

From Plans to Progress:

STRENGTHENING COLLABORATION IN CALIFORNIA'S AB 617 COMMUNITIES



Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the time, effort, and insight of the many individuals and organizations who participated.

ILG extends its sincere thanks to:

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- Local government staff and elected officials who contributed their time, expertise, and leadership
- Air district staff who partnered in convenings, discussions, and case study development
- State partners who supported the broader goals of this work

We are especially grateful to those who participated in convenings, interviews, and case studies. Your willingness to speak openly about both challenges and successes made this report possible and strengthened the insights shared here.

This work reflects your experiences, your efforts, and your commitment to improving air quality in communities across California.

About ILG



INSTITUTE FOR
LOCAL GOVERNMENTSM

capacities, and build trust in their communities. Visit www.ca-ilg.org to find out more.

The Institute for Local Government (ILG) is a statewide nonprofit that empowers local government leaders and delivers real-world expertise to help them navigate complex issues, increase their



This project is part of California Climate Investments, a statewide initiative that puts billions of Cap-and-Trade dollars to work reducing greenhouse gas emissions, strengthening the economy, and improving public health and the environment — particularly in disadvantaged communities.

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Executive Summary

The Institute for Local Government (ILG), with support from the California Air Resources Board's Community Air Grant Program, set out to answer a simple but important question: how can communities, air districts, and local governments work better together to improve air quality?

Across California, AB 617 communities are doing incredibly complex work. They are navigating technical requirements, community expectations, and real-world constraints, all while trying to deliver cleaner air in places that have been disproportionately impacted for decades. What became clear early on is that success depends not just on the plans themselves, but on how well people work together to carry them out.

ILG's role in this project was to create space to reflect on that collaboration. We brought partners together through regional convenings, small group discussions, and one-on-one conversations. We listened to what people were experiencing on the ground, what was working, and where things were breaking down. We also captured real examples through case studies to better understand how collaboration shows up in practice.

This report reflects what we heard.

While every community is different, a few themes came up again and again.

First, collaboration doesn't just happen because people are invited to the table. It requires clear roles, the right partners, and ongoing commitment. In particular, local governments play a critical role in implementation, and when they are not actively engaged, it becomes much harder to move from planning to action.

Second, trust matters more than process. Communities are not looking for more meetings or more plans; they are looking for honesty, transparency, and follow-through. Trust grows when agencies show up consistently, communicate clearly, and deliver visible results over time.



Third, the strongest solutions come from the community. Residents and local organizations understand the day-to-day impacts of air pollution and often bring forward ideas that are practical, immediate, and meaningful. When those perspectives are centered, the work becomes more relevant and more effective.

At the same time, there are real constraints that cannot be ignored. Many communities and agencies are stretched thin. Funding rules can limit flexibility. Jurisdictional boundaries create barriers. And expectations are not always aligned between partners. These challenges show up across regions and continue to shape what is possible.

Even with these obstacles, there is real progress happening. Communities are building stronger relationships, finding creative ways to move projects forward, and learning how to work across differences. The case studies in this report highlight what that looks like in practice; messy at times, but ultimately productive and worth the effort.

This report is meant to support future collaborative efforts. The recommendations focus on strengthening collaboration, building capacity, and creating the conditions needed for long-term success. With the right support and continued commitment, there is a clear opportunity to build on this momentum and deliver meaningful, lasting improvements in air quality and beyond for communities across California.

Project Overview and Approach

Why This Work Matters

Improving air quality in California's most impacted communities is not just a technical challenge. It is a coordination challenge. It requires multiple agencies, community leaders, and organizations to work together across different roles, responsibilities, and expectations.

The AB 617 program has created a strong framework for community-driven air quality planning and action. At the same time, it has introduced new layers of complexity. Communities are navigating technical requirements, agencies are working across jurisdictional boundaries, and partners are trying to align priorities while managing limited time and resources.

What became clear early on is that the success of this work depends on how well these groups collaborate. Strong plans alone are not enough. Implementation depends on relationships, communication, and a shared understanding of how to move forward together.

This project was designed to focus on that gap. Rather than developing new technical strategies, the goal was to better understand how collaboration is working in practice, where it is breaking down, and what can be done to strengthen it.

What We Set Out to Do

- Bring community leaders, air districts, and local governments together in a more intentional way
- Create space for honest, experience-based conversations
- Identify what is helping collaboration move forward and what is getting in the way
- Capture practical lessons that can be applied across AB 617 communities and in future collaborative efforts

ILG's Role

The Institute for Local Government (ILG) served as a neutral convener and facilitator throughout this effort. ILG's role was to bring together a wide range of stakeholders, create space for open and honest dialogue, and capture lessons that could be shared across communities.

This included working with:

- Community-based organizations and community leaders
- Air district staff
- Local government staff and elected officials
- State partners and subject matter experts

ILG focused on making the conversations practical and grounded in real-world experience. The goal was not to evaluate individual communities or agencies, but to surface patterns, challenges, and opportunities that are showing up across the state.

By creating a structured but flexible environment for discussion, ILG helped participants reflect on their experiences, learn from one another, and identify ways to improve collaboration moving forward.

How We Did the Work

This project was built around a combination of convenings, conversations, and targeted case studies designed to capture both broad patterns and specific examples.

Regional Convenings

ILG hosted in-person convenings across multiple regions, bringing together community members, air districts, and local governments. These sessions focused on relationship-building, shared learning, and honest discussion about what is working and where challenges remain.

Focus Groups & Small Group Discussions

To build on the convenings, ILG facilitated virtual and in-person discussions and focus groups. These settings allowed participants to go deeper

into specific topics, share candid feedback, and explore solutions in a more focused way.

- **One-on-One Conversations**

ILG conducted individual conversations with key stakeholders to better understand specific community dynamics, agency perspectives, and implementation challenges. These conversations provided important context that may not always surface in larger group settings.

- **Case Study Development**

ILG worked with select communities and partners to document real-world examples of collaboration. These case studies highlight both successes and challenges, offering practical insights that can be adapted in other contexts.

What We Focused On

- Real-world collaboration, not theory
- Experiences across different types of communities
- Both successes and challenges
- Practical insights that can be applied in other regions

What You'll Find In This Report

This report brings together what ILG heard and observed throughout the project. It is designed to be practical, accessible, and useful to a range of audiences, including community leaders, local governments, air districts, and state partners.

The sections that follow include:

- A snapshot of the different community contexts participating in AB 617, highlighting the diversity of conditions across the state
- Key insights that emerged across regions about what supports or limits effective collaboration
- Case studies that show how collaboration is playing out in real communities
- A summary of common barriers that continue to impact implementation

- Recommendations focused on strengthening collaboration, improving alignment, and supporting long-term success

What This Report Is (and Is Not)

- This report is a practical, field-informed look at collaboration across AB 617 communities
- It focuses on relationships, processes, and implementation—not technical air quality modeling
- It is designed to support partners working on the ground, as well as state-level decision-makers
- It is not an evaluation of individual communities or agencies

This is not a technical report on air quality strategies. Instead, it is a grounded look at the people, processes, and partnerships that make those strategies possible.

The intent is to provide clear, usable insights that help partners strengthen working relationships, navigate challenges more effectively, and ultimately deliver more meaningful outcomes for the communities they serve.

Understanding the AB 617 Landscape

Air Districts and AB 617 Communities Included in this Report

This section provides a reference list of the air districts and AB 617 communities represented in this report. These communities reflect a range of geographic, economic, and environmental conditions across California and are referenced throughout the case studies and findings.

These communities are referenced throughout the report to illustrate how collaboration plays out across different contexts. While each community faces unique conditions, the lessons and recommendations that follow reflect shared experiences and common challenges across regions.



