

Pass the Microphone: Our Community, Our Air



2023

brightline
DEFENSE

Acknowledgements

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Cover photo: SRO Tenant Leaders Greg Johnson and Susie Melkonian during an Our Community, Our Air meeting. Photograph by Drew Bird.

Photos on pages 10 and 14 are courtesy of Sharon Beals.
Photo on page 6 is courtesy of Drew Bird.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	1
Table of Contents	2
Executive Summary	3
Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Needs Assessment: Community Interviews	7
Case Study: The Tenderloin	9
Capacity Building: Community Workshops	11
Case Study: Chinatown	13
Recommendations	14
Conclusion	15
Appendix I: Community Engagement Toolkit	16
Introduction	16
Low-Cost Sensor Networks	17
Community Engagement Within Your Network	17
Government Agency Processes	17
Conclusion	17
Appendix II: Community Interview Questions	18

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Poverty and lack of access to public resources contribute to social vulnerability among residents in low-income communities and excessive environmental burdens for those same groups. Low-income residents, specifically Single-Room Occupancy (SRO) Hotel tenants, have endured disproportionate urban environmental burdens, which negatively impact their health and overall quality of life. Income and resource disparities in the Bay Area, exacerbated by redlining and de facto segregation, have forced low-income communities of color to live in dense housing stock with high concentrations of pollution that can cause multiple public health issues. While frontline communities deal with these social and economic burdens and live in conditions that may harm their long-term health, they face barriers advocating for better resource allocation from local government agencies.

Brightline Defense partnered with Central City SRO Collaborative (CCSROC), La Voz Latina and Community Youth Center of San Francisco (CYC) to form the Our Community, Our Air Program. With support from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District ("the Air District"), the Our Community, Our Air Program ("the Program") aims to develop authentic community engagement in public air quality processes. Brightline and Program partners coordinated interviews with low-income residents living in frontline neighborhoods to conduct a needs assessment and create a baseline for the levels of participation in local government decision-making processes. The community interviews highlighted community concerns around air quality and a gap in understanding of the Air District's public processes. After the needs assessment, Brightline and Program partners used the insights to inform community capacity-building activities and strategies. Brightline and Program partners coordinated community-centric workshops with frontline populations in San Francisco to increase participation in local government processes. The Program empowers low-income SRO residents, monolingual Spanish-speaking residents and partners with bilingual high school youth leaders who engage with monolingual Chinese-speaking communities in order to reach the communities facing social and linguistic barriers.

The Our Community, Our Air Program builds capacity and increases authentic participation in public processes by empowering community leaders to develop a strong understanding of Air District roles and responsibilities. In the process, Brightline has developed strong community partnerships with local community-based organizations and community leaders that will serve as a foundation for expanding this project in the future.

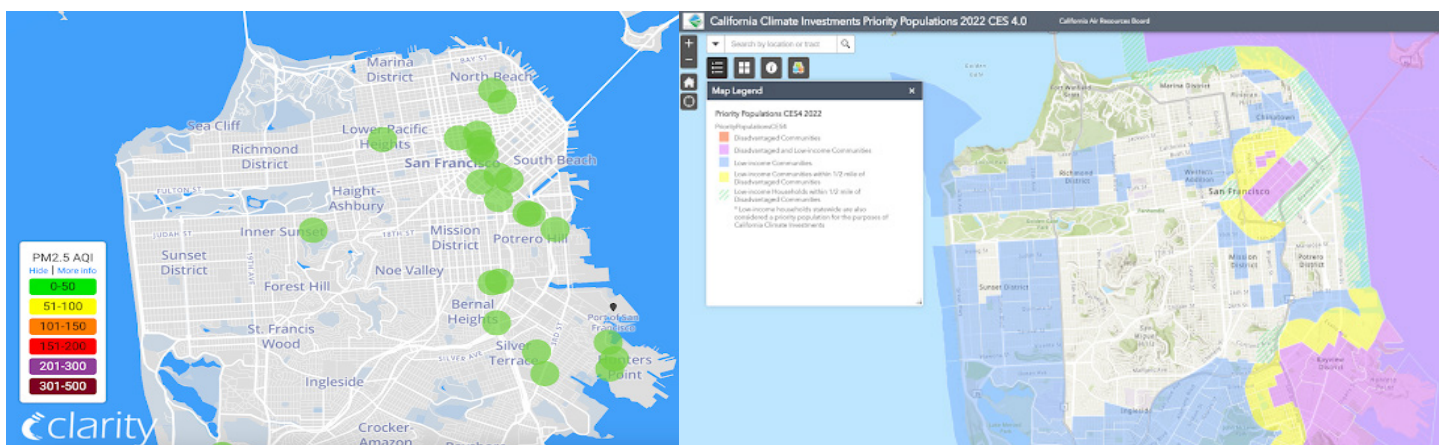


The Jefferson Hotel located in the Tenderloin.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental impacts are spread disproportionately across populations depending on a variety of factors, including economic status, race, gender, age, and housing. The Our Community, Our Air Program seeks to better understand environmental and climate impacts affecting these factors to strategize and highlight community needs in local government processes. One particular area this report focuses on is Single Room Occupancy Hotels, or SROs, which are a housing stock with small individual rooms and shared restrooms and kitchens. SROs have units that are typically only 8 x 10 feet, providing space for only the bare essentials. Today, SROs make up the largest supply of low-cost housing for seniors, adults with disabilities, and children in San Francisco — all vulnerable populations who face the highest wildfire-related health risks.¹

