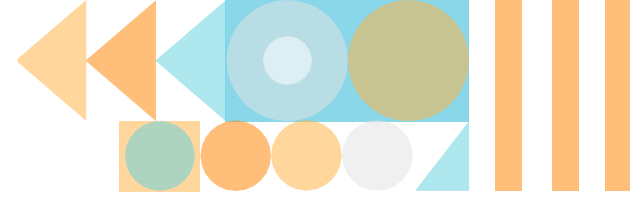


Identifying Underserved Communities Using the Caltrans Equity Index (EQI) **Fact Sheet**

July 2025



Director's Office of
Equity & Tribal Affairs (ETA)

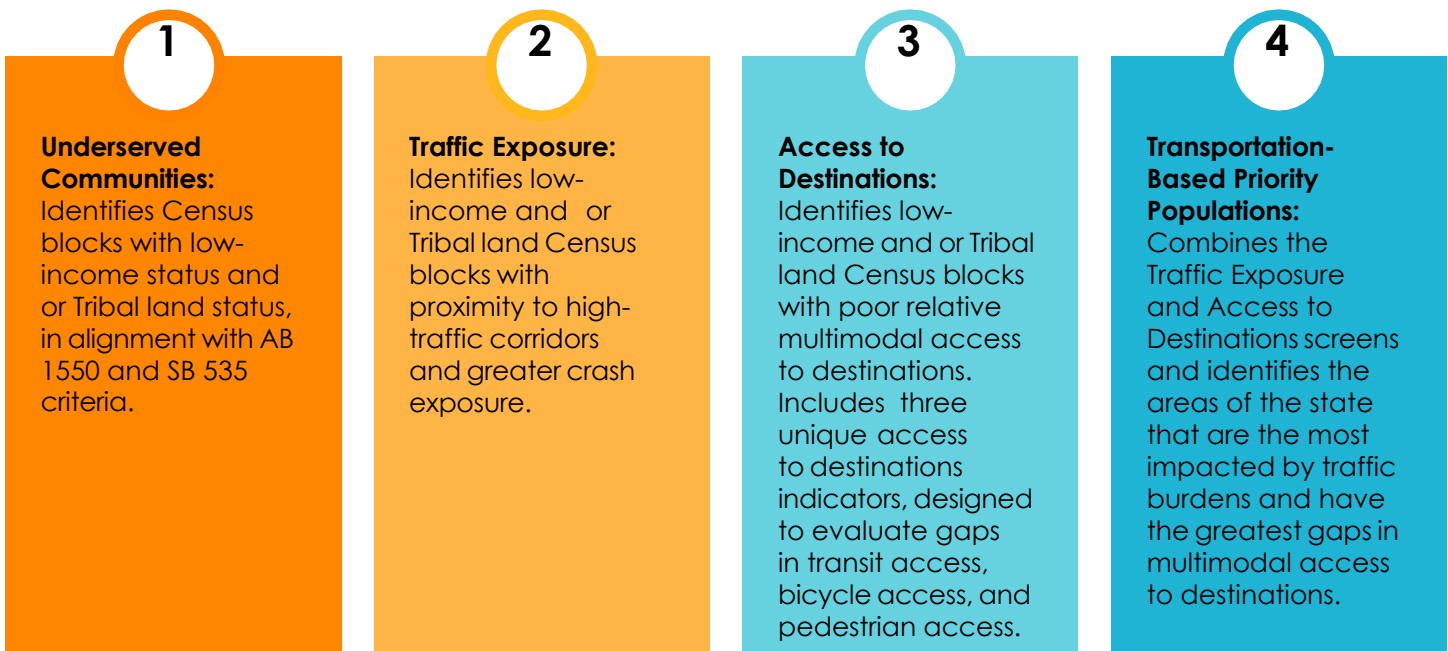


Background

SB 960, signed into law in September 2024, directs Caltrans to establish a definition of “underserved communities” for the purpose of inclusive engagement during the planning and delivery of projects with complete streets facilities funded by the State Highway Operation and Protection Program (SHOPP).

What is EQI?

The Caltrans Equity Index (EQI) is a spatial screening tool used to identify transportation-based priority populations. It includes:



Caltrans Definitions

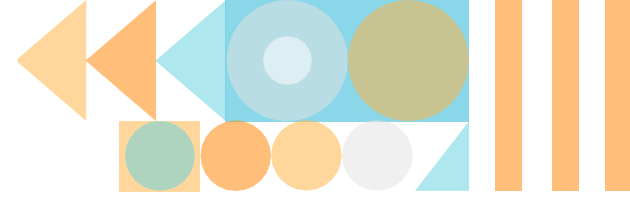
Definitions of underserved communities, disadvantaged communities, and priority populations vary across different grant programs administered by Caltrans, but they commonly consider the following factors:



Historically Disadvantaged Communities: Areas identified by federal criteria as experiencing persistent poverty.