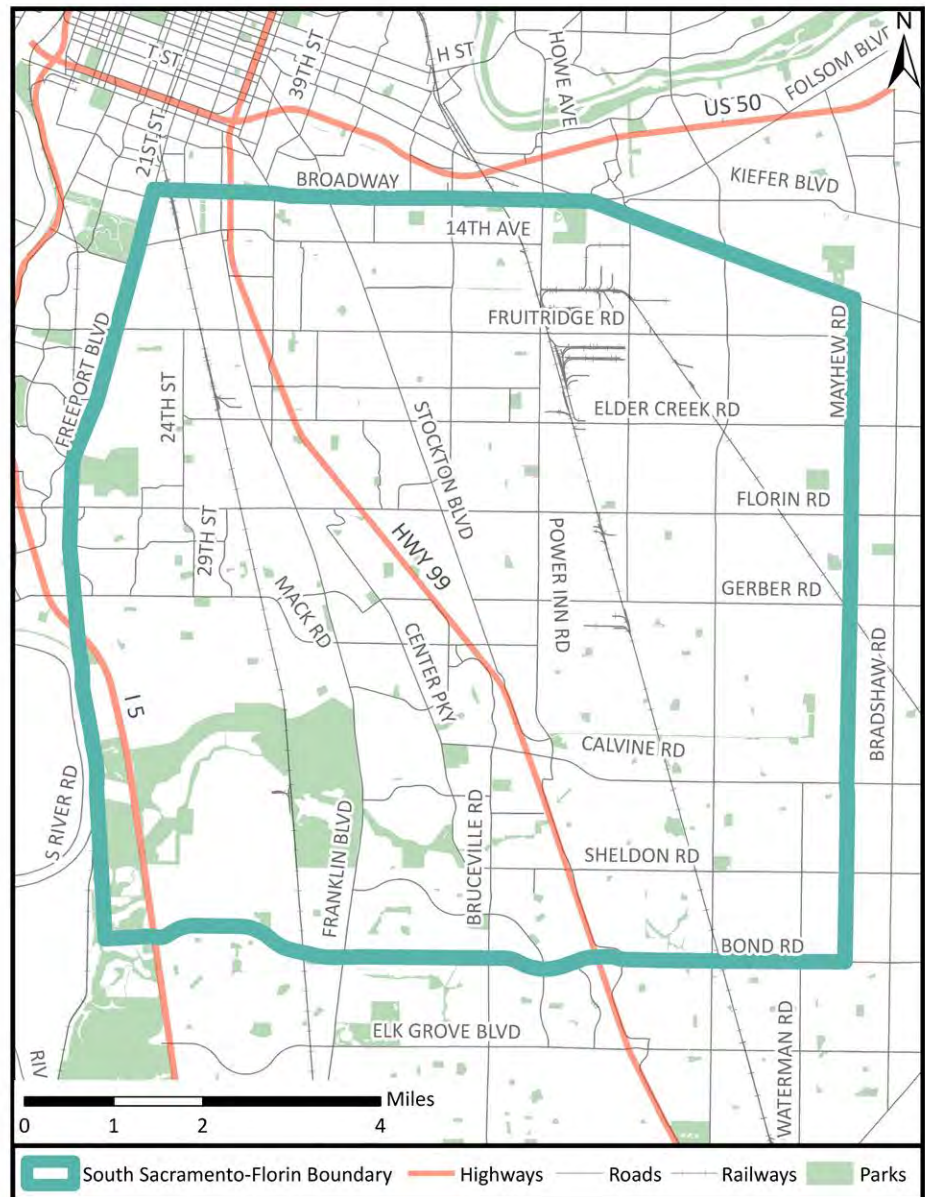
1 Sacramento Metropolitan Air Quality Management District (SMAQMD)

COMMUNITY:

- South Sacramento–Florin

DESCRIPTION:

An early AB 617 community located in a dense urban area in southern Sacramento. Air quality challenges are driven by proximity to major transportation corridors, including Highway 99, and the Sacramento Executive Airport, along with adjacent industrial land uses.



2 Bay Area Air District

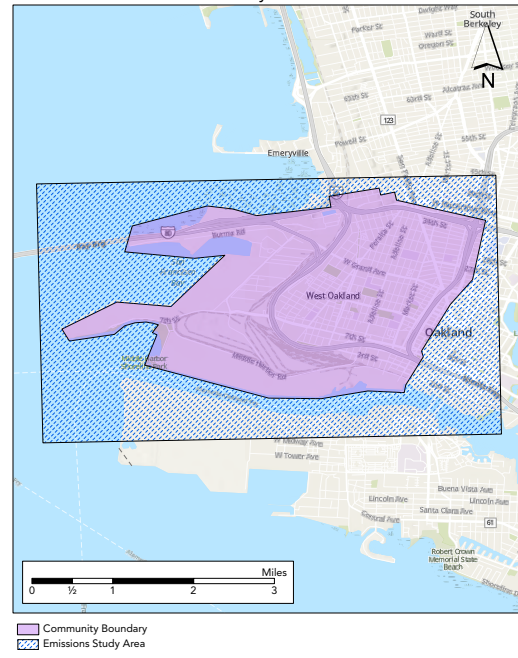
COMMUNITIES:

- West Oakland
- Richmond–North Richmond–San Pablo
- East Oakland
- Bayview Hunters Point / Southeast San Francisco

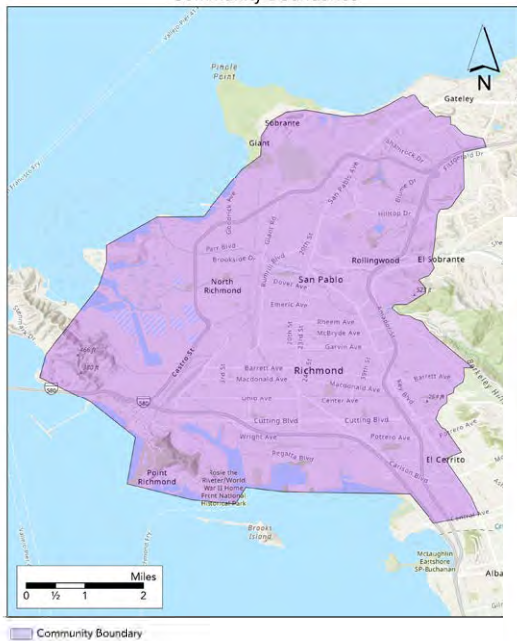
DESCRIPTION:

A group of highly urbanized environmental justice communities across the Bay Area, each located near major freight corridors, ports, rail infrastructure, and industrial operations. These communities experience some of the highest cumulative pollution burdens in the region due to the close proximity of residential neighborhoods to goods movement and industrial activity.

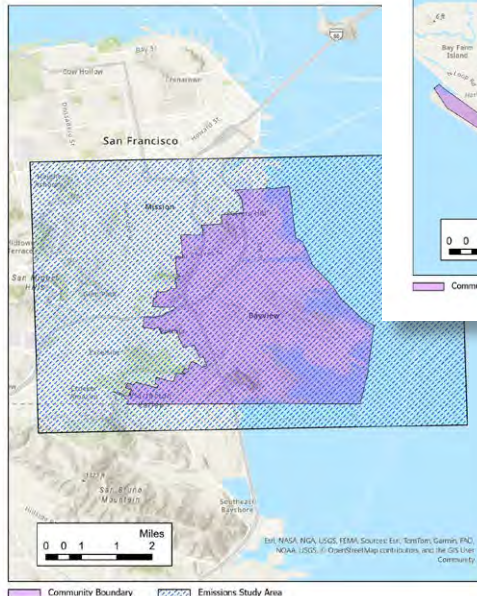
West Oakland
Community Boundaries



Richmond
Community Boundaries



Bayview Hunters Point - Southeast San Francisco



East Oakland



3 San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (SJVAPCD)

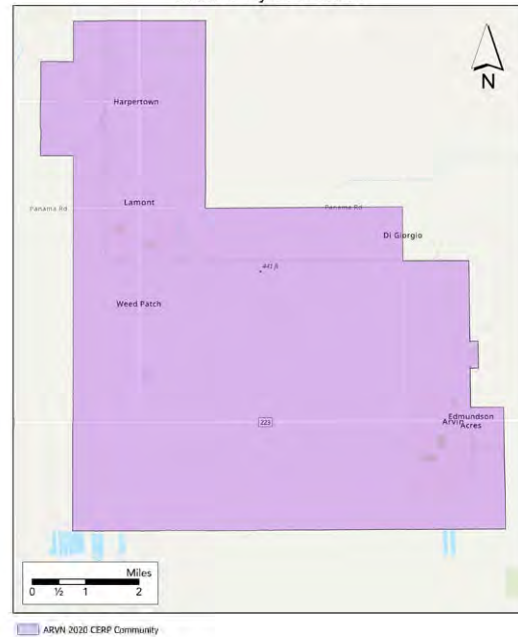
COMMUNITIES:

- Arvin-Lamont
- Shafter
- Stockton
- South Central Fresno

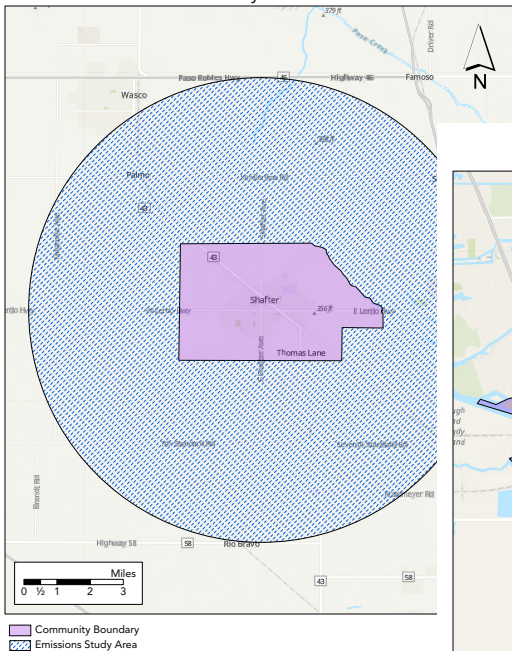
DESCRIPTION:

A mix of rural and urban communities across the San Joaquin Valley facing significant air quality challenges from agricultural operations, freight movement, industrial activity, and regional air basin conditions. Many of these communities experience some of the highest particulate matter levels in the state.

