

Gap Analysis Report

ACCESS & INCLUSION IN THE TAHOE BASIN



Photo: Tom Zikas, courtesy of Achieve Tahoe

THE MISSION OF THE TAHOE FUND is to use the power of philanthropy to improve the Lake Tahoe environment for all to enjoy.

We commissioned Point b(e) Strategies to conduct a gap analysis to better understand the current state of access and inclusion in the Tahoe Basin. To inform this research, Point b(e) Strategies held interviews with many of our grantees, partners, and community leaders in Kings Beach, Incline Village, South Lake Tahoe and Truckee.

In this piece, we highlight key findings from the Point (b)e Strategies analysis and share examples of projects and programs that are already making a difference.



Key Challenges in Advancing Access & Inclusion in Tahoe

As part of the interview process, respondents were asked to share the barriers to access and inclusion within the Tahoe Basin. The issues raised are significant and multifaceted, and fall into the following categories:

Invisible Working Class

In South Lake Tahoe and Kings Beach, many residents and families are Latino. Respondents explained that Latino communities in Tahoe feel largely invisible. They also shared that there is a widely-held assumption that all Latino people are low-income and all low-income people are Latino. Many service providers challenged this assumption, noting that Latino residents exist across the economic spectrum.

Cost of Living

There is a dearth of affordable housing options for both low-income and middle-income families as they must compete with visitors for affordable properties. Some expressed how this tension impacts a sense of community, as many neighborhoods are nearly empty on weekdays. Others mentioned a loss of community as residents are forced out of the Tahoe Basin and are moving to Carson City and Reno and commuting to jobs.

Access to Recreation

While the Tahoe Basin has world-class trails and pathways, they are often inaccessible to lower-income communities. Respondents cited a lack of transportation as a barrier to popular recreation activities such as snow sports, hiking, and swimming in the lake, especially for lower-income communities. They also noted important cultural barriers, including the belief that recreation in the Tahoe Basin is for the benefit of white and wealthy visitors and residents, not for lower-income residents or residents who are people of color.

Community Tensions

Both amenities and services in the Tahoe Basin cater to visitors and second-home owners, and this impacts home prices, the cost of goods, and access to recreation. A tension exists within the community of full-time residents who struggle to make ends meet and visitors who rely on residents to maintain services and amenities.

Lack of Diversity

Most residents and visitors are white and wealthy, and therefore there is a lack of visible diversity by race or socio-economic status. There is also scant diversity related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and ability status.

Transportation Systems

Respondents noted that the public transit bus systems in Lake Tahoe do not effectively meet the needs of residents who rely on these systems to connect them to employment, services, schools, and their homes. Further, bus routes do not connect lower-income neighborhoods to amenities and services, buses run infrequently, and bus service is unreliable.

Youth Disengagement

The Tahoe Basin experiences a “brain drain” related to its youth, as young adults cannot afford to return to the area after college because of the lack of economic opportunity and the cost of housing.

Opportunities to Expand Access & Inclusion in the Tahoe Basin

Many opportunities to increase access and inclusion in the Tahoe Basin were identified through this gap analysis. Fortunately, several Tahoe Fund partners have projects underway that are already making an impact, highlighted within each of the following areas.

Recreation

Increase Accessibility in Paths & Trails

Many trails and pathways within the Tahoe Basin are not accessible to people with disabilities or emerging outdoor enthusiasts from different cultural backgrounds. Often, well-maintained paths and trailheads are located in areas around the lake that are convenient for wealthy visitors and residents. Expanding trailheads and trail connections in lower-income residential neighborhoods would create better access for diverse communities.



East Shore Trail

Tahoe's East Shore Trail has ample parking, a paved path, and signage that help increase access to the outdoors for diverse communities.

Expand Low-Barrier Recreation Opportunities

Physical and cultural barriers exist for people of color and mixed-income communities when engaging in outdoor recreation in Lake Tahoe. This includes a feeling of not being welcome on beaches, trails, and on the mountain. Low-barrier recreation activities like fishing, camping, swimming, and hiking should be available for both residents and visitors.



Achieve Tahoe

Achieve Tahoe offers outdoor recreation programs like archery, hiking, paddle sports and sailing for people with disabilities.

Stewardship

Improved Interpretive Signage & Wayfinding

Improved signage and wayfinding throughout the Tahoe Basin would help ease fears related to outdoor recreation. Sharing this information in multiple languages, including Spanish and Washoe, would help increase accessibility for diverse communities.



Inclusivity & Accessibility on the Tahoe Rim Trail

The Tahoe Rim Trail Association created new signage, maps, and brochures in Spanish to help make the Tahoe Rim Trail system more accessible to Latino communities.