Tribal Lands: Areas under the jurisdiction of federally recognized Tribes.



EQI Definition of Underserved Communities

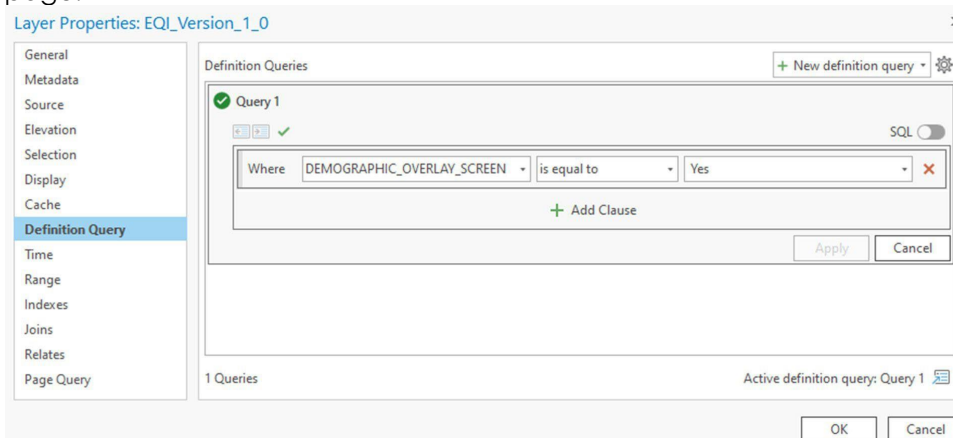
For the purpose of defining underserved communities under SB 960, Caltrans issued a memorandum in June 2025 to use the Underserved Communities layer of the EQI as the primary identifier. This layer incorporates the following:

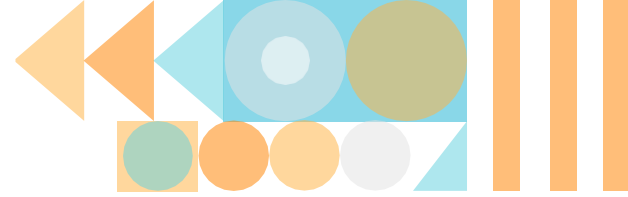
Low-income Status: Census blocks with a median household income at or below 80% of the statewide median household income, OR a median household income at or below the 2021 county low-income limit established by the California Department of Housing and Community Development. This is in alignment with AB 1550 (2016, Gomez).

Tribal Land Status: Census blocks within or touching Tribal land, as identified in the 2022 SB 535 Disadvantaged Communities definition. These Census blocks are automatically screened for inclusion in the Underserved Communities layer, regardless of household income status.

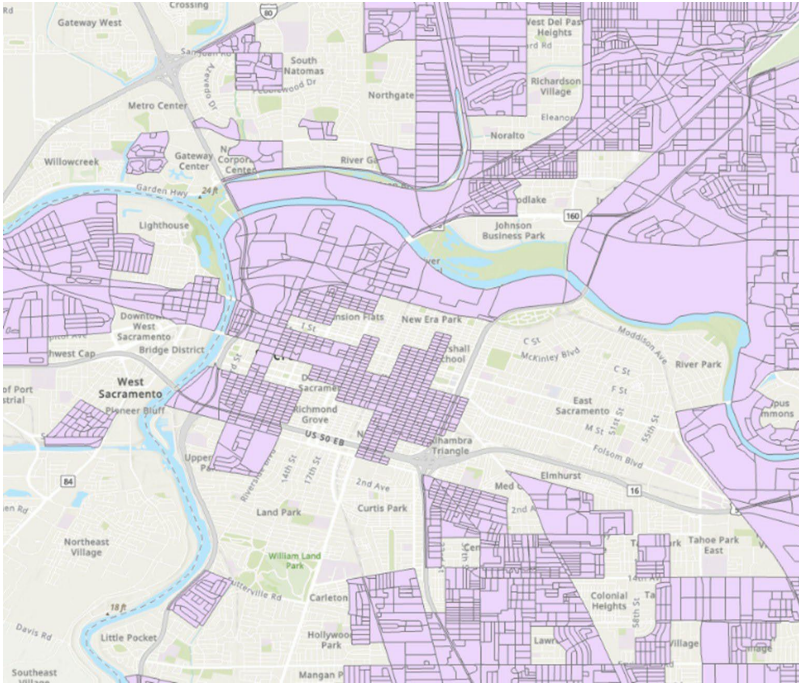
SB 960 Screening Instructions Using the EQI Underserved Communities Layer

1. Download EQI Version 1.0 spatial data [here](#). If you have a Caltrans ArcGIS Online account, enter your username and password to access the data download link. If you do not have a Caltrans ArcGIS Online account, click the 'Sign into your account on ArcGIS Online' link below to sign in with a non-Caltrans account. You can create a free account [here](#).
2. The spatial data is in a zipped ESRI file geodatabase, which can be opened in ArcGIS or ArcGIS Pro, or other spatial analysis software package.
3. Open the data in ArcGIS Pro or other spatial analysis software package.
4. Query the data to only show the Underserved Communities layer. Right-click on the EQI_Version_1_0 layer in the Contents pane, then click on Properties, then Definition Query. Apply the following query to the data: DEMOGRAPHIC_OVERLAY_SCREEN = 'Yes.' An example of queried data is included on the next page.