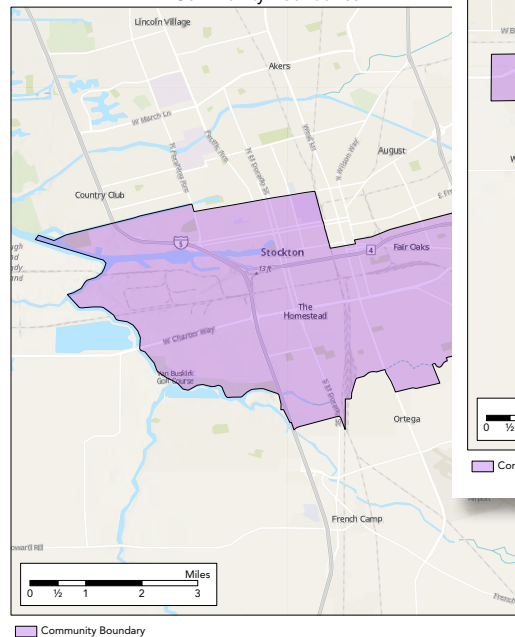
Arvin Lamont
Community Boundaries



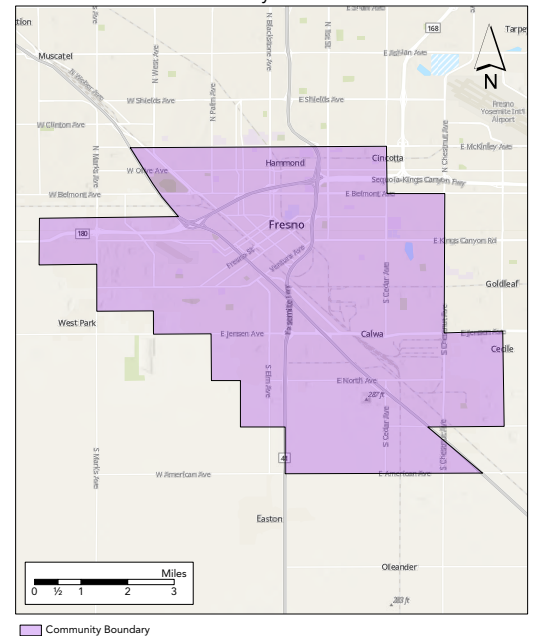
Shafter
Community Boundaries



Stockton
Community Boundaries



South Central Fresno
Community Boundaries



4 San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD)

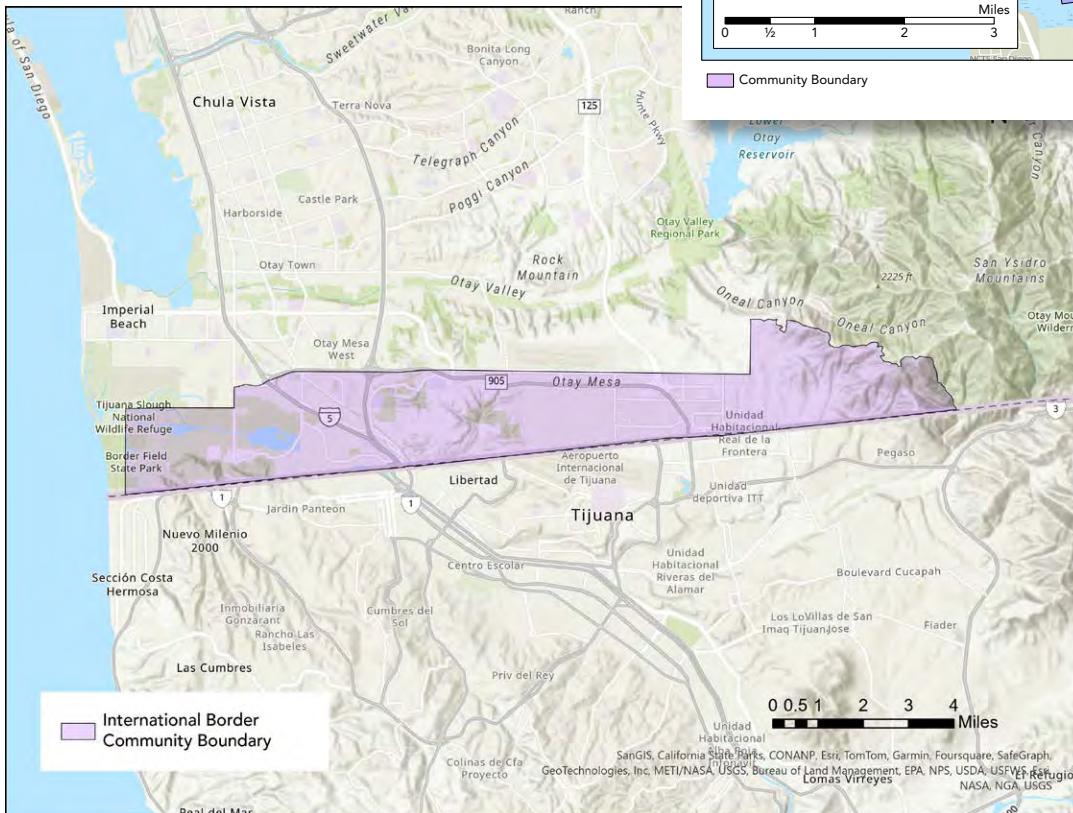
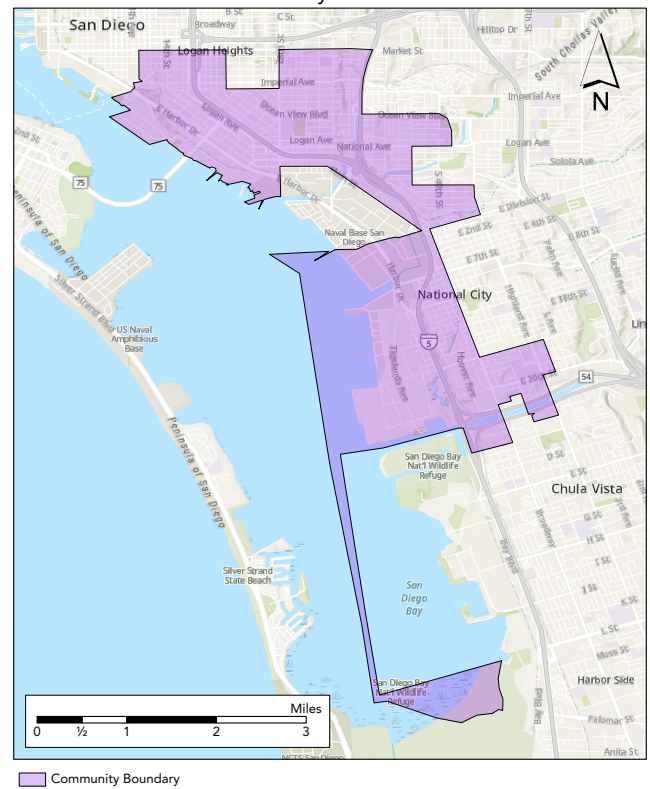
COMMUNITIES:

- Portside Community
- International Border Community

DESCRIPTION:

Densely populated urban communities shaped by port activity, military operations, and some of the busiest border crossings in the country. Air quality is influenced by heavy-duty truck traffic, port operations, and cross-border emissions, requiring coordination across local, state, federal, and binational partners.