Historically Accurate, Respectful, & Culturally-Appropriate Storytelling

As tourism has increased in the Tahoe Basin, Washoe people feel increasingly unwelcome and pushed out. Representatives from the Tribe noted that a lack of signage and recognition of Washoe people at Meeks Bay and at other important cultural locations for the Tribe around Lake Tahoe contributes to this feeling of exclusion. Providing accurate history about the Washoe people and including land acknowledgements in messaging is paramount to break down this barrier.



Taylor Creek Visitors Center Audio Tour in Washoe

The National Forest Foundation created an audio tour for the Taylor Creek Visitors Center to provide a guided experience on the natural and historic elements of the land. This tour is available in Washoe, Spanish, and English.

Youth Engagement

Create Long-Term Opportunities for Youth to Recreate

A lifetime love for the outdoors requires ample time and low barriers to access. Providing one-time or short-term experiences may inspire some youth to seek out ongoing opportunities, but for most, it confirms that recreation within the Tahoe Basin is not for people of color and low-income communities. Engaging youth in sustained programming over time will help them build strong connections to nature and become lifelong stewards of Lake Tahoe.



Adventure Risk Challenge

Adventure Risk Challenge's Community Leadership Program is an immersive literacy, leadership, and outdoor program for underserved youth that engages kids in workshops and weekend activities, in addition to a month-long summer course.

Transportation

Support More Equitable Transportation

Existing transit options in the Tahoe Basin cater to visitors and do not connect low-income residents to work, school, or community services. Free transit options do not connect residents to beaches, trails, or resorts. To ensure all individuals and families, regardless of income, can both recreate and meet their daily needs, investment in equitable and accessible public transportation is paramount.



TART Connect

TART Connect provides free, on-demand, curb-to-curb rides helping people frequent trails and other establishments they may not have been able to access safely or conveniently in the past.

Relationships & Culture

Build Relationships with Latino Communities

There is a strong Latino community within the Tahoe Basin that often feels invisible. Building meaningful relationships with community leaders and investing time to identify community needs is necessary to expand access and inclusion efforts that are both community-centered and community-informed.



Tahoe's Nature for All

Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences (TINS) offers free nature experiences for community members of different social and economic backgrounds, including the Latino community, survivors of abuse, and those experiencing mental health challenges.

Increase Opportunities for Washoe People to Access the Lake

The Tahoe Basin is historically Washoe land, yet many members of the Washoe Tribe do not have access to the many recreational experiences that exist here. While free recreation and stewardship programming exists, often the Tribe is not considered or included. Organizations should offer more dedicated programming for Washoe people and youth.



Tahoe Backcountry Alliance

Tahoe Backcountry Alliance offers free winter recreation experiences for kids from the Washoe Tribe of Nevada and California, including providing them with cross country ski equipment, snowshoes and additional winter gear.



Photo: Tahoe Institute for Natural Sciences

Program Support

Meaningful Consultation with the Washoe Tribe

Representatives from the Washoe Tribe shared that they are asked to give their blessing to projects and initiatives that occur within their historic tribal lands, but they are rarely asked to provide meaningful consultation in the planning or design phases. Organizations should require meaningful consultation with the Tribe on projects that directly impact them and their ancestral lands.

Capacity-Building for Nonprofit Staff & Programs

Respondents noted that free or reduced resort and park passes and scholarships are not always beneficial because the majority of youth cannot fully utilize them due to a lack of gear and reliable transportation. There is an opportunity to invest in nonprofit staffing and programs to more fully engrain access and inclusion into organizations' culture and curricula.

Real change requires collaboration, vision, leadership and investment in these efforts to expand access and inclusion in the Tahoe Basin.



Photo: First Tracks Productions

Many respondents shared the need for:

Vision

Creating baseline access and inclusion metrics and goals that can be shared by partners as we work toward collective impact.

Collaboration

Continuing conversations about challenges and opportunities, alongside diverse community members, to ensure all voices are heard.

Leadership

Ensuring that internal policies, practices, and procedures advance access and inclusion, especially at leading organizations in the Tahoe Basin. They also highlighted the need for organizations to move towards a more representative and diverse board of directors and staff.

Investment

Prioritizing projects and programs that expand access and inclusion in the Tahoe Basin.



The Tahoe Fund and its partners are committed to ensuring all people within the Lake Tahoe Basin have access to meaningful outdoor experiences. Thank you to Point b(e) Strategies for conducting this gap analysis, and all those who took the time to share meaningful responses that informed this study. To see the full gap analysis report, please reach out to Amy Berry, Tahoe Fund CEO at aberry@tahoe fund.org.

The Tahoe Fund acknowledges that we live, work, and recreate on the traditional and ancestral homeland of the Waš'í-šiw (Washoe people – the people from here).