SRO residents are disproportionately affected by environmental issues as most buildings do not have heating, ventilation, air conditioning or air filtration systems. Consequently, residents face the burdens of poor air quality and its impact on health and overall quality of life. For these reasons, the target communities for this program are all located in Eastern San Francisco and are “disadvantaged communities” with an overall score exceeding 70 in CalEnviroScreen 4.0 (CES 4.0).² While low-income tenants, SRO tenants, and high school youth have sometimes engaged with city government agencies on these issues, the same voices tend not to be familiar with regional government agencies or policymaking processes in air quality. The tool helps some state government agencies administer environmental grants for targeted neighborhoods. These communities also qualify as Priority Populations as defined by the California Air Resources Board.³



Brightline’s Air Quality Sensor Network (map seen on left) brings localized air quality data to Priority Populations as defined by the California Climate Investments Map (seen on right)

Another major concern this report addresses is the fact that civic engagement can fall short in low-income communities, communities of color, youth, and monolingual communities due to a variety of barriers to participation. For instance, meeting times, access to the internet or phone lines, or a lack of understanding of meeting procedures all contribute to skewed representation in the meetings where policymaking happens. To increase community engagement and capacity to participate in public meetings, the Our Community, Our Air Program must first understand the barriers in place that limit participation and then empower community leaders to participate in the processes. For these reasons, we have broken up the Program into two segments. First, Brightline and Program partners crafted

1 Brightline Defense, *Little Room to Breathe: Evaluating Air Quality & Health Impacts In San Francisco’s Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Buildings*. (July 2021) <https://www.brightlinedefense.org/our-publications>

2 CalEnviroScreen is a mapping tool that helps identify California communities that are most affected by many sources of pollution, and where people are often especially vulnerable to pollution’s effects.

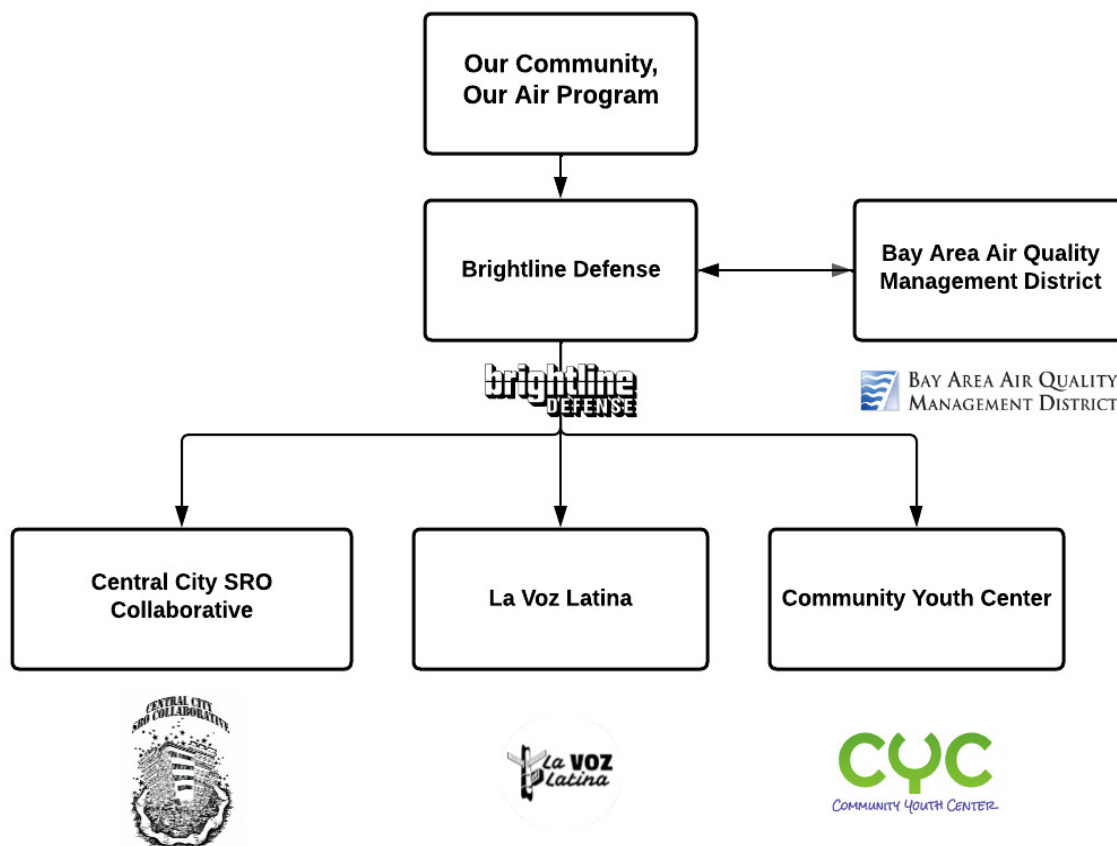
3 California Air Resources Board, *Priority Populations*. (2023) <https://webmaps.arb.ca.gov/PriorityPopulations/>

interview questions to gather a baseline grasp of the current understanding of the role of the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and potential barriers for a needs assessment. Secondly, because many low-income residents, SRO tenants, and high school youth have limited experience engaging with city, regional and state environmental government agencies, we created community workshops to strengthen community leadership and empower residents to be a part of the local decision-making processes in their community.

