

Chapter 3

Involving the Public and Developing a Community Profile

3.1 Introduction

Now that you understand the general process for preparing a community impact assessment (the focus of Chapter 2), the next major step is to involve the public in the process and develop the community profile. The community profile establishes the baseline conditions for assessing impacts and is used to prepare the “Affected Environment” or “Setting” section of the community impact assessment report and the ED. The community profile describes the physical features of the study area and the pertinent social and economic conditions in the community and region. In keeping with the principles of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS), the affected community should be engaged in the preparation of the profile, and the profile should be considered a living document that is updated as additional information becomes available during the project development process.

3.2 Involving the Public

The public involvement process is discussed in detail in [Chapter 3 of the Caltrans Environmental Handbook Series, Volume 1](#). This chapter includes discussion of the legal requirements for public involvement as well as links to a number of guidance documents related to public involvement in transportation projects. For a detailed discussion of techniques for involving the public, the analyst is directed to the FHWA/FTA document, [Public Involvement Techniques For Transportation Decision-making](#). This booklet discusses a wide variety of subjects, including civic advisory committees, public meetings/hearings, negotiation, mediation, and improving meeting attendance.

To facilitate the public involvement process, it may be helpful to prepare a map or series of maps that show the locations of the project alternatives, study area neighborhoods and communities, relevant demographic and economic characteristics, land uses, and the various resources identified in the research discussed below. The use of GIS in preparing these maps is highly encouraged because it is so well suited to this sort of task. Each of the geographic and socioeconomic features of the study area that make up the community profile can become a data layer in GIS along with a layer that represents the project alternatives and proposed right-of-way. These layers can be added or removed to create easily understood visual representations of the project alternatives, which will aid greatly in the comparison of alternatives and the development of measures to avoid and minimize impacts.

The analyst should consult with the GIS technician before beginning the data collection task. GIS technology requires geographically referenced data, which in many cases may not be readily available. If feasible and appropriate, global positioning system (GPS) technology can be used to assist in the data collection effort.

3.3 Developing the Community Profile

3.3.1 Review and Inventory Existing Conditions

Prior to beginning the assessment, a base map should be created to familiarize the analyst with the project area and to assist with field surveys. Aerial base maps may be available from Caltrans staff, such as the project engineer, or consultants working on the project. The aerial map should be as current as possible, so as to depict existing buildings (residential and commercial), transportation facilities, land uses, and neighborhood and community features. The base map should include the following components:

- Project alignment for each alternative
- Existing and proposed right-of-way boundaries
- Assessor's parcels (boundaries and numbers) located adjacent to or within project boundaries

As discussed in Chapter 2, this map should be used to establish a project boundary that includes the land, buildings, and other features that may be subject to project effects. Delineation of the affected social and economic environment should be drawn to include the following components:

- Buildings: Residences, businesses, schools, government offices, and public service buildings that would be made more or less accessible or otherwise affected by the proposed project. Include structures that may be subject to removal or relocation. Coordinate with Caltrans right-of-way staff concerning information available for the draft relocation impact statement or report (DRIS or DRIR) prepared for the proposed project. Please see Chapter 7 and Appendix C of this volume for more information on relocations. More about this in Appendix C.
- Transportation Facilities: Streets, railroad lines, bikeways, pedestrian overcrossings, and parking facilities that may be closed or otherwise affected by the proposed project.
- Neighborhood and Community Features: Communities, neighborhoods, parks and recreation facilities, and business centers that may be affected by the proposed project. Local planning agencies may have maps or plans delineating neighborhoods or communities. When conducting a community impact assessment, it is always a good idea to contact the local planning agency to determine whether there is a planner with a special knowledge of the area.

This working project area map can then be verified during subsequent site visits and will help to identify existing conditions for the setting section. Depending on the input received from the community during the course of public involvement, it may be necessary to reassess the boundary lines or to update the map to address changes in facilities or features that are identified later in the process.

The map should clearly depict the area directly affected by the project, which is the *project area*, and the area used for determining the demographic and socioeconomic character of the surrounding community, which is the *study area*.

3.3.2 Land Use

Inventories of existing and planned land uses in the study area provide a basis for understanding growth trends of the broader community and the study area. Such data are useful in assessing the potential for the transportation project to conflict with land uses, result in growth-related effects, or displace active farmland or timberland.