Portside Environmental Justice Neighborhoods Community Boundaries



5 Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (ICAPCD)

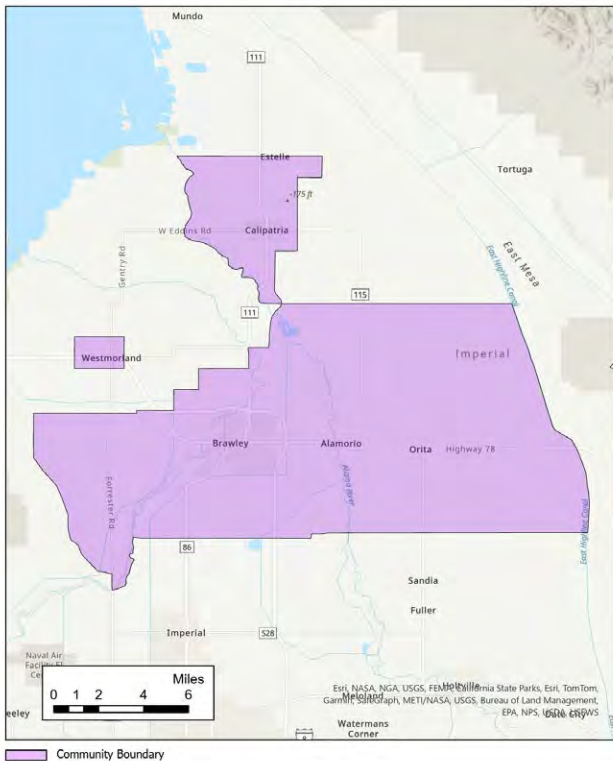
COMMUNITIES:

- Calexico–Heber–El Centro Corridor
- Imperial County North End (Phase 1 Community)

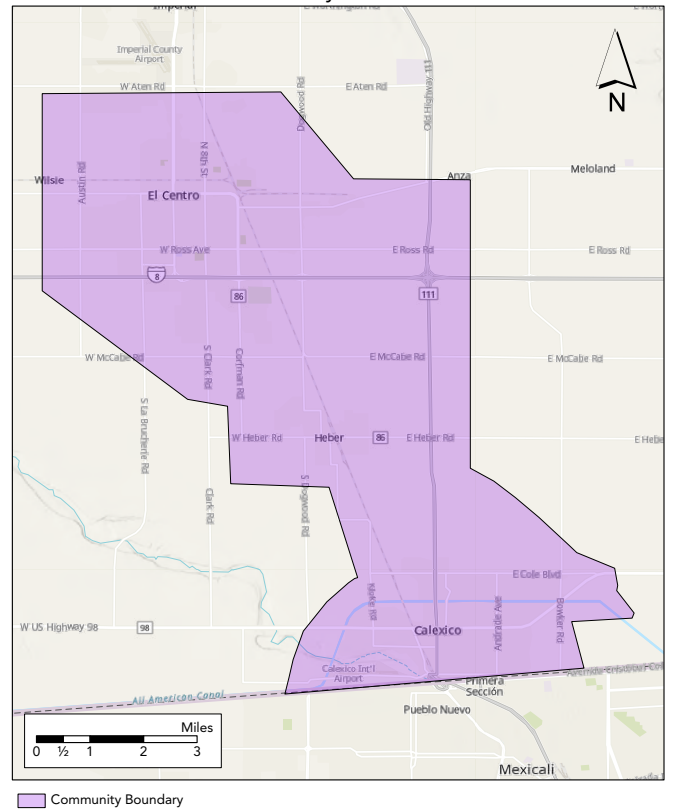
DESCRIPTION:

Predominantly rural and agricultural communities located near the U.S.–Mexico border and the Salton Sea. Air quality challenges include cross-border traffic, agricultural emissions, windblown dust, and environmental conditions unique to desert and agricultural landscapes.

North Imperial Phase 1



Calexico, El Centro, Heber
Community Boundaries



A Snapshot of Participating Communities

The communities engaged through this project reflect the full range of conditions across California's AB 617 program. From dense urban corridors to rural agricultural regions and binational border areas, each community operates within a distinct set of environmental, economic, and governance realities.

The maps included above highlight where these communities are located across the state and help illustrate the geographic diversity of the program. They also reinforce an important point: while AB 617 operates under a shared framework, the conditions on the ground vary significantly from place to place.

These differences shape the types of pollution sources communities face, the agencies involved in decision-making, and the strategies that are feasible to implement. They also influence how collaboration shows up in practice—who needs to be at the table, what barriers exist, and what success looks like on the ground.

At the same time, despite these differences, many communities are working through similar challenges. Understanding both the diversity and the shared patterns across regions is essential to strengthening collaboration statewide.

Why Context Matters

- Pollution sources and exposure patterns vary widely across communities
- Different agencies hold different authorities depending on location
- Community priorities are shaped by local history, land use, and economic conditions
- Collaboration strategies must reflect these realities to be effective

Urban Communities

Urban AB 617 communities are often located in densely populated areas where residential neighborhoods sit alongside major industrial operations, freight corridors, ports, and transportation infrastructure.

The maps for these regions show how closely homes, schools, and community spaces are situated next to freeways, rail lines, ports, and industrial facilities. This proximity creates layered and cumulative pollution impacts that are difficult to address through a single strategy or agency.

In these settings, pollution is driven by overlapping sources such as heavy-duty truck traffic, port activity, rail yards, freeways, and industrial operations. These are also some of the most visible and immediate sources of concern for residents.

Collaboration in these communities often involves a wide range of partners, including air districts, cities, counties, ports, transportation agencies, and community-based organizations. Each brings a different role, authority, and set of constraints.

Urban communities also tend to have strong community-based organizations and advocacy networks. These groups play a critical role in shaping priorities, raising concerns, and ensuring that community voices remain central to decision-making.

Because of the scale and complexity of these environments, collaboration must be highly coordinated. Clear communication, defined roles, and sustained engagement are essential to moving from planning to implementation.

Rural and Agricultural Communities

Rural AB 617 communities, including those in the San Joaquin Valley and Imperial Valley regions, face a different set of challenges shaped by geography, land use, and economic activity.

Maps of these areas highlight expansive agricultural land, dispersed communities, and long transportation corridors. Unlike urban areas, pollution sources are often spread out, but no less impactful.

Air quality challenges in these regions are tied to agricultural operations, including pesticide use, dust from unpaved roads and fields, agricultural burning, and emissions from equipment and transportation. In some areas, oil and gas production and freight movement also contribute to local air quality concerns.

These communities are often smaller and more spread out, with fewer local resources and limited staffing capacity within local governments. This can make it more difficult to participate consistently in planning processes, apply for and manage funding, and implement complex programs.



**AB 617 Proyecto de Mejoras de Carreteras e Instalaciones
de Carriles para Bicicletas de Arvin: South A Street**






El Proyecto de Mejoras de Carreteras e Instalaciones de Carriles para Bicicletas de Arvin es parte de California Climate Investments, una iniciativa estatal que pone a trabajar miles de millones de dólares de Cap-and-Trade para reducir las emisiones de gases de efecto invernadero, fortalecer la economía y mejorar la salud pública y el medio ambiente, particularmente en comunidades desfavorecidas.

Este proyecto fue posible gracias al programa AB 617 del Valley Air District, con el apoyo del Arvin/Lamont Community Steering Committee.

Beneficios Comunitarios de Arvin

- Mejoras en la calidad de las calles y aceras
- Carriles para bicicletas dedicados con señalización
- Cortes de los bordillos para mayor accesibilidad
- Mejoras de seguridad mediante pasos de peatones y líneas centrales claramente marcados





Collaboration doesn't happen in a vacuum. When you are a small rural community trying to do the impossible, getting support for technical assistance and having a technical consultant to help with the large projects is invaluable.

— Christine Viterelli, Grant Manager,
City of Arvin



At the same time, rural communities often rely heavily on partnerships to move work forward. Collaboration with air districts, state agencies, and regional partners becomes essential to accessing technical expertise, funding, and implementation support.

In these settings, successful collaboration often depends on flexibility, creativity, and strong relationships that help bridge gaps in capacity.

Border Communities

Communities located along the California–Mexico border operate within an even more complex environment shaped by cross-border activity.

Maps of these regions show the concentration of ports of entry, major transportation routes, and dense residential areas located near high-traffic border crossings. These visuals help underscore the scale of daily movement and the resulting air quality impacts.

Air quality challenges in these regions are influenced not only by local sources, but also by high volumes of cross-border traffic, freight movement, and industrial activity on both sides of the border. Additional factors, such as differences in regulatory systems and environmental conditions, add another layer of complexity.

These communities must navigate collaboration across multiple levels of government, including local, state, and

federal agencies, as well as binational coordination. This can make it more difficult to align strategies, share data, and implement solutions that require cooperation beyond a single jurisdiction.

Despite these challenges, border communities have demonstrated strong commitment to collaboration, often finding ways to engage partners across systems and work toward shared solutions.

What This Means for Collaboration

Across all of these community types, one thing is clear: there is no single model for collaboration that works everywhere.