METHODOLOGY

Community input is the key to a successful needs assessment strategy. Therefore it was crucial for Brightline to incorporate the knowledge and lived experiences from CCSROC’s tenant leaders into the Program. Since 2001, CCSROC has enhanced the well-being of low-income residents living in Single-Room Occupancy hotels, specifically in the Tenderloin and South of Market (SoMa) neighborhood. In June to September of 2022, Brightline partnered closely with CCSROC and SRO tenant leaders to craft 10 interview questions and design the outreach strategy for needs assessment. Each question highlights an understanding of community needs and in turn, the respective action needed in order to bridge the gap. The interviews were designed for Disadvantaged Communities within San Francisco and asked specific questions about local air quality and government agencies.

The Program sought to interview 20 community members to analyze community needs across factors like gender and race. Each community leader was responsible for conducting 1-3 interviews, with each interview lasting 10-15 minutes each, and CBO staff checked in on progress every two weeks to ensure that we would meet our goal of interviewing 15 community members and 5 monolingual community members in Eastern San Francisco. With these partnerships the Our Community, Our Air Program conducted 66 community interviews, exceeding the goal of 20.



Each partnership in the Program was able to reach unique communities. SRO tenant leaders in the Central City SRO Collaborative Tenant Organizer Program interviewed residents in the Tenderloin and community leaders about their personal and neighborhood-based concerns. Collaborating with La Voz Latina allowed us to reach monolingual Spanish-speaking residents also living in the Tenderloin in the interview process. La Voz Latina has been a primary resource for the Spanish-speaking community living in the Tenderloin since 2005. They provide services and resources like Spanish interpretation, immigration advocacy, and career development. Furthermore, CYC youth leaders interviewed Chinese-speaking participants in Chinatown and other San Francisco neighborhoods on their concerns and experiences. Each youth leader was responsible for conducting 1 interview independently to encourage youth development. The Program gained insight into each community's unique needs, wants, and lived experiences.



SRO Tenant Leader Greg Johnson taking notes during an Our Community, Our Air meeting with Brightline and CCSROC staff. Photograph by Drew Bird.

When designing capacity-building strategies, community outreach and engagement are key elements of an effective program. Partnering with existing community-based organizations leads to an effective strategy as they can mobilize and reach key populations whom they have relationships with. In our work with Program partners, we understood in-person community workshops would be the most effective in reaching socially vulnerable communities as well as allowing community members to meet Bay Area Air Quality Management District staff. The Program partners hosted workshops in venues of community significance to best accommodate residents who wanted to attend the workshops. A partnership with the Air District not only allowed participants to meet local government staff members, but they also got the opportunity to see and touch some of the equipment to make the subject of air quality science less abstract. We also used the interview findings to develop the subject matter of each workshop. For instance, the interview asked about the level of understanding and familiarity with the Air District's role and we used this information to develop our first workshop which covered an introduction to environmental justice and the Air District.

After the community interviews and workshops, Brightline analyzed the findings and feedback to create this report and recommendations to the Air District on how to increase authentic participation of frontline community members in the public processes.

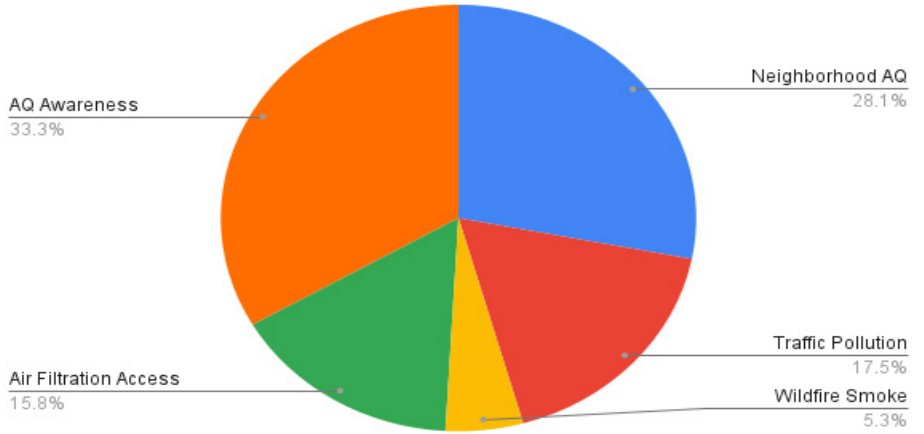
Needs Assessment: Community Interviews

It has long been clear that San Francisco's frontline communities are exposed to more pollution and a unique set of barriers to long-term solutions. Brightline and Program partners conducted a needs assessment to understand the range of needs of these Disadvantaged Communities, including monolingual residents and low-income communities in order to effectively build capacity for future civic participation. Low-income households often lack the time, resources, and information needed to participate in making well-informed decisions in their own government's public processes. This disconnect can lead to groups receiving less access to exposure reduction programming and resources to mitigate the health and safety risks that come from air pollution. Brightline and Program partners aim to inform and empower communities by providing workshops to build understanding and capacity around public processes.