Data Needs

The following data should be collected to establish the baseline description of existing land uses in the study area:

- Major land uses (e.g., commercial, residential, agricultural)
- Acreages of rural and urban land and farmland
- Amount and location of undeveloped land
- Zoning and land use plans
- Parks and recreational facilities
- Land use development trends

Data Sources

In addition to general plans and land use maps, sources of land use information include local special area plans, EDs prepared for other types of projects in the area, master EDs, local real estate boards, large-scale residential and commercial developers, district right-of-way staff, the area chamber of commerce, and articles from the local newspaper. Additional sources available to Caltrans staff are the Digital Highway Inventory Photography Program (DHIPP) and the Caltrans Photolog. DHIPP allows every Caltrans employee with intranet access the ability to instantly view color, high-resolution, and geo-referenced digital imagery of the entire State Highway System (SHS). The Caltrans Photolog provides all employees with intranet access to take a video driving tour of any segment of the SHS.

Below are other sources that can be used to gain information specific to each property within the study area.

- Field Surveys: Information such as existing land uses are best obtained through direct observation and visits to the project area. Aerial photos and the creation of the base map can give analysts a general idea of the existing conditions, but actual conditions should be verified through field surveys.
- Local Planning or Community Development Agency: Local agencies can provide copies of general plan elements and other information such as the prospects of approval of pending development projects and potential construction activities that could take place at the same time as the project's construction. This may include recent records of the number and types of building permits issued to aid in identifying growth trends. In many cases, planning agencies will have data available in a format compatible with GIS.
- [State of California's Department of Conservation](#) website: This website contains links to available maps and information about the [Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program](#) (FMMMP). Additional sources of data regarding farmland include:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture, [Census of Agriculture](#). The Census of Agriculture is taken every five years, and provides a complete count of U.S. farms and ranches including data on land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, income, and expenditures and other areas.
 - [California Department of Food and Agriculture](#).
 - [The California Office of the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Agricultural Statistics Service \(NASS\)](#). The NASS prepares reports on agricultural production including an interactive statistical map and detailed data by county.
 - County Agricultural Commissioners.
 - County Farm Bureaus.
 - [American Farmland Trust](#) is a nonprofit group that maintains statistics on state agriculture.
 - The [California Institute for Rural Studies](#) is also a non-profit research organization that conducts research on topics including farm labor conditions, sustainable food systems, immigration reform, immigrant civic participation, rural health, pesticide use, and water policy.
- Local Council of Governments: This agency is likely to have published reports containing discussions of development trends in the region.

Summarizing Results

The land use section of the community profile provides the basis for analyzing the project's compatibility with existing and planned land uses, consistency with local zoning, plans and programs, potential for growth-related impacts, and impacts to farmlands and timberlands. Comparing local data with similar county and state data can provide further insight regarding identified land use trends in relation to the broader region or state. The summary should address the following topics:

- Land use characteristics in the study area (acreages of rural and urban land, existing use, and zoning). The purpose is to convey a general understanding of the amount of developed, undeveloped, and underdeveloped land in the area.
- General discussion of the agricultural resources and character of agriculture in the project area (if applicable). Such a discussion might include the amount of land under cultivation by crop type, the number of acres under Williamson Act contracts, the Important Farmland Mapping categories applicable to relevant farmlands, the value of agricultural production, a description of trends in farmland conversion in the particular county, and a description of applicable general plan elements, ordinances, and other policies related to agriculture in that locale. More detail regarding farmland can be found in Chapter 4 of this volume.
- Important land use changes that have or are occurring in the community, such as major development, redevelopment, or urbanization.
- Local growth and development policies for the region. All developable land areas that would be made more accessible by the action should be identified and described. This information

is used to analyze any growth-related impacts of the proposed action. Development trends should also be described to assess the growth potential of the affected area.

- Location and characteristics of parks and recreational facilities in the study area (indoor vs. outdoor, public vs. private, community center, and amenities available), availability (time of year, hours of operation, membership eligibility, etc.), programs offered, and the condition of structures/facilities. If the project would result in the use of a Section 4(f) resource and a Section 4(f) evaluation is being prepared for the project, include reference to that report here.

Exhibits for both existing and planned land uses should be used if the area is not fully built out. These exhibits should encompass the study area at a minimum and may include a larger area such as a community plan or group of planning areas. Whenever possible, the land uses should be simplified to cover the standard planning and zoning classifications.

3.3.3 Community Character and Cohesion

This section addresses the demographics of the study area population, housing characteristics, and economic conditions and trends. Because they influence the character of a community, this section should also describe the types of transit facilities, highways, streets, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the study area as well as the availability of parking facilities and any existing lots or parking spaces if the proposed project would likely have an effect on such facilities.