The maps and examples throughout this section reinforce that each community operates within its own set of conditions, constraints, and opportunities. What works in a dense urban port community may not translate directly to a rural agricultural region or a border community with binational dynamics.

At the same time, the differences between communities do not mean they are working in isolation. Many of the same themes show up across regions; questions about roles and responsibilities, challenges with capacity, the need for trust and transparency, and the importance of bringing the right partners to the table.

Shared Realities Across Communities

- Collaboration is essential, but often difficult to sustain
- Capacity constraints affect both public agencies and community partners
- Trust and transparency are critical to moving work forward
- Clear roles and expectations are often missing or evolving
- Strong relationships can help overcome structural barriers



This mix of diverse conditions and shared challenges sets the stage for the insights that follow.

The next section focuses on what communities are learning in real time about how collaboration works—and what it takes to make it more effective.

What We Heard and What We Learned

Across regions, the implementation of AB 617 has led to meaningful progress in relationship-building, community engagement, and cross-agency coordination. At the same time, it has surfaced consistent challenges related to transparency, capacity, and aligning expectations across partners.

What follows reflects what people shared based on real experience. While each community is different, many of the same themes came up again and again.

Collaboration Takes Structure, Not Just Good Intentions

Bringing together agencies, community groups, and residents is essential. It is also complex. In many communities, it is not always clear where to start, who needs to be at the table, or how decisions are made.

Local agencies are often balancing multiple priorities with limited staff and time. Community-based organizations are doing the same. Without clear structure, even well-intentioned collaboration can stall or become frustrating for everyone involved.

A consistent theme across communities is the importance of having the “right” players at the table and making sure they stay engaged. In the AB 617 context, participation from land-use authorities is especially important. Cities, counties, and other agencies bring critical knowledge about what is feasible and how projects can actually be implemented.

Making collaboration work takes:

- Clear roles and responsibilities
- Shared understanding of how decisions are made
- Ongoing communication across agencies and partners
- Intentional outreach to stakeholders who are not always included

It also means expanding the table to include farmers, business and industry representatives, elected officials, and state partners. These perspectives help clarify constraints early and create more realistic pathways to implementation.

What Strong Collaboration Requires

- The right stakeholders at the table from the start
- Clear roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes
- Ongoing communication and coordination
- Commitment to stay engaged over time

CASE STORY:

Imperial Valley: Building Trust Through Education and Shared Ownership

In Imperial Valley, collaboration did not begin with a formal plan. It started with a gap.

Air quality was not part of the local school curriculum, even though the community is deeply affected by environmental conditions. That gap became the starting point for a partnership between the Imperial Valley Air Pollution Control District and local educators.



For communities to make changes, we need to be educated.

— Jackie Valadez, Teacher, Career Technical Education, Southwest High School, El Centro



That idea was simple, but turning it into something real took work. Schools needed to make space for new material. Agencies needed to show up in a different way. Partners had to figure out how to build something together that had not existed before.

Over time, they did.

Air district staff began working directly with teachers and students, bringing equipment into classrooms and helping translate technical concepts into something tangible. Students responded quickly. They created presentations, led peer discussions, and began sharing what they learned with their families and community.

What started as a classroom effort grew into something much larger. Students became health ambassadors. They engaged in community events. They connected what they were learning to real-world conditions around them. “Three years ago, we did not talk about air quality in the curriculum. Now it is a staple,” Valadez said.

The program also built something less visible, but just as important. It built trust. Trust between the air district and the school. Trust between students and agencies. Trust that this work mattered and would continue.

Project ACE is now in its third year. It continues to expand its reach and deepen its impact. It shows that collaboration can start small and grow into something durable when people are willing to invest in it.

Community Voices Lead to Better, More Practical Solutions

Community-driven processes lead to solutions that reflect real conditions on the ground. Across AB 617 communities, residents and local organizations brought forward ideas that were practical, immediate, and directly connected to daily life.

These included:

- Pesticide notification systems
- Dust mitigation near agricultural areas
- Vegetation barriers around schools and neighborhoods
- Hyper-local clean air investments



Communities also helped shape incentive programs such as vehicle replacement, electric lawn equipment, air filtration, and green space improvements. These programs made clean air efforts more visible and accessible.

In many places, this work led to increased civic engagement. Residents began reporting pollution concerns, sharing information through local networks, and participating more actively in meetings and decision-making processes.

Over time, community members built confidence and leadership skills. Many stepped into more active roles in steering committees, subcommittees, and local organizations.

What Communities Bring to the Table

- Lived experience that shapes practical solutions
- Local knowledge of pollution sources and impacts
- Trusted networks for outreach and education
- Long-term commitment to community well-being

CASE STORY:

San Diego: Aligning Long-Term Vision with Community Priorities

In San Diego, the Port entered the AB 617 process with a head start. It had already been developing its Maritime Clean Air Strategy, which aligned with many of the goals of AB 617.

“We saw the regulatory signals coming,” said Philip Gibbons, Deputy Director of Climate and Sustainability, Port of San Diego. “So by the time AB 617

arrived, we already had the leadership, the culture, and the strategies in place. It all lined up.”

Even with that alignment, the process required adjustment.

Community expectations were high. There were real questions about where to focus resources and how to address different sources of pollution. “Everybody wants electric trucks, but ships and equipment pollute more. There was tension around where to focus resources, and we had to explain what we can and cannot do,” said Gibbons.

The Port stayed engaged. Staff participated in steering committees and subgroups. They worked closely with partners to align strategies and address concerns.



In the early days, it was a little contentious, but that changed because we showed up and people saw the work the Port was doing.

— Philip Gibbons, Deputy Director of Climate and Sustainability, Port of San Diego



Over time, relationships strengthened. The Port was able to align its long-term strategy with community priorities and move forward on implementation.

This story highlights the value of preparation and consistency. When agencies come in with a clear direction and stay engaged, it creates a stronger foundation for collaboration.

Trust Is Built Through Consistency and Follow-Through

Trust came up in nearly every conversation. It is essential to collaboration and takes time to build.

Communities consistently asked for clear communication, transparency, and honesty about what can and cannot be done. When expectations are unclear, it creates frustration. When agencies are open about constraints and follow through on commitments, it builds credibility.

Trust grows when:

- Information is shared clearly and consistently
- Decision-making processes are easy to understand
- Agencies are present in community spaces, not just formal meetings
- Progress is visible over time

In many communities, trust improved when agencies took the time to engage more directly. Site visits, community events, and informal conversations helped build relationships and mutual understanding.

Shared data also played an important role. When air monitoring results were openly shared and explained, it created a common understanding and helped shift conversations toward solutions.

Visible outcomes made a difference. When communities saw air purifiers distributed, trees planted, or infrastructure improvements underway, it reinforced that the work was moving forward.

What Builds Trust

- Showing up consistently
- Communicating clearly and honestly
- Sharing data in accessible ways
- Following through on commitments

CASE STORY:

Stockton: From Mistrust to Momentum in Stockton



The experience of the Port of Stockton reflects how collaboration can evolve over time.

When the Port first engaged in the AB 617 process, there was significant community distrust. Early meetings were challenging, and it took time for partners to find a productive path forward.

The Port was navigating its own realities. It had operational responsibilities and regulatory constraints that were not always well understood by others in the room. At the same time, community members were asking for accountability and immediate action.

It would have been easy to disengage. Instead, the Port made a decision to stay. “You just need to stay committed. As bad as it gets, I will stick around for the overall good of the area,” said Jeff Wingfield, Deputy Port Director, Port of Stockton.

That decision shaped everything that followed.

Over time, the Port stayed engaged and worked to build stronger relationships. This included meeting regularly with community groups, increasing transparency about operations, and creating more opportunities for dialogue.

Key efforts included:

- Establishing a Port Outreach Committee
- Hosting tours, events, and in-person meetings
- Developing Clean Air Guidelines in collaboration with partners
- Supporting community initiatives through partnerships

They also changed how they engaged. There was more listening, more transparency, and more effort to meet people where they were.



The Port Outreach Committee became a meaningful space for engagement, reflecting the Port’s genuine interest in residents and communities. Port employees are not just an agency. They are people, too, who live in Stockton and breathe the same air.

— Julia Ulm, Senior Administrative Assistant,
Port of Stockton



Over time, the tone shifted. Relationships improved. Conversations became more productive.

That shift made progress possible. The Port advanced projects such as urban greening and truck rerouting. It secured major funding to support electrification and emissions reduction. Many of these outcomes were shaped by the relationships that had been rebuilt.

The Stockton story is not about quick wins. It is about persistence. It shows what can happen when partners stay engaged long enough to move through the hard part.

Policy Alignment Makes Implementation Possible

Implementation becomes more achievable when clean air strategies are aligned with existing policies and plans.