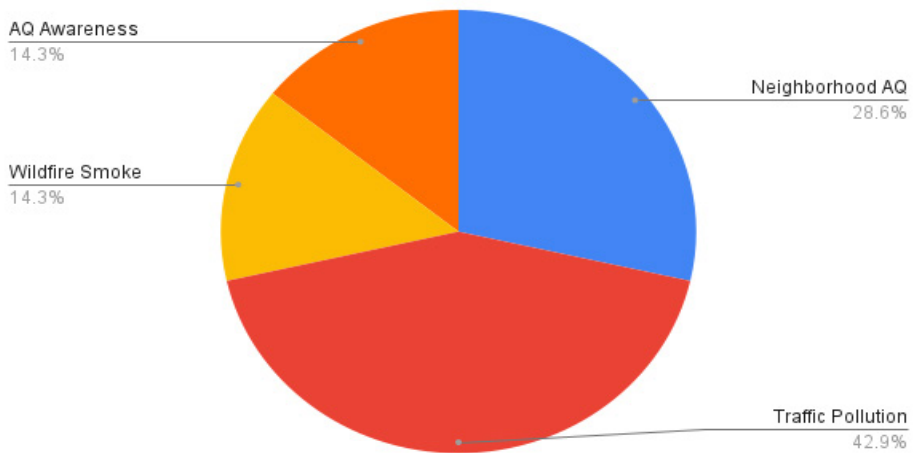
Interview questions were designed to gauge the level of community participation in government and policymaking processes. For example by submitting a public comment in an agency meeting. The findings revealed significant barriers frontline communities face when trying to engage in these processes. From the results of 66 interviews, only 36.4% of participants had attended a local government public meeting and even less, 21.2%, had submitted a public

Key Themes Identified in Interviews

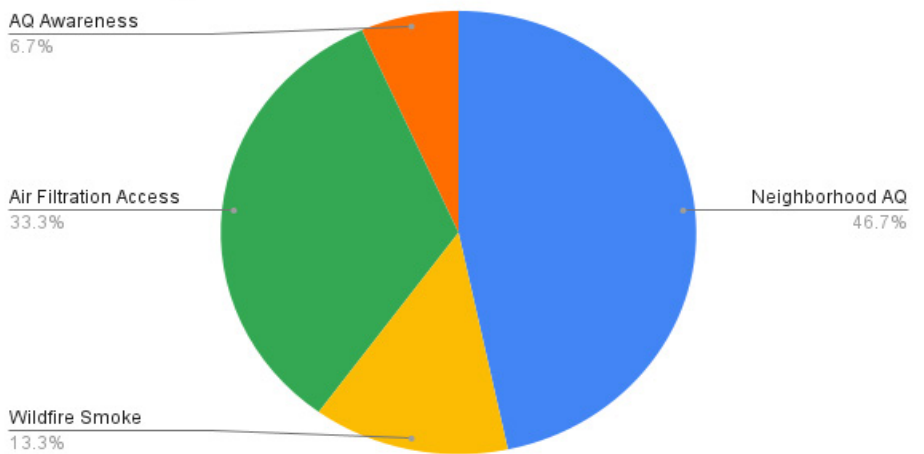
Interviews by SRO Tenant Leaders



Interviews by CYC Youth Leaders



Interviews by La Voz Community Leaders



comment. This gives the Program a baseline to understand current levels of participation and potential barriers. Furthermore, only 45.5% of interviewees stated they understood the public comment process. This reveals a specific gap in the process. The Program built on these gaps in our capacity-building, ensuring that one of our workshops covered the process of making a public comment online in advance, online during the live meeting and audibly during the live meeting as well. It is important to note that the majority of participants interviewed seemed unfamiliar with the Air District, and their air quality work in the Bay Area, but 31.8% of interviewees voiced that they were greatly concerned with not being aware of air quality monitoring efforts. The concern around air quality pollution is present, but many residents do not know the infrastructure that exists to channel these concerns into effective change.

The majority of participants expressed their concerns with the lack of information from the Air District and local governments on the decision-making process that directly impacts air quality issues in their own communities. This impact is seen as both a personal and community concern as 28.1% of participants from CCSROC interviews believe that neighborhood air quality has negatively impacted their health or exacerbate pre-existing conditions, such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), hypertension, respiratory infection, and lung cancer. The interviews reveal a need for expanding the Air District's engagement and work in low-income neighborhoods in San Francisco. The community is requesting information and resources to help inform government decisions in the future. They seek to be a part of finding solutions to the constant poor air quality and living conditions they face.

The interviews helped identify major concerns impacting frontline communities. Interviews were transcribed and coded by Brightline staff with support from La Voz and CYC to transcribe those interviews conducted in Spanish and Cantonese. Major themes and ideas were identified and categorized from the transcriptions. Because interview questions were centered around the community's current access to resources and information from local government and identifying future needs to explore possible solutions, Program partners were able to identify the gaps in information among frontline communities and their current understanding of local government agencies and their decision-making processes. The five key issues raised in the interviews were:

- 1) Air Quality Awareness
- 2) Neighborhood Air Quality
- 3) Traffic Pollution
- 4) Wildfire Smoke Impacts
- 5) Air Quality Filtration Access.

