

# State Coastal Conservancy

## Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Report

2018-2023

June 6, 2024

All Californians have the right to access the coast and to live in a healthy environment.

The Coastal Conservancy is committed to addressing injustices and inequities along the California coast. We recognize that a history of injustice, exclusion, displacement, and extractive processes towards California's Native Americans, Black people, people of color (BIPOC), and other frontline communities has resulted in inequitable access to the coast and its resources that persists today.

This report summarizes the actions taken by the Coastal Conservancy from 2018-2023 to identify, understand, and address these inequities and our efforts to implement practices at our agency to deliver more equitable outcomes.

### Background

In 2017, the Conservancy formed a Justice Equity Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Committee among staff to address inequities in our grantmaking, improve community engagement, increase diversity of our staff, and provide staff training on environmental justice and equity. Since late 2017, the JEDI Committee has convened bi-monthly to explore how our mission of providing coastal access and implementing climate adaptation projects intersect with environmental injustices throughout California.

The committee's discussions have been ongoing and driven by a subgroup of interested staff members organized around:

- **Advancing Equitable Access:** Enhance policies, programs, and practices to promote equitable access to California's coast and coastal watersheds for all communities.
- **Continuous Evaluation and Improvement:** Regularly assess and adjust program priorities, grant funding, contracting, hiring practices, communications, and community engagement to address and prevent inequities.
- **Expanding Outreach and Engagement:** Increase outreach efforts and engage with tribes and community-based organizations to foster broader community involvement.
- **Empowering Systemically Excluded Communities:** Enhance the involvement of systemically excluded communities in decision-making processes within the Conservancy.
- **Inclusive Hiring Practices:** Review and improve hiring practices to attract applications from a diverse population of Californians and support staff career development.
- **Staff Training:** Provide training in environmental justice and cultural education to ensure awareness and inclusivity towards diverse communities.

All these strategies are driven by dedicated individuals on staff striving to create an inclusive culture within the agency.

In 2018, the Conservancy joined the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a network of government agencies dedicated to advancing racial equity by critically evaluating how to better serve Californians, regardless of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, migration status, or zip code. Over a dozen staff members, including the executive and management team, participated in a year-long training program to identify and address inequity in our work. Using this framework, Conservancy staff began the process of developing JEDI Guidelines.

The JEDI Guidelines provide an overarching framework for the ongoing work of Conservancy staff through a public-facing document. They were co-developed with community focus groups across California, environmental justice advocates, project partners, and a stakeholder workshop, in which our board members participated. In 2020, the Coastal Conservancy Board adopted these guidelines, establishing principles and goals for our agency.

Since then, the Conservancy has made substantial progress towards implementing the guidelines by directing funding to projects that benefit systemically excluded communities, reducing barriers to accessing our grants, and supporting projects that share power with systemically excluded communities and California's Native American tribes.

We recognize that there is still much work to be done, as injustices have persisted for centuries. It will require significant, sustained, and intentional effort to uplift systemically excluded communities.

### **Goal 1: Prioritize Equity**

The Conservancy is committed to improving and expanding our efforts to embed equity into our grantmaking. This encompasses changes to the way we select projects, award funding, manage grants, and work with partners.

During 2020 and 2021, the Conservancy worked to update its [Project Selection Criteria](#). This task was identified as an implementation action under the JEDI Guidelines to incorporate recommendations related to meaningful engagement, broad community benefits, and working with California's Tribes. The Conservancy conducted public outreach to solicit input on the Criteria before the Board adopted the new Criteria in September 2021. These new criteria guide us towards projects that have broad community engagement and support, meaningful tribal engagement, and deliver benefits to underserved communities.

The [Coastal Conservancy's 2023-2027 Strategic Plan, adopted by the Board in December of 2022](#), aims to allocate 40% of the agency's funding to benefit systemically excluded communities and California Native American tribes. Since 2023, nearly two-thirds (63%) of Conservancy funding has supported projects that benefit tribes and systemically excluded communities. To ensure this funding has a meaningful impact, the Conservancy has implemented strategies to uplift and reflect community values into our grant program structure. We have strengthened our partnerships with tribes and Community Based

Organizations (CBOs) by supporting “Land Back” projects, developing accessible grant resources, reaching out to new partners, and providing technical assistance.

In the Strategic Plan, the Conservancy committed to returning power to tribes. As of 2023, Conservancy has funded 12 projects in collaboration with Native Californian tribes. This includes funding tribal engagement and planning, “Land Back” projects, and projects that support tribal leadership of restoration projects. To support staff working with tribes, we have increased our internal tribal trainings and created a tribal guidance document that walks staff through important protocols, though the document is ever evolving as our agency continues to learn. One of the many tribally led projects our agency was proud to support is a grant of \$4,500,000 to the Hoopa Valley Tribe to acquire the 10,300-acre Hupa Mountain Conservation Property in the Klamath River watershed to protect and restore water quality, anadromous fish habitat, wildlife habitat, wildlife connectivity, and forest health, and for tribal and public access. The acquisition was completed in December 2023.

Internally, the Conservancy has worked to streamline our funding programs to reduce complexity, redundancy, and workload for applicants. In 2022, we introduced a two-stage grant application process, starting with a brief pre-application. Only those projects that pass this initial stage are invited to submit a full grant application, significantly reducing the workload for potential partners and aiding staff in screening non-qualifying projects early on.

To support applicants, staff have developed grant application guidance that is tailored to Conservancy grants. We also offer grant program webinars and individualized pre-consultation sessions. These resources are available on our website for partners' convenience, making the application process more approachable and inclusive for a wider pool of applicants—especially the organizations that do not have grant writers on staff.