In some communities, local governments incorporated AB 617 priorities into General Plans, Environmental Justice Elements, and other long-term planning efforts. This helped clarify roles and create stronger connections between planning and implementation.

Local agency staff played an important role in this process. Their knowledge of permitting, infrastructure, and regulatory requirements helped ensure that proposed strategies were realistic and achievable.

When air quality strategies are connected to transportation, land use, and infrastructure planning, it creates more opportunities to move projects forward through existing programs and funding sources.

Why Policy Alignment Matters

- Clarifies roles and responsibilities
- Connects strategies to existing plans and funding
- Improves coordination across departments
- Supports long-term implementation

CASE STORY:

Sacramento: Turning Alignment into Action



In Sacramento, the challenge was not building collaboration from scratch. It was aligning across systems.

The South Sacramento–Florin community spans both city and county jurisdictions. That creates complexity, but it also creates opportunity if partners are aligned.

Sacramento County took an early step by embedding environmental justice and air quality priorities into its General Plan. This gave staff a clear mandate to engage in AB 617 work.

The City of Sacramento built on that by aligning AB 617 strategies with its own planning efforts, including transportation, climate, and infrastructure. According to Amy Yang, Senior Planning with the City of Sacramento, “AB 617 reinforced the strong working relationships we already have across departments.”

Reflecting on the process, both the City of Sacramento and Sacramento County acknowledge that it was a gradual shift toward more coordinated engagement over time. While Environmental Justice policies have empowered county and later city staff to be involved, monitoring data through CAMP implementation has provided shared knowledge and a foundation for future CERP development work and alignment across agencies, reinforcing the need for ongoing communication and joint efforts around clean air efforts.

Specifically, the agencies identified the following elements of successful and effective collaboration:

- Recognition that the AB 617 boundary spans both county and city jurisdictions
- Early and ongoing participation in strategy discussions
- Clear communication regarding jurisdictional authority and regulatory limits
- Integration of air quality objectives into general planning and zoning frameworks
- Cross-department coordination within agencies
- Consistent engagement with SMAQMD and community stakeholders

Rather than creating parallel processes, agencies incorporated AB 617 objectives into established planning, permitting, and infrastructure frameworks. This approach reduced friction, improved clarity around implementation authority, and positioned both jurisdictions to move more confidently toward execution once the CERP is adopted. It meant that strategies were reviewed early for feasibility. It meant that departments were coordinating rather than working in siloes. It created clearer pathways from planning to implementation.

The Sacramento experience shows the value of structure. When local governments are aligned internally and across jurisdictions, it becomes much easier to move from ideas to action.

Capacity Shapes What Is Possible

Across communities, capacity remains a real and ongoing challenge.

Local governments, air districts, and community-based organizations are all working with limited staff and resources while managing multiple priorities. This affects how consistently partners can participate and how quickly projects can move forward.



Common challenges include:

- Limited staffing and time
- Competing priorities across agencies
- Gaps between technical expertise and community engagement
- Long timelines for implementation
- Despite these challenges, many agencies and community partners continue to find ways to stay engaged and move work forward. This often requires prioritization, partnership, and flexibility.

Capacity Challenges Are Shared

- Limited staffing across agencies and community organizations
- Complex program requirements
- Need for technical assistance and support
- Balancing short-term needs with long-term goals

CASE STORY:

Oakland: Learning Through Doing



In Oakland, the AB 617 process has been both collaborative and adaptive.

Local agencies, the air district, the Port of Oakland, and community organizations have worked together to develop and implement strategies. That work has required ongoing coordination and a willingness to learn along the way.



AB 617 made jurisdictions with a lot of autonomous tendencies come to the table and work together.

— Shayna H. Hirshfield-Gold,
Acting Sustainability Director, City of Oakland



As implementation progressed, challenges emerged. Some strategies were more complex than anticipated. Questions around enforcement, equity, and capacity required additional coordination. Rather than slowing progress, these challenges created opportunities to refine approaches. Partners worked together to adjust strategies and improve alignment.

The work also influenced broader efforts. Lessons learned through AB 617 have informed climate planning and other city initiatives.

Oakland's experience reflects a key reality. Collaboration is not static. It evolves through practice. What matters is the ability to adapt and continue moving forward.

Flexibility and Creativity Help Move Work Forward

Rigid program rules and funding limitations can make it difficult to respond to community priorities. At the same time, some of the most effective efforts came from finding ways to adapt and work creatively within those constraints.

In several communities, local agencies and partners explored new approaches to:

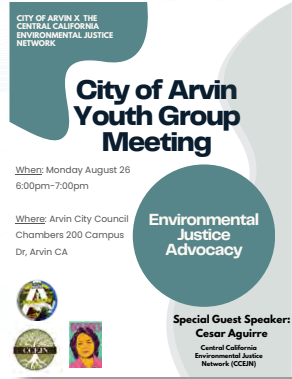
- Use funding in ways that better matched community needs
- Build partnerships that expanded capacity
- Engage stakeholders who had not previously been involved

This kind of flexibility often depends on individuals and teams who are willing to problem-solve, collaborate, and look for practical solutions.

CASE STORY:

Arvin: Making It Work with What You Have

Arvin is a small city with limited resources and significant air quality challenges. That reality shapes how collaboration happens. Rather than stepping back, the City of Arvin has taken a hands-on approach. Staff consistently show up to meetings. They stay engaged with air district and state partners. They actively look for ways to connect community needs with available funding and programs. “It starts with good communication, being responsive, reaching out, and being proactive,” said Christine Viterelli, Grant Manager, City of Arvin.



That mindset shows up in how the city approaches its work.

Arvin looks for practical solutions. It adapts programs to fit local conditions. It builds relationships with community members, businesses, and growers to expand participation.



Collaboration doesn't happen in a vacuum. When you are a small rural community trying to do the impossible, getting support for technical assistance and having a technical consultant to help with the large projects is invaluable.

— Christine Viterelli, Grant Manager, City of Arvin



The city has also been intentional about outreach. Staff recognize that programs only work if people understand them and see their value. That has led to increased communication and engagement across the community.

Arvin's experience shows that capacity matters, but it is not the only factor. Persistence, communication, and a willingness to engage can make a significant difference.

Relationships Are the Foundation

Across all of these insights, one theme stands out clearly. Strong relationships are what make collaboration work.

This work takes time. It requires persistence, communication, and a willingness to work through challenges together. It also requires recognizing the different roles and perspectives that each partner brings.

Local agencies, community organizations, and residents are all contributing to this effort in meaningful ways. When these relationships are strong, it becomes easier to navigate constraints and make progress.



From the agency's perspective, rebuilding trust is essential. Our growth and learning have shown that adapting to new processes and centering community voices are critical, with respect and trust always at the forefront.

— Esperanza Vielma, Chief Heat Policy Advisor, City of Stockton Mayor's Office



What Makes Collaboration Work Over Time

- Consistent engagement and communication
- Respect for community knowledge and agency expertise
- Willingness to adapt and learn
- Shared commitment to long-term outcomes

Where Things get Stuck: System-Level Barriers to Implementation

Across communities, there is no shortage of commitment. Local governments, air districts, and community partners are showing up, engaging, and pushing the work forward.

At the same time, there are consistent points where progress slows down or becomes more difficult. These are not isolated challenges tied to a single community. They are system-level barriers that show up across regions, regardless of geography or capacity.

Understanding where things get stuck is just as important as understanding what works. These barriers shape how quickly communities can move from planning to implementation, and how effectively partners can stay aligned over time.

Funding Constraints and Program Rigidity

One of the most consistent challenges raised across communities is the rigidity of funding structures.

While AB 617 and related programs provide critical resources, the rules tied to those funds can limit flexibility. Communities often identify solutions that are practical and responsive to local needs, but those solutions do not always fit neatly within existing funding categories.

This creates tension.

In several communities, residents prioritized strategies like vegetation barriers near schools, localized dust mitigation in agricultural areas, or small-scale infrastructure improvements that would immediately improve quality of life. These ideas were grounded in lived experience and often relatively straightforward to implement. However, they did not always align with existing program eligibility or funding criteria.



In other cases, funding structures made it difficult to support emerging or innovative approaches that had not been previously defined within program guidelines.

The result is not a lack of effort. It is a mismatch between community-driven solutions and program design.

Where Funding Becomes a Barrier

- Program rules limit flexibility for locally-driven solutions
- Funding categories do not always align with community priorities
- Approval processes can slow down implementation
- Short-term funding cycles do not match long-term needs



Jurisdictional and Regulatory Limitations

Air quality does not follow jurisdictional boundaries, but authority does.