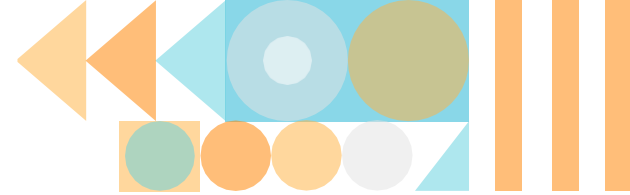


An example of queried data in Sacramento, CA:



5. Add a project as a new layer. On the map tab, click on 'Select by Location' and input the following parameters:
- Input Feature: EQI_Version_1_0
 - Relationship: Intersect
 - Selecting Feature: Project
 - Search Distance: 500 meters
 - Selection type: New selection

The output should show all Census blocks within 500 meters of the project location.



6. The highlighted blocks represent EQI SB 960-screened blocks. Right click on the EQI layer and click on the Attribute Table to display a table of all Census blocks that have been screened. The table will show general information about the blocks (e.g., number of people and housing units) as well as all EQI indicators. These indicators can be used to better understand what transportation issues are currently present in communities surrounding the project.

EQI_Version_1_0												
	OBJECTID_1*	SHAPE*	COUNTYFP20	GEOID20	UR20	HOUSING20	POP20	median_hh_income	rounded_hh_size	local_low_income_threshold	localized_income_screen	state_inc
1	3357	Polygon	067	060670021001014	U	25	24	61472	2	58000	0	
2	8438	Polygon	067	060670021003016	U	0	0	47462	2	58000	1	
3	18127	Polygon	067	060670021001024	U	50	86	61472	2	58000	0	
4	26544	Polygon	067	060670021002013	U	14	7	57426	2	58000	1	
5	26703	Polygon	067	060670021001007	U	0	0	61472	2	58000	0	
6	32634	Polygon	067	060670021003027	U	0	0	47462	2	58000	1	
7	49506	Polygon	067	060670021001025	U	10	23	61472	2	58000	0	
8	58348	Polygon	067	060670021003012	U	52	76	47462	2	58000	1	
9	64764	Polygon	067	060670021001030	U	22	23	61472	2	58000	0	
10	70036	Polygon	067	060670021002021	U	22	25	57426	2	58000	1	
11	73632	Polygon	067	060670021003001	U	18	45	47462	2	58000	1	
12	78198	Polygon	067	060670021001026	U	10	25	61472	2	58000	0	
13	81316	Polygon	067	060670021001053	U	0	0	61472	2	58000	0	
14	87921	Polygon	067	060670021001019	U	20	29	61472	2	58000	0	
15	89069	Polygon	067	060670021002010	U	1	24	57426	2	58000	1	
16	93672	Polygon	067	060670021001022	U	35	66	61472	2	58000	0	
17	100408	Polygon	067	060670021003005	U	0	0	47462	2	58000	1	
18	103120	Polygon	067	060670021001042	U	0	0	61472	2	58000	0	
19	104292	Polygon	067	060670021003021	U	0	0	47462	2	58000	1	
20	117125	Polygon	067	060670021001015	U	3	9	61472	2	58000	0	
21	125458	Polygon	067	060670021002026	U	23	46	57426	2	58000	1	
22	127227	Polygon	067	060670021003013	U	33	76	47462	2	58000	1	
23	127228	Polygon	067	060670021002018	U	52	67	57426	2	58000	1	
24	127231	Polygon	067	060670021001018	U	18	52	61472	2	58000	0	

Other Considerations

If any portion of the project falls within a 500-meter buffer of an underserved community identified through the EQI, outreach to that community is required to ensure compliance with SB 960. The law also allows for the use of regional definitions of underserved communities, provided they were developed through a stakeholder engagement process as part of the regularly scheduled four-year adoption cycle of a Regional Transportation Plan (RTP) by a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or Regional Transportation Planning Agency (RTPA).

Staff are encouraged to verify whether their MPO or RTPA has adopted a regional definition of underserved communities and to compare it with the EQI to ensure outreach efforts are as inclusive as possible. [Here](#) you can find a list of MPOs and a map showing MPOs and RTPAs.



Director's Office of
Equity & Tribal Affairs (ETA)