These five themes played a key role in the subjects of the following community workshops. Brightline and Partners were able to strengthen the foundation for capacity-building work through various workshops, covering a range of topics from environmental justice, government decision-making and air pollution exposure reduction.

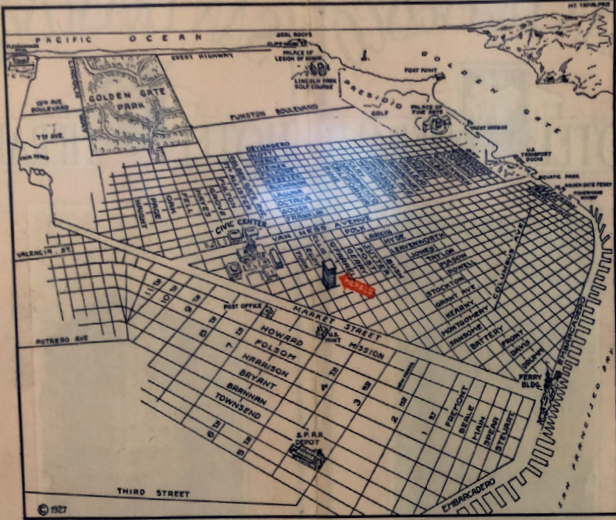
Brightline Program Manager, Cecilia Mejia, presenting preliminary findings to tenant leaders.



Case Study: The Tenderloin

The Tenderloin is one of the most diverse neighborhoods in San Francisco. Residents living there, especially SRO tenants, face disproportionate health impacts from structural barriers to resources for climate change, disaster preparedness and risk reduction. While SROs are a vital part of San Francisco's low-income housing stock and are essential to the people living in the Tenderloin, residents can experience negative impacts from environmental issues more than the average Bay Area resident. The community needs assessment gave Brightline insight into specific concerns. For example, residents in the Tenderloin worry about the overall air quality in their neighborhood, particularly from lack of ventilation in their units and pollution exposure from traffic and construction. The neighborhood's proximity to downtown San Francisco exposes residents to higher air pollution and carbon dioxide emissions from high traffic density, heightening health concerns among various groups in the Tenderloin community.

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THE HERALD

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Two persons - - - 2.50 per day

OUTSIDE ROOM, with private bath—
One person - - - \$2.00 and \$2.50 per day
Two persons - - - 3.00 and 3.50 per day

OUTSIDE ROOM, twin beds and private bath—
- - - \$3.50 and \$4.00 per day

Attractive Weekly and Monthly Rates

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The Herald has the reputation of being one of the cleanest hotels in the city. It is a place where you may feel free to send your wife, sister or mother without the slightest fear.

CLEANLINESS OUR MOTTO

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Herald Garage in Connection.

F. W. SMITH and O. MONSON, Proprietor, and Managers

HOW TO REACH THE HOTEL HERALD

From Ferry Depot take Car No. 4 direct to Hotel.
From Southern Pacific Depot, Third and Townsend Sts., take Car No. 20 to Jones Street and walk one block south, to Eddy. When driving, turn up Jones Street from Market (three blocks).