Data Needs

The community demographics provide insight into the ethnicity, income, and age characteristics of the affected population. This information is also used to support the environmental justice analysis, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8 of this volume. For this reason, data should be collected at a level of detail appropriate for the anticipated impacts. If minority and low-income groups are not present in the study area, then less detail is needed in the demographic analysis. However, if there are concentrations of minority or low-income persons that may be adversely affected by the project, then these groups need to be identified. A site visit or interviews with planning agencies and community leaders may be the best way to identify these groups. [U.S. \(Census\)](#) data can provide detailed information on ethnicity, income, and poverty levels.

The data collection effort for community character and cohesion should compile the following information:

- Demographic characteristics of the community and region
 - Population and growth trends
 - Ethnic composition
 - Average household income and percentage of the population under the poverty level
 - Age distribution
 - Average household size
 - Concentrations of special groups, such as minority or low-income populations, elderly persons, religious or ethnic groups, and persons with disabilities

- Housing characteristics
 - General characteristics of housing in the study area compared to the larger region (Median home value, single-family vs. multifamily, age of structures)
 - Type of occupancy (renters vs. owners)
 - Type, value, age, and condition of housing that may be displaced
 - Vacancy rates and length of residency (tenure)
 - Availability and location of low-income housing
- Economic data and trends
 - Unemployment rates and trends
 - Major employers in the local area and region
 - Workforce composition
 - Commuting patterns
 - Sales tax and property tax revenues
- Circulation and access
 - Major freeways and highways serving the study area and region
 - Type, availability, and location of transit services
 - Local roadways, bicycle, and pedestrian facilities in the study area

Data Sources

The Census generally provides the most geographically detailed data on demographics, housing characteristics, and income. However, Census data is only updated every ten years and may be out of date when you need it. The U.S. Census Bureau also produces population estimates and conducts the [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#) annually. All data from the ACS are estimates, however, as the information is based on a sample of the population of the United States and Puerto Rico, rather than from the whole population. Other possible sources of data include state and local government agencies or previous planning studies. City and county planning departments and economic development departments as well as metropolitan planning organizations usually maintain up-to-date projections of demographic and economic information. Demographic information is also regularly compiled and maintained by other agencies such as the [California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit](#), social service agencies, water management districts, and health departments.

Economic data, such as labor force characteristics, major employers and industries, and tax revenue may be obtained from the Census, local plans and planning studies, the county assessor's office, county or city budgets, the chamber of commerce, and local economic development organizations. In addition, the [California Employment Development Department](#) compiles detailed records of labor data on California businesses in the [Labor Market Info Database](#). Economic data is also compiled by the [California Department of Finance, Demographic Research Unit](#) and the [Bureau of Economic Analysis](#). Depending on the nature of

the project, a thorough inventory of businesses in the study area may be necessary in order to evaluate potential economic impacts related to relocations or changes in access.

Property tax is imposed on real property and is based on the value of the property. Sales tax is imposed on retailers for the privilege of selling tangible personal property in California. The sales tax rate is a composite of various tax rates: a state rate, a variable city-county rate, a local transportation rate, a statewide rate for local public safety services, and a statewide rate for local health and social services. Therefore, if a large number of firms or major firms may be displaced, the effect would be important to assess. The analyst would need to determine the amount of local taxes paid annually by the businesses. The community impact analyst should also determine the amount of property tax paid annually by both the residents and the business owners who are likely to be subject to displacement. This amount is then calculated as a percentage of the city or county's total annual property tax. The local tax assessor's office can provide the information on the total amount collected.

Housing data can be obtained from the Census, California Department of Finance, Caltrans right-of-way studies, local planning agencies, the county assessor, real estate agencies, and real estate websites. Site visits and interviews with people familiar with the area are helpful for collecting information on housing conditions and development trends.

Information on local and regional circulation and access can be obtained from maps, information from the circulation element of the general plan, traffic studies, and field surveys. Information on transit services can be obtained from city and county transit agencies and their websites and through interviews with officials of the local public transit authority and/or planning agency.

Note on Census Data

The U. S. Census Bureau within the Department of Commerce is the basic source for demographic data. Census data provides statistics on population, housing, race, age, family composition, marital status, nativity, parentage, country of origin, school enrollment, years of school completed, birth rates, place of work, means of transportation, employment status, occupation, industry, class of worker, and income.

The Census generally collects and analyzes data in various geographic divisions. These geographic divisions include obvious areas such as states, cities, and counties. The Census also provides information at the Census Tract (1,000–8,000 persons), Block Group (300–3,000 persons) and Block (1–500 persons, usually equivalent to city blocks) levels. The Census provides data on ethnicity and income characteristics at varying levels.