Many of the strategies identified through AB 617 require coordination across multiple agencies, each operating within its own legal and regulatory framework. Cities, counties, air districts, ports, and state agencies all have distinct roles, and no single entity has full control over outcomes.

This creates real constraints.

For example, in several communities, land-use decisions were central to addressing pollution exposure. Yet land-use authority sits with local governments, not air districts or community groups. Without consistent participation from cities and counties, it became difficult to advance strategies tied to zoning, siting, or long-term planning.

In Stockton, early conversations reflected this dynamic. Community members pushed for immediate changes tied to port operations and funding allocations, while the Port and other agencies were navigating regulatory limits, operational requirements, and broader system constraints. Without a shared understanding of those boundaries, it was difficult to align expectations.

In border communities, the complexity is even greater. Air quality is influenced by cross-border traffic, freight movement, and industrial activity beyond U.S. jurisdiction. Local agencies are often working within

systems that require federal or binational coordination, which adds time and complexity to implementation.

These limitations are not always visible to community members, which can lead to frustration when progress feels slow or unclear. At the same time, local agencies are often working behind the scenes to navigate these constraints and identify pathways forward.

The Reality of Jurisdiction

- No single agency controls all outcomes
- Authority is distributed across multiple entities
- Coordination is required for nearly every major action
- Progress often depends on alignment, not just decision-making

Capacity Gaps Across Agencies and Communities

Capacity is one of the most significant and persistent challenges across all regions.

Local governments, air districts, and community-based organizations are all operating with limited staff and resources. At the same time, AB 617 requires sustained engagement, technical expertise, and ongoing coordination.

This creates a gap between what is expected and what is feasible.

In smaller or rural communities like Arvin and parts of Imperial County, staffing constraints are particularly pronounced. Local governments may have only a handful of staff managing multiple programs, making it difficult to consistently attend meetings, develop new initiatives, and follow through on implementation.

In larger urban communities, the challenge looks different but is still present. Agencies may have more staff, but they are often spread across departments with competing priorities. Coordination across transportation, planning, public health, and environmental teams requires time and alignment that is not always built into existing structures.

Another gap that surfaced repeatedly is the need for staff who can bridge technical and community-facing work. Translating complex air quality data into clear, accessible information takes time and skill. Without dedicated capacity for this role, communication can break down and slow progress.

Even when funding is available, the administrative burden of managing grants, reporting requirements, and compliance can stretch already limited capacity.

Capacity Is a Shared Challenge

- Limited staffing across agencies and community organizations
- High demand for technical and administrative expertise
- Gaps between planning and implementation capacity
- Need for sustained support, not just short-term funding

Misaligned Expectations Between Partners

Another consistent barrier is the misalignment of expectations across stakeholders.

Community members often come to the process seeking visible, near-term improvements. Agencies are often working within longer timelines tied to planning cycles, funding approvals, and regulatory requirements.

Both perspectives are valid. The challenge is that they do not always align.

In several communities, this showed up in conversations about funding allocation and project timelines. Residents were eager to see immediate investments in programs like air filtration, green space, or local infrastructure. Agencies, in turn, needed to move through structured planning and approval processes before those investments could be made.

In Stockton, early tensions reflected this gap. Community members questioned how funds were being used and pushed for faster action, while agencies

were working through program requirements and feasibility constraints.

In Oakland, implementation challenges also surfaced after plans were adopted. Some strategies that seemed straightforward during planning raised new questions around enforcement, equity, and feasibility once agencies began trying to operationalize them.

These experiences highlight the importance of clear communication. Communities have been clear that they want transparency about what is possible, what constraints exist, and how decisions are made.

When that clarity is present, it helps build understanding. When it is not, it can create frustration and slow collaboration.

Where Expectations Break Down

- Different timelines between communities and agencies
- Limited visibility into constraints and decision-making
- Unclear communication about feasibility
- Lack of shared understanding of roles and authority
- Misunderstanding of local agency capacity

The Tension Between Technical and Community Approaches

Several communities described a disconnect between technical approaches and community expectations.

Agencies often approach problems through data, modeling, and regulatory frameworks. Communities are focused on lived experience, immediate impacts, and practical solutions.

This tension showed up in multiple ways.

In some cases, communities brought forward ideas that addressed very specific, localized concerns such as dust near schools or exposure from nearby industrial activity. These solutions were immediate and tangible. At the same time, agencies were working within broader frameworks that prioritized region-wide emissions reductions, long-term planning, or strategies tied to existing regulatory tools.

In Oakland, this dynamic surfaced during implementation, when certain strategies raised questions about enforcement or unintended consequences. What seemed straightforward conceptually required deeper analysis once agencies began working through the details. This does not reflect a failure of the process. It reflects the complexity of integrating different types of knowledge and priorities.

At its best, the AB 617 process creates space for these perspectives to come together. When it works, technical expertise and community knowledge inform each other, leading to stronger and more grounded solutions.

Maintaining Momentum Over Time

AB 617 is not a short-term effort. It requires sustained engagement over multiple years, from planning through implementation.

Maintaining that momentum is not easy.

Across communities, participants described challenges such as meeting fatigue, staff turnover, and shifting priorities. Once the initial planning phase is complete, the work often becomes less visible and more complex, which can make it harder to sustain engagement.

At the same time, communities have shown that sustained participation is possible when people see progress.

In places like Imperial Valley and Stockton, continued engagement was supported by visible outcomes and ongoing communication. Programs like Project ACE created a sense of ownership and continuity, while consistent outreach and follow-up helped maintain relationships over time.



From the agency's perspective, rebuilding trust is essential. Our growth and learning have shown that adapting to new processes and centering community voices are critical, with respect and trust always at the forefront.

— Esperanza Vielma, Chief Heat Policy Advisor,
City of Stockton Mayor's Office



This reflects a broader shift. Many agencies are recognizing that maintaining momentum requires ongoing investment in relationships, communication, and transparency, not just initial planning efforts.

What Sustains Momentum

- Clear communication about progress and next steps
- Visible outcomes tied to community input
- Continued opportunities for engagement
- Strong relationships that extend beyond formal meetings

What This Means Moving Forward

These barriers are real, but they are not insurmountable.

Across communities, partners are already finding ways to navigate them. They are adapting processes, building stronger relationships, and identifying creative solutions within existing constraints.

What is clear is that addressing these challenges requires more than technical fixes. It requires continued focus on how partners work together.

The next section builds on these insights and outlines practical steps to strengthen collaboration, and improve alignment.

What Comes Next: Practical Steps to Strengthen Collaboration

The work described in this report reflects real progress. Communities, local governments, air districts, and state partners are building relationships, testing new approaches, and finding ways to move complex work forward.

At the same time, the barriers outlined in the previous section are real and persistent. They are not the result of a lack of effort. They are structural, and they shape what is possible on the ground.

This section focuses on what can be done next.

Success depends on shared responsibility. At the same time, they recognize that success depends on shared responsibility. Local governments, air districts, state partners and community stakeholders all play critical roles, and any path forward needs to reflect the realities they are working within.

That includes limited staffing, recruitment and retention challenges, competing priorities, and a difficult fiscal environment.

The goal is not to add more expectations. It is to create conditions that make the work more doable, more aligned, and more effective over time.

1 Create More Flexible Funding Pathways That Reflect Community Priorities

Across communities, one of the clearest themes is the need for flexibility.

Residents are identifying practical, place-based solutions such as vegetation barriers near schools, dust mitigation in agricultural areas, and small-scale infrastructure improvements that directly affect daily life. These solutions are often relatively straightforward, but they do not always align with existing funding categories.



There is an opportunity to build more flexibility into program design so that funding can better reflect what communities are asking for.

This could include:

- Expanding eligible project categories to include community-identified solutions
- Allowing pilot or demonstration projects that test new approaches
- Creating small, flexible funding pools that can be deployed more quickly
- Simplifying approval pathways for lower-cost, high-impact projects
- For local agencies, this would make it easier to align community priorities with available resources. For community partners, it would create a clearer connection between participation and outcomes.

This does not mean removing accountability. It means designing programs that are responsive to real conditions on the ground.

What Flexibility Makes Possible

- Faster response to community-identified needs
- More visible, near-term outcomes
- Greater alignment between planning and implementation
- Increased trust in the process

2 Strengthen and Support Local Government Participation

Local governments are essential to implementation. They bring land-use authority, infrastructure expertise, and the ability to connect planning to real projects.

At the same time, many local agencies are operating with limited staff, hiring constraints, and increasing workloads. Recruitment and retention challenges have made it difficult to fill key positions, particularly in planning, engineering, and environmental roles.

In this context, participation in AB 617 can feel like an added responsibility rather than an integrated part of existing work.