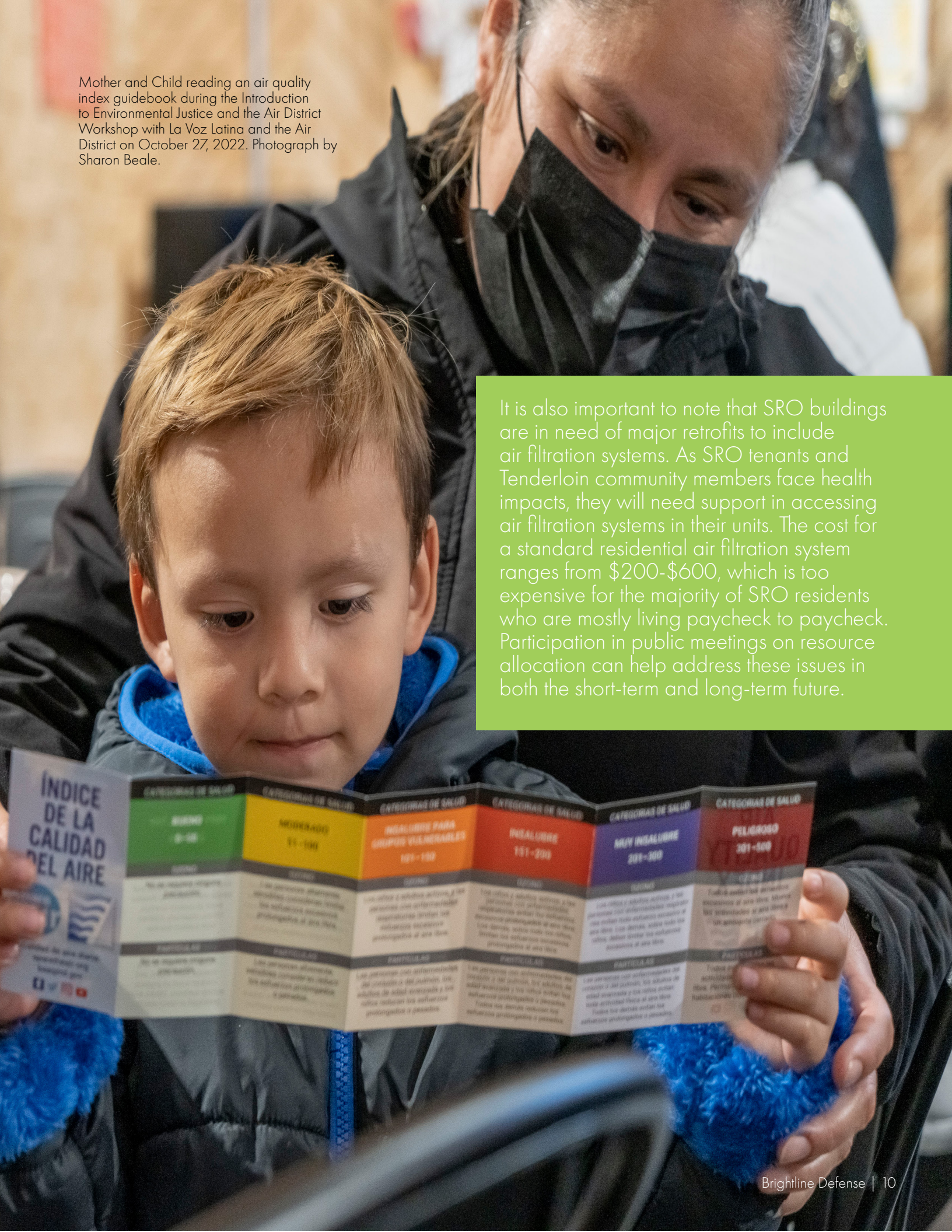
THE HERALD IS CLOSE TO EVERYTHING — YET QUIET

Advertisement with daily rates for an SRO in the Tenderloin in 1927. (Stored in the Tenderloin Museum).

Interviews conducted by La Voz Latina showed that Spanish-speaking residents in the Tenderloin were largely concerned with long-term air pollution impacts and the health of their children and families. Furthermore, one in three of the Spanish-speaking interviewees were concerned with lack of access to air filtration. Residents living in the Tenderloin may experience a higher chance of poor health outcomes due to living in substandard conditions, such as lack of adequate ventilation systems in their homes. 57% of residents living in an SRO in the Tenderloin reported having at least one chronic health condition, such as asthma, hypertension, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease.¹ Access to air filtration can prevent the exacerbation of these symptoms.

¹ Brightline Defense, *Little Room to Breathe: Evaluating Air Quality & Health Impacts In San Francisco's Single Room Occupancy (SRO) Buildings*. (July 2021) <https://www.brightlinedefense.org/our-publications>
9 | Brightline Defense

Mother and Child reading an air quality index guidebook during the Introduction to Environmental Justice and the Air District Workshop with La Voz Latina and the Air District on October 27, 2022. Photograph by Sharon Beale.



It is also important to note that SRO buildings are in need of major retrofits to include air filtration systems. As SRO tenants and Tenderloin community members face health impacts, they will need support in accessing air filtration systems in their units. The cost for a standard residential air filtration system ranges from \$200-\$600, which is too expensive for the majority of SRO residents who are mostly living paycheck to paycheck. Participation in public meetings on resource allocation can help address these issues in both the short-term and long-term future.

CATEGORIAS DE SALUD	CATEGORIAS DE SALUD	CATEGORIAS DE SALUD	CATEGORIAS DE SALUD	CATEGORIAS DE SALUD	CATEGORIAS DE SALUD
BUENO 0-50	MODERADO 51-100	INSALUBRE PARA GRUPOS VULNERABLES 101-150	INSALUBRE 151-200	MUY INSALUBRE 201-300	PELIGROSO 301-500
BUENO No se requiere ninguna precaución.	MODERADO Las personas sensibles deberían considerar reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	INSALUBRE PARA GRUPOS VULNERABLES Las niñas y adultos mayores, y las personas con enfermedades respiratorias, deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	INSALUBRE Las niñas y adultos mayores, y las personas con enfermedades respiratorias deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Las personas sensibles deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	MUY INSALUBRE Las niñas y adultos mayores, y las personas con enfermedades respiratorias deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Las personas sensibles deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	PELIGROSO Todas las personas deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Mantener las actividades al aire libre a un mínimo.
PARTICULAS No se requiere ninguna precaución.	PARTICULAS Las personas sensibles deberían considerar reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	PARTICULAS Las personas con enfermedades respiratorias del corazón o del pulmón, los adultos de edad avanzada y las niñas deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	PARTICULAS Las personas con enfermedades del corazón o del pulmón, los adultos de edad avanzada y las niñas deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Todas las personas sensibles deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	PARTICULAS Las personas con enfermedades del corazón o del pulmón, los adultos de edad avanzada y las niñas deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Todas las personas sensibles deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre.	PARTICULAS Todas las personas deben reducir las actividades recreativas prolongadas al aire libre. Mantener las actividades al aire libre a un mínimo.

