affordable food • Wealth building opportunities • Building codes for welfare of people and environment
One group	• Access to basic services for climate change adaptation • New projects meet community-determined need • Health and safety audits and standards for the presence of toxic substances • Government protects people over profits • Involve the most impacted in decision-making • Transit that doesn't require a car • Displacement safeguards

Participant Evaluations

Participants were asked to fill out an optional evaluation after each event and shared largely positive feedback.

- 100 percent of respondents said they felt welcome and comfortable in the sessions.
- 100 percent of respondents said they would like to stay in touch with DEQ's BE team.
- 99 percent of respondents said the sessions were a good use of their time.
- 98 percent of respondents said they felt that their opinions were heard and reflected in the final session.
- 94 percent of respondents said they were interested in participating in a demonstration project.
- 86 percent of respondents said they could explain the concept of the built environment to someone else.
- 80 percent of respondents said the right amount of information was shared in the sessions.
- 55 percent of respondents said they would need a stipend to participate in future sessions. 24 percent said they did not. 21 percent said they were not sure.

Some additional feedback included:

Positive Feedback	*Constructive Feedback*
"Thank you for considering us in this work. Please continue to involve us in future projects, especially for the children and the community. We will see good results in the future."	*"More explanation of the built environment – what is not included? More details would help. Love to talk to other groups outside of metro area."*
"This was a great start – great energy, great communication and great leaders. Looking forward to next meeting."	*"I understand the need to reduce the categories [for prioritization] to a manageable number, but some descriptions were too broad for me."*

Lessons Learned

Strengths throughout the engagement process included:

- **Strong partnerships:** Using the community advisor model, the team successfully built and strengthened relationships with community advisors and organizations, creating lasting connections that can benefit future initiatives and projects. 94 percent of participants who filled out session evaluations shared that they would like to participate in future demonstration projects.
- **Building relationships over time:** Community advisors agreed that their role helped community members build trust with the listening session organizers and BE team. Holding a series of three sessions helped all participants, including advisors, community members, and the BE team build a shared understanding of the issues and priorities within the built environment for each community. Having a series of multiple sessions also helped build accountability into the process and show participants how their feedback was being used.
- **Wide range of diverse communities:** The project engaged with a wide range of diverse communities and received positive feedback about the engagement events from participants. Session participants were engaged throughout the process and felt comfortable sharing their thoughts and asking questions. The sessions were also a good opportunity for participants to meet each other, make more connections, and build upon each other's experiences. The team engaged with BIPOC, youth, elders, low-income, renters, and multilingual communities.
- **Valuable Built Environment feedback:** The team received a wide array of valuable feedback about participants' relationships to their environment and surroundings. The project team heard about many issues and concerns from the community and the in-person conversations allowed participants to share deeper context and background about their experiences.
- **Lowering barriers to participation:** It is a privilege to participate in our democratic and governmental processes because it requires time and energy, often accessible only to those whose basic needs are met. The team was able to adjust outreach methods and materials to better connect with different communities and make it easier for people to participate. Adjustments included in-language events, events at convenient locations, translated materials, and setting aside time to share a meal. 100 percent of participants who filled out session evaluations said they felt welcomed and comfortable.
- **Compensating community participants:** The project intentionally set aside budget to compensate advisors and participants throughout the engagement process. This dedicated budget allowed advisors to more meaningfully participate in the planning and review process. Stipends also allowed more flexibility for participants to attend. Some participants shared that the stipends allowed them to take time off from their jobs to attend the sessions without losing out on income. 55 percent of participants

who filled out session evaluations shared that they would require a stipend to participate in a demonstration project.

Opportunities for improvements for future Built Environment and listening session engagements include:

- **Simplifying language, concepts and materials:** Advisors found it challenging to explain the concept of the "built environment" and recommended having more succinct explanations to help them explain the purpose of the engagement and recruit participants. They also recommend simplifying the language in session materials even more and creating images and simple explanations of different concepts for the project website. Advisors and participants also recommended providing more explanations about what DEQ and the BE team do and how their work connects to community experiences and needs.
- **Clarify terminology and expectations for participants:** The short title of this engagement, "listening sessions," is potentially confusing to participants. The purpose of this engagement was for the BE team to listen to community members, but some community participants misunderstood and thought that their role was primarily to listen to DEQ. More clarity on this issue may have led to more engaged, talkative participants.
- **More involvement in planning and implementation:** Advisors suggested having a higher level of input in the planning and development of future demonstration projects and listening sessions. Although they felt well-informed during this phase of work, they spoke about being involved earlier on in the process to help ensure that future demonstration projects align with or can help enhance existing programs and priorities for their communities. Advisors also recommended exploring ways to involve community members in the advisor roles and in the implementation of demonstration projects to help strengthen the tangible connections between the listening sessions and impacts to their communities.
- **Consider incorporating facilitation mini-structures to support more equitable and more meaningful participation during meetings:**
  - Consider using breakout groups (pairs, trios, quads) and other facilitation structures to balance the airtime of less talkative and more talkative individuals, as well as process live the group's input.
  - Consider using virtual "whiteboards" (or some form of shared working documents) to make it easier for participants to track discussion points in the moment. These shared tools could potentially also be used for "voting" on priorities. For example, quick polls could have been used to gauge participants' relative interest in the preliminary list of potential demonstration projects.
  - Consider providing – optional – prep or primers for participants prior to in-person meetings to get their best thinking and engagement. Some people prefer to receive information prior to meetings so they have some time to digest it before being expected to discuss it. For example, sharing the Prioritization exercise results with participants prior to the third in-person meeting may have supported more meaningful discussion of the results, as well as potential demonstration projects.
- **Continue adjusting meeting accommodations**
  - Consider hiring professional interpreters to allow people who speak languages other than English to participate in the wider group discussions in multilingual spaces.
  - Recognizing that some participants are or may be technology-challenged, consider ways to incorporate virtual participation, perhaps through community advisors.

- **Explore other options for analyzing participants' input.** This project used Q-methodology as an engagement and for its analytical rigor, but consider exploring the use of other less complex, more accessible analysis prioritization tools. Some participants in this project shared that they were overwhelmed by the task of evaluating 24 issue statements.
- **Government and industry participation was limited.** The built environment efforts at DEQ are embedded in these sectors and are engaged in dialogue, focus groups, design and research and other activities. As such, the low participation in the listening engagement is not viewed as a failing. The findings from deep listening sessions with affected communities across the State of Oregon will be useful to our industry and government partners and collaborators.

What we'll do next

The BE team will continue to partner with each community group in 2024 to develop and implement a demonstration project that addresses at least one of their top priorities identified during the listening sessions. Many priorities relate directly or indirectly to the BE team's established work areas and legislative mandates. If communities choose to focus on a priority area that does not have a connection with the BE team's established work areas, the BE team will work to provide connections to other agencies, organizations, and resources that could be helpful. Examples of community priorities that do not have a direct connection with an existing BE work area include access to healthy and affordable food, basic services for climate change adaptation, and transit that does not require a car.

Demonstration projects will be used to continue building relationships, meaningfully contribute to communities, gather feedback, and demonstrate the effectiveness of concepts that may be able to be implemented at a larger state-wide scale in the future. The BE team will allocate $25,000 for the development and implementation of each demonstration project in addition to support and expertise from the project team. Community participation may look different than during the listening sessions based on timelines, budget, and staff availability.

Regardless of the form that community participation takes in the next phase of work, the BE team will continue to send and publish project updates in English and Spanish to interested individuals via email, text messages, and using the project website.