Note that not all information is available at the same geographic level and be aware of any potential discrepancies when presenting differing levels of data in the same table. For example, because detailed economic and social information (occupation, income, poverty, housing values), otherwise known as “long-form” data, are gathered from a sample of the population, they are available only down to the block group level. However, “short-form” data (race, sex, age, total population) includes 100% of the population and is available down to the block level.

In addition, over time the value of the data may become diminished. While short-form Census data are available on a relatively short interval (annually for areas with 65,000 or greater

population, three-year average for areas with 20,000 or greater population, and five-year average for areas with populations below 20,000), long-form Census data are available only on a ten-year basis. If the locale has been experiencing relatively rapid or constant change, the data can become unreliable. The analyst, therefore, must continually validate the data so that it represents the current economic and business conditions of the affected area.

The usefulness of Census data for social and economic analyses does have some limitations because: 1) it is collected only every ten years, 2) it is not usually available until at least two years after the census is taken, and 3) it is not updated until the new census is taken. Since California is a dynamic state, Census data can, in some instances, become outdated within a few years of being collected, depending on local circumstances and the amount of change occurring in a specific geographic area. Local planning agencies may have more current demographic data based upon community surveys or projections of Census information, but this is not always standard practice. The Census information can be valuable nonetheless for indicating community characteristics because existing low income and minority areas tend to persist over the years even if specific resident individuals, families, and households shift or relocate. [2010 US Census](#) data is now available via the Internet.

Summarizing Results

Describing the community character is best accomplished by comparing the local community to an appropriate larger area such as a city, county, or state, depending on the size and nature of the project and affected community. This comparison will provide insight into social and economic trends in the study area. Depending on the nature of the project's anticipated effects, the discussion of community character and cohesion could include the following components.

- Changes in population that are occurring in the community and how they compare to changes in the larger region. The discussion should address growth trends and changes in demographics such as ethnicity, income, and age—if these demographic indicators are relevant to the study.
- Location of high growth areas and proposed new development in the region (e.g., residential neighborhoods, commercial centers, or industrial parks).
- Characteristics of the populations affected by the project as compared to the larger region (age, ethnicity, employment, median income, and families living below the poverty level).
- Locations of populations of concern, such as minority or low-income neighborhoods, concentrations of low-income elderly persons, and persons with disabilities.
- Housing characteristics in the study area (size and location of neighborhoods, types of units, condition of houses, and relative value), household size, length of residency, vacancy rates, and tenure (owner vs. renter) compared to the larger region.
- Economic conditions and trends in the community, including unemployment, labor force characteristics, major employers, dominant business sectors, and the location and nature of businesses in the study area.
- Tax revenues from property taxes and sales tax.
- Traffic patterns, traffic problems, and transit use.

3.3.4 Utilities, Public Services, and Emergency Services

The basic utilities that serve a community are often taken for granted, but interruptions to those services seldom go unnoticed. The community impact assessment should include an inventory of the community facilities and services, utility providers, and emergency services that could be directly or indirectly affected by the construction or operation of the project.

Data Needs

The inventory should include the service provider, location, service area, and a general description of the following topics as relevant to the project effects.

- Public utilities and services such as gas and electrical power, telecommunications, water supply, sewer, post offices, libraries, and public assistance services
- Law enforcement and emergency services (such as fire protection and ambulance service), including the location of emergency routes
- Schools, including student enrollment and capacity
- Medical and health care facilities
- Community centers
- Religious institutions

Data Sources

Data sources for utilities, public services, and emergency service providers are similar to those for land use. Local planning agencies, public works departments, utility companies, and public service providers will be able to provide the bulk of the data. Telephone directories, on-line mapping services such as Google Earth, and road maps of the local area are potential sources of information. Data gathered from these sources should be verified through field surveys to assure accuracy. Stakeholder meetings and interviews with knowledgeable persons are also valuable for identifying local resources.

Summarizing Results

The community impact assessment report should provide sufficient information, such as that listed below, about utilities, public services, and emergency service providers to assist in comparison of alternatives.

- Location of major water supplies, sewer lines, and underground power and telephone lines that cross or are in close proximity to the project alignment.
- Location of police stations and substations, fire stations, and ambulance dispatch centers. If frequently used emergency routes cross the project alignment, this should be noted in the report.
- Location of schools relative to the project area to determine if construction or operation of the project would affect normal school operations or access to the schools. If the project is expected to result in growth-related impacts, the existing capacity and enrollment of schools should be identified.

- Other community facilities such as hospitals, religious facilities, and community centers should be described. These facilities act as focal points for community residents.