Capacity Building: Community Workshops

The Our Community, Our Air Program organized workshops by using data and insights from the community interviews described above, all of which guided the workshops' building process. Program partners sought to create an environment where participants could have the opportunity to interact and ask questions in real-time, which is why they were held in person. The Program partners wanted to make the workshops accessible, thus workshops were held at locations that were identified by community leaders as spaces that local residents were already familiar with and convened in. Additionally, Brightline and Partners incentivized community attendance with raffle gift cards, food, and refreshments to create a comfortable and engaging space. One of the long-term goals of the workshops is to increase participation in local government decision-making processes, so it was important that participants were able to interact directly with Air District staff and learn about the regional air quality monitoring systems. A benefit of having Air District staff present was their demonstration of filters used in monitoring the historically harmful California wildfires in the fall of 2020, giving local residents the opportunity to see and touch the filters used during this time.



Air District Staff Elinor Mattern and Rute Negassi presenting the filters they use in the regional air quality sensors at the Introduction to Environmental Justice and the Air District Workshop on September 15, 2022.

The workshops aimed to empower local residents by increasing their capacity to participate in local government processes to reduce air pollution and address community concerns. The interviews highlighted the barriers residents face in accessing air quality information, air filtration systems, and unfamiliarity with local air quality decision-making processes. The interviews considered lived experiences to ensure the workshops were designed with information that reflected their respective community needs as well as culturally relevant materials and were tailored for monolingual Spanish- and Cantonese-speaking residents.

The community workshops included:

- Introduction to Environmental Justice and the Air District (In English)
- Introduction to Environmental Justice and the Air District (In Spanish)
- Introduction to BAAQMD Public Meetings and Public Comments (In English)
- Introduction to Air Quality and Air District Air Quality Alerts (In Cantonese)
- Wildfire Preparation: Health Impacts and Protective Measures (In Cantonese)

To ensure that workshops built capacity effectively, we designed the workshops to cover broad subject matter and then got more specific as the workshops went on. For example, we noted that 59% of interviewees across communities stated they did not understand the meaning of sustainability, which is an important foundation for understanding environmental justice. To remediate that, we focused on providing introductory workshops that introduced the overlap of environmental justice, sustainability and air quality. With a stronger understanding of environmental justice, community members are able to have agency over decisions that impact their everyday life. The Decision Making at the Air District workshop aimed to give community members a stronger understanding of specific government processes surrounding air quality.

After the workshops, Brightline and CCSROC hosted a watch party of the Community, Equity, Health and Justice Committee on February 15, 2023, where Brightline staff Cecilia Mejia and Trinity Vang highlighted the agenda and meeting process in real-time and local residents were able to submit a public comment.

A row of SROs in the Tenderloin on Eddy Street.



Case Study: Chinatown

CYC is a non-profit organization that serves San Francisco youth by providing a range of resources, such as academic counseling, job training, substance abuse prevention, and leadership development. The Our Community, Our Air Program empowers 10 bilingual CYC youth leaders enrolled in high school to support community engagement by reaching the Chinese-speaking population. San Francisco's Chinatown is the most densely populated area west of Manhattan and its proximity to downtown San Francisco leads to higher traffic density and exposure to its respective harmful pollutants. Youth leaders interviewed Chinese-speaking residents living in San Francisco and learned that air pollution from traffic was a top concern as 42.9% of interviewees mentioned traffic impacts as one of their key concerns around air quality. Chinese-speaking interviewees, whom the majority reside in Chinatown, also showed concern with the overall air quality of their neighborhood at 28.6%. As climate change impacts escalate, the call to invest in effectively reaching monolingual communities increases.



SROs in Chinatown

The community interviews, conducted by the youth leaders, were helpful as the high-school-age cohort crafted their workshops based on community concerns. Youth were able to lead their own workshops and tabling efforts to inform monolingual community members and senior citizens on local air quality monitoring, government programs like Spare the Air, and how to prepare and protect yourself during a wildfire. The community workshops empowered youth leaders to engage with the public, invite participants to join local public meetings and guide community members to resources like signing up for Spare the Air alerts in Cantonese.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Our Community, Our Air Program was able to target Disadvantaged Communities as identified by CalEnviroScreen 4.0, low-income communities and other socially vulnerable frontline community members like monolingual Spanish- and Chinese-speaking residents for community needs assessment and capacity-building in order to access local resources and air quality decision-making processes at the Air District. After sharing their concerns, interviewees were asked to offer recommendations to the Air District on how they can increase public engagement and awareness of local air quality issues. It is critical that the Air District increase community engagement within the local decision-making processes to better serve historically disenfranchised communities. Based on community interviews and feedback from workshops, the following recommendations would remove the barriers associated with accessing and participating in the air quality decision-making process.

In order to increase community engagement we recommend the Air District consider the following:

- Increase engagement to reach audiences from a range of backgrounds and cultures by facilitating in-person community workshops in spaces frontline communities already convene in on topics like navigating government and agency websites to find resources, downloading and using the Spare the Air app, and navigating more complex topics like current projects or policy topics.
- Organize free tours of the Bay Area Metro Center for youth and frontline community members, particularly with a focus on the Air District's lab and office space.
- Provide community members with comprehensive printed maps that include public transit directions to help community members familiarize themselves with the location and transit options for public meetings.
- Expand modes of communication to include printed fliers or in-person outreach in addition to the current method of electronic notifications for meetings on community-centric matters and decisions.