This could be addressed by making local government engagement more sustainable and aligned with existing capacity.

This could include:

- Providing dedicated funding or staffing support for local government participation
- Supporting regional or shared staff models for smaller jurisdictions
- Aligning AB 617 requirements with existing planning processes to reduce duplication
- Creating clearer guidance on local government roles and expectations

Local agencies, in turn, can continue to:

- Integrate AB 617 priorities into General Plans, Climate Action Plans, and capital improvement programs
- Identify internal champions who can help coordinate across departments
- Leverage partnerships with air districts and regional organizations to expand capacity

This is not about asking local governments to do more. It is about making it easier for them to do the work they are already trying to do.

Supporting Local Government Capacity

- Dedicated resources for participation
- Alignment with existing planning processes
- Clear roles and expectations
- Opportunities for shared or regional support

3 Invest in Community Capacity, Peer Learning, and Long-Term Engagement

Community participation is one of the strongest elements of AB 617. It brings critical knowledge, builds accountability, and leads to more grounded solutions.

At the same time, meaningful engagement takes time, resources, and support.

Community-based organizations are often managing multiple programs with limited staff. Residents are balancing participation with work, family, and other responsibilities. Without sustained investment, it becomes difficult to maintain engagement over time.

Investing more consistently in community capacity would enable more consistent and sustained engagement. This could include:

- Ongoing funding for community-based organizations, not just project-specific support
- Training on technical topics, leadership, communication, and advocacy skills, and the regulatory and legal landscape
- Support for peer-to-peer learning across communities
- Resources for translation, outreach, and culturally relevant engagement

Local agencies and community partners can build on this by:

- Creating more accessible pathways for participation
- Partnering with trusted organizations to expand outreach
- Providing clear, consistent updates that show how input is being used

When communities are supported, participation becomes more consistent, more informed, and more impactful.

What Sustained Community Investment Delivers

- Stronger participation over time
- More informed and effective engagement
- Greater trust and accountability
- A pipeline of future community and civic leaders

4 Improve Transparency Around Process, Constraints, and Decision-Making

Across all communities, one request came through clearly. People want to understand how the process works.

They want to know:

- What decisions are being made and by whom
- What constraints exist
- What is feasible and what is not
- When they can expect to see results

When this information is not clear, it creates frustration. When it is shared openly, it builds trust, even when the answers are not what people hoped for.

This can be achieved by:

- Providing clearer, more accessible guidance on program processes
- Standardizing how information is shared across communities
- Encouraging consistent reporting on progress and timelines
- Supporting tools that make data and decisions easier to understand

Local agencies and partners can reinforce this by:

- Communicating regularly and in plain language
- Being transparent about constraints and trade-offs
- Creating opportunities for dialogue, not just information sharing



Transparency does not require perfection. It requires clarity and consistency.

What Clear Communication Builds

- Shared understanding of the process
- More realistic expectations
- Reduced conflict and confusion
- Stronger relationships over time

5 Align AB 617 with Existing Planning and Investment Systems

One of the strongest opportunities identified through this work is alignment.

When AB 617 strategies are connected to existing planning efforts, such as General Plans, transportation plans, and climate initiatives, they become easier to implement. They can tap into existing funding streams, timelines, and decision-making processes.

Alignment could be accelerated by:

- Encouraging integration of AB617 priorities into local and regional planning frameworks
- Coordinating across state agencies and with other state programs to align funding and requirements

- Providing guidance on how to connect CERP strategies to capital improvement programs and infrastructure investments

Local governments are already beginning to do this. In places like Sacramento and Oakland, AB 617 strategies are being woven into broader planning efforts, creating more durable and scalable outcomes.

This approach reduces duplication, improves efficiency, and creates a clearer path from planning to implementation.

Why Alignment Matters

- Connects clean air strategies to real projects
- Leverages existing funding and systems
- Reduces duplication and administrative burden
- Supports long-term implementation

6 Design for Long-Term Implementation, Not Just Planning

AB 617 has been highly effective at bringing partners together and developing community-driven plans. The next phase requires an equally strong focus on implementation.

Implementation is where many of the challenges identified in this report become most visible. It is also where the greatest opportunity exists.

This shift can be supported by:

- Providing clearer pathways from planning to implementation
- Supporting multi-year funding and project timelines
- Tracking and sharing implementation progress across communities
- Creating opportunities for communities to learn from each other's implementation experiences

Local agencies and partners can support this by:

- Identifying early implementation opportunities that build momentum
- Continuing engagement beyond the planning phase
- Sharing lessons learned and adapting approaches over time

Implementation is not a single phase. It is an ongoing process that requires flexibility, coordination, and sustained commitment.

What Strong Implementation Requires

- Clear pathways from plans to projects
- Multi-year funding and timelines
- Continued collaboration across partners
- Ongoing learning and adaptation

Moving Forward

The work happening across AB 617 communities is complex. It is also meaningful.

There is a strong foundation in place. Communities are engaged. Local governments and agencies are committed. Partnerships are forming and strengthening.

The recommendations in this section are not about changing direction. They are about building on what is already working and addressing the structural challenges that make the work harder than it needs to be.

With continued investment, flexibility, and alignment, there is a clear opportunity to strengthen collaboration and deliver more consistent, lasting improvements in air quality for communities across California.

The path forward is not simple, but it is clear.

Closing Reflections

This work is complex. It asks a lot of everyone involved.

It asks community members to show up, often repeatedly, to share their experiences and advocate for change. It asks local governments and agencies to navigate technical requirements, regulatory constraints, and limited resources while staying engaged and responsive. It asks partners across systems to work together in ways that are not always easy or familiar.

And still, across California, that work is happening.

What stands out most from this effort is not just the challenges, but the commitment. People are showing up. They are staying at the table. They are working through differences and continuing to move forward, even when progress feels slow.

That matters.

What This Work Has Shown

Across all of the communities engaged through this project, a few things are clear. Collaboration is not automatic. It takes structure, clarity, and time. It requires people to build relationships, understand each other's roles, and find ways to work within real constraints.

At the same time, collaboration is possible. Even in places where the work started with tension or uncertainty, partners have found ways to move forward. They have built trust, aligned priorities, and created outcomes that reflect both technical expertise and community experience.

Local governments and agencies are playing a critical role in this process. They are helping translate ideas into action, connecting community priorities to planning and investment, and navigating the systems that make implementation possible. Much of this work happens behind the scenes, but it is essential to long-term success.

Community members and organizations are equally central. They bring lived experience, local knowledge, and a long-term commitment to improving conditions

in their neighborhoods. Their participation strengthens the work and keeps it grounded in what matters most.

Together, these efforts are building something that extends beyond individual projects. They are strengthening relationships, improving coordination, and creating a foundation for more effective work in the future.

What Makes This Work Possible

- People who continue to show up and stay engaged
- Agencies willing to adapt and work across systems
- Community voices that shape and strengthen solutions
- Partnerships built on trust, respect, and persistence

A Moment to Recognize the Work

It is important to acknowledge the level of effort behind this work.

For many participants, this is not their only responsibility. Local government staff are balancing multiple programs and priorities. Community-based organizations are managing limited resources while supporting their communities. Residents are participating on top of work, family, and other commitments.

At the same time, many are navigating broader challenges, including staffing shortages, recruitment and retention issues, and an uncertain economic environment.

Despite this, people continue to engage.

They attend meetings. They share perspectives. They work through disagreements. They look for solutions.

That level of commitment is not easy to sustain, and it should not be taken for granted.

Where This Leaves Us

The AB617 program has created a strong foundation for community-driven air quality work. It has brought together partners who may not have otherwise worked together and created space for new approaches.

It is about strengthening the systems that support collaboration, making it easier for partners to stay engaged, and creating clearer pathways from planning to implementation.

It is also about continuing to learn.

The experiences shared in this report reflect a process that is still evolving. There is no single model that works everywhere, and there is no one solution that will address every challenge. What matters is the ability to adapt, improve, and move forward together.

There is reason for optimism.

Across communities, there are examples of progress, innovation, and resilience. There are partnerships that are stronger today than they were at the start of this process. There are communities that are more engaged, more informed, and better positioned to advocate for their needs.

Those are meaningful outcomes.

The Opportunity Ahead

- Build on existing partnerships and momentum
- Strengthen alignment across agencies and programs
- Invest in capacity and long-term engagement
- Continue learning and adapting over time

Closing

Improving air quality is long-term work. It requires sustained effort, coordination, and trust.

The progress happening across AB 617 communities is a result of people choosing to stay engaged, to work together, and to keep moving forward.

That is what makes this work meaningful. And that is what will continue to drive it forward.