3.3.5 Community Values, Issues, and Attitudes

Data Needs

Understanding the values, issues, and attitudes of the affected communities is an essential part of community impact assessment. Generally this information will become available through the development and execution of the public involvement plan. For additional information on the public involvement process, please see [Volume 1, Chapter 3 of the Caltrans Environmental Handbook Series](#). Within the framework of CSS, outreach should focus on learning about specific community values and understanding community attitudes toward the proposed transportation project. If there are divergent value and opinions within a community, this should be noted.

Data Sources

An initial feel for community values, issues and attitudes can be obtained through conversations with knowledgeable persons and reviewing media reports, community plans, and local community organization bulletin boards. Other secondary sources of information include general plans, policy studies, minutes of public hearings, and histories of the local area. These same sources can be used to review similar projects in other locations to see how the public reacted to those projects. Interviews and surveys of community residents can provide valuable, first-hand information about community values and concerns regarding the project. Appendix B contains a list of sample interview questions as well as a sample survey questionnaire that can be used to gather information about the community. Lastly, field surveys are critical to gaining first-hand knowledge of the area and its residents.

Summarizing Results

The community impact assessment report should provide sufficient information, such as that listed below, about community values, issues, and attitudes to assist in comparison of alternatives.

- Does the community generally feel that the proposed project is needed? Do they think it will resolve problems that the community is currently experiencing? Do they feel the project will resolve a problem somewhere else and place the burdens of the project on their community?
- How does the community feel about the proposed project? Are they generally in favor? Opposed? Worried about its affect on the community?
- What are the community's major concerns regarding the project? Are they worried about relocations? Impacts on businesses? Safety? Aesthetics?

3.4 Summary

Involving the community and developing the community profile is the key step in understanding the context within which the transportation project needs to fit. For the community impact analysis to be meaningful, the data gathered must be complete, accurate, and current. The public involvement process can assist the analyst in verifying the accuracy and completeness of data by identifying information that may have been missed, providing information on the importance of

facilities and services to the community, and providing information about community concerns, issues, and attitudes. The following table summarizes the data needs and potential sources of data that were discussed in this chapter. Additional information regarding data sources can be found in Appendix B.

Table 3.1. Summary of Data Needs and Sources

Data needs	Sources
Land Use	
Major land uses (e.g., commercial, residential, agricultural)	General plans, area plans, aerial photos, field surveys
Acreages of rural and urban land and farmland	State of California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program , County Agricultural Commission, Census of Agriculture, California Department of Food and Agriculture, National Agricultural Statistics Service, County Agricultural Commissioners, County Farm Bureaus, American Farmland Trust, California Institute for Rural Studies
Amount and location of undeveloped land	City or county planning departments, aerial photos, field surveys
Zoning and land use plans	City or county planning departments, general plans, area plans, Land Use Planning Information Network (LUPIN)
Parks and recreational facilities	City or county recreation departments, general plans, area road maps, recreation maps
Land use development trends	City or county planning departments, general plans, area plans, local councils of governments, local real estate boards, large-scale residential and commercial developers, District right-of-way staff, the area chamber of commerce, articles from the local newspaper
Community Character	
Demographic characteristics of the community and region	U.S. Census Bureau , California Department of Finance , local councils of government, city or county planning departments
Housing characteristics	U.S. Census Bureau , local plans and planning studies, the county assessor's office, county or city budgets, the chamber of commerce, Department of Finance, local economic development organizations
Economic data and trends	U.S. Census Bureau , local plans and planning studies, the county assessor's office, county or city budgets, the chamber of commerce, and local economic development organizations, California Employment Development Department , Labor Market Info Database , California Department of Finance, the Bureau of Economic Analysis
Circulation and access	Local or regional transportation planning agencies, city or county planning departments, road maps, field surveys, aerial photos, the local bicycle coalition or similar advocacy group, transit agencies
Utilities, Public Services, and Emergency Services	
Public utilities and services	Local planning agencies, public works departments, utility companies, public service providers, telephone directories
Law enforcement and emergency services	Local planning agencies, police and fire departments, ambulance, telephone directories
Schools	School district staff, school staff, state department of education, telephone directories
Medical and health care facilities	Local planning agencies, , field surveys, telephone directories

Data needs	Sources
Community Values, Issues, and Attitudes Understanding of the values, issues, and attitudes of the affected communities	Interviews and surveys of community members, conversations with knowledgeable persons, media reports, community plans, community organization bulletin boards, general plans, policy studies, minutes of public hearings, histories of the local area.