Tenderloin resident speaking during the Introduction to Environmental Justice and the Air District Workshop with La Voz Latina and the Air District on October 27, 2022.
Photograph by Sharon Beale.

To increase accessibility to public meetings and processes, we recommend the Air District consider the following:

- Address language barriers by offering translated versions of Spare the Air app and simplifying the signup process by offering the “Spare the Air” text message service translation options before one enters their phone number to remove the immediate barrier for monolingual communities who may have trouble understanding or be hesitant about what they are signing up for.
- Address the technology divide low-income communities and youth face by providing an in-person digital literacy workshop, in collaboration with San Francisco libraries, to help the community navigate the Air District’s website and online processes to engage them in the public comment process.
- Place a greater emphasis on starting and ending the meetings at the time noted, as this allows people to schedule their participation and submit public comments.



CONCLUSION

As climate change worsens and environmental justice issues continue to disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities, the need to build capacity to participate in local government processes will only grow more important. Brightline’s community needs assessment reveals that lack of information and understanding of government processes is the top concern for residents living in Disadvantaged Communities within San Francisco as they experience significant burdens from environmental justice issues. Community members express their desire to participate in public meetings and voice their concerns, specifically about the air quality issues and how they can limit further exposure to harmful pollutants in their area, but are unfamiliar with the Air District and the decision-making process surrounding air quality. We must address the lack of familiarity with the Air District, access to the public meeting location, technology divide, and access to transportation restricts participation in order to authentically engage communities. Program partners will continue to facilitate community workshops in order to build community leadership and increase authentic participation in local government processes over the next year.

Appendix I: Community Engagement Toolkit

Introduction

As the boom in technology coincides with the increase in wildfires across the globe, there is a greater interest in understanding the air around us. The air we breathe affects our health, especially for those with respiratory diseases and/or chronic illnesses. Regional air quality monitoring is conducted by local government agencies across the United States with the intention of monitoring air quality trends on short-term and long-term scales to inform public planning and policy.

The increased access to low-cost sensors allows communities to deploy and create their own sensor network in areas of community interest, something that previously was not accessible. Low-cost sensor networks also create access to localized air quality monitoring and open data access. There are two major goals in creating and deploying a sensor network, 1) study design and 2) community engagement. Low-cost sensor networks offer an opportunity to engage and empower frontline communities to participate in local decision-making spaces within public processes which can ultimately support resource allocation and investment.

Tenant Leaders touring BAAQMD offices.



Low-Cost Sensor Networks

There are many low-cost sensor options, some share instantaneous data, others allow users to collect historical data. Depending on your needs, one may work better than others. The following questions can help you determine which is the right fit for the network: Are community members interested in learning about air quality and its health impacts? Are community members interested in checking the network like they check the weather? Are community members interested in checking air quality on a larger, regional level, like through annual heat waves or wildfires? Are community members interested in comparing air quality in different neighborhoods? Choosing the right sensors can facilitate engagement by ensuring that community members feel their needs are being met. Moreover, it is important to engage community members and leaders in this process to encourage their participation in public processes that lead to decision-making and resource allocation.

Community Engagement Within Your Network

Deploying sensors in areas that community leaders are interested in encourages a larger pool of community members to check their air quality on the sensor network. It is important to engage the stakeholders like community-based organizations, local residents, youth and existing programs before and during your network deployment to ensure community members feel invested in the process. Air quality monitoring is a great tool to engage and inform the community on regional air quality trends and air pollution health impacts. Capacity-building workshops and programming for youth leadership and community empowerment will encourage their authentic participation in the public planning process around air quality developments which will create the opportunity to advocate for longer-term change and solutions.

Government Agency Processes

Low-cost sensor networks can provide localized air quality information for community members who are interested in their local air quality, but are also interested in participating in local government decision-making on the topic. Attending public meetings or crafting public comments can be daunting for community members who are unfamiliar with government processes. Each government agency must follow guidelines for meeting proceedings and if you are interested in needs assessment and capacity-building, you must understand the current public meeting and public comment processes that are underway from your local government agencies. There are also government agencies that have resources and programs focused on increasing community engagement. This is a great opportunity to increase civic participation and ensure that government agencies consider frontline communities in their future programming and planning.

Conclusion

Understanding the air we breathe is critical. Low-cost sensor networks can create the space for authentic community engagement and empowerment of frontline communities to ensure that local decision-making will ultimately support clean air and environmental justice for all.

Appendix II: Community Interview Questions

Brightline worked with Program Partners to create ten interview questions for public participation needs assessment.

1. What do you know about sustainability within your housing?
2. Do you practice sustainable habits (for example: sorting your trash or recycling)?
3. What are your top concerns about air quality or your environment?
4. What would you like your local government to know?
5. [Interviewers gave background on AB 617 and the Air District] How would you go about raising concerns about impacts on your community to local government?
6. Have you attended a public meeting hosted by a government agency before? For example, a San Francisco Board of Supervisors Meeting, Bay Area Air Quality Management District Commissioners Meeting, or a San Francisco Planning Department Meeting.
7. If yes, which public meetings?
8. Do you know what a public comment is? If yes, have you ever submitted one?
9. What could make the public comment process easier for you to do?
10. What is your advice for the Air District if they want to support your engagement and feedback in their project?