For the grant management process, staff created a [Grantee Manual](#) with informational videos and infographics to support our partners. We now host onboarding webinars after each board meeting as a technical assistance service. We also established an advance payment process and reduced project withholding from 10% to 5% to better address the financial realities of community-based organizations (CBOs) and smaller NGOs.

At the end of the grant application process and upon project completion, we ask our partners to fill out a survey, and we continuously assess survey responses and incorporate feedback to improve our grantmaking and grant management.

Additionally, staff completed a [“Tips for Meaningful Community Engagement”](#) to provide concrete ideas for better engaging communities in project planning and a [“Tips for Equitable Workforce Development in Environmental Conservation Projects”](#) to clarify requirements for Conservancy grants and support fair wages and training programs on state-funded projects. A webinar was held to share examples of equitable workforce development with partners and other state agencies.

## **Goal 2: Enjoy the Coast**

California's ocean, coast, and beaches are spaces of joy, relaxation, and healing. The ability to experience the coast without fear of financial cost, physical barriers, or feelings of not belonging is crucial to how people cultivate their own lifelong connections with the coast.

Our Explore the Coast, Explore the Coast Overnight, and Coastal Stories programs fund coastal experiences and projects that foster joy and belonging on the coast for the diverse population of California. To reduce barriers for people with disabilities, we have funded grant programs to procure adaptive equipment, including beach wheelchairs, and we updated our 40-year-old Coastal Access Project Standards to prioritize JEDI values, such as accessibility for people with disabilities, coordinating with California's tribes and providing equitable and inclusive coastal access. Our goal is to create a coast that reflects the diverse values of California's communities.

Through our Explore the Coast program (ETC), we fund coastal experiences for ETC Priority Communities that include but are not limited to lower-income individuals and households, people with disabilities, people of color, immigrant communities, and foster youth, among others. In 2019, the ETC Grant Program established an Advisory Board (AB) composed of experts and individuals experienced in outdoor education and equity. The AB initiative aims to share power and receive community guidance from those who are either from or have expertise working with the ETC priority communities.

Since the formation of the AB, we have seen an increase in projects that serve people of color, tribes, families, and people with disabilities. The AB's wide range of knowledge and experience has led to robust discussions, resulting in projects being prioritized for funding that might otherwise have been overlooked. In 2023, the internal ETC committee conducted a multi-method evaluation of the strengths and benefits of having an Advisory Board. Notably, staff interactions with the AB have translated to meaningful professional and personal development among Conservancy staff, such as gaining a better understanding of the needs and perspectives of various communities and what to look for in grant applications. This process has aided in deepening the staff's cultural humility.

In 2020, Amid the COVID-19 outbreak and the death of George Floyd that propelled the historic Black Lives Matter movement, social injustices of all kinds were brought to the forefront, including a call to action to address environmental disparities impacting BIPOC communities. Staff responded to the call to action by, among other things, introducing Coastal Stories, a new grant program to fund installations or interpretive materials that represent diverse communities and perspectives that historically have been excluded from narratives of California's coast and publicly accessible lands. The program aims to broaden California's coastal narratives to ensure everyone feels comfortable and welcomed in public outdoor recreational spaces. Since the program began in 2022, 16 Coastal Stories projects have been funded.

### **Goal 3: Protect & Restore the Coast**

The Conservancy ensures the coast is protected and restored for existing and future generations. In undertaking conservation and restoration projects, staff collaborate with partners to meaningfully engage the community and prioritize projects that support workforce

development and deliver benefits to underserved communities. As a result, nearly two-thirds (63%) of Conservancy funding has supported projects that benefit systemically excluded communities.

The Conservancy's Central and Southern California regions, with other state agencies, co-implement the Community Wetland Restoration Grant Programs that support community involvement in wetland restoration activities and foster education about wetland ecosystems. One project funded by this program was Outward Bound Adventures, a nationwide non-profit dedicated to outdoor education for BIOPC youth. Outward Bound Adventures is leading hands-on paid conservation workforce training project to engage 25 adults from low-income communities in restoring four acres of riparian/coastal stream corridor in Malibu Creek State Park. The project offers an experiential education program to improve participants' knowledge of Malibu Creek State Park and the value of wetlands ecosystems and riparian habitats.

The Conservancy believes that working with Community Based Organizations (CBOs) is a vital component of a successful conservation project. CBO partnership advances community representation in project development, ensures the project is aligned with the communities' priorities, and provides opportunities such as coastal access and climate education. To help build relationships between our agency, project partners, and CBOs, staff developed resources, including "Tips for Meaningful Community Engagement," and hosted an internal workshop on working with CBOs. In our grantmaking, we encourage partners to allocate funding for community engagement, give priority to projects that demonstrate existing community support, and frequently fund CBOs directly to implement projects in the Conservancy's jurisdiction.

#### **Goal 4: Climate Ready**

The Conservancy supports projects to help communities adapt to and mitigate rising seas, intense storms, and catastrophic wildfires. Between July 2022 and April 2024, the Conservancy Board authorized nearly \$400 million for coastal protection and sea level rise adaptation projects. We know that climate change will disproportionately affect frontline communities, so we are directing funding and implementing strategies.

In 2020, the Environmental Health Coalition, a community-based organization, was awarded a grant from the Conservancy to increase climate resiliency in the underserved Barrio Logan community of San Diego by developing a Barrio Logan Community Plan Update and prepare a plan for the construction of Boston Linear Park. The two plans incorporated grassroots community leadership into every aspect and ensured climate change education within the community. This grant ensured the preservation of cultural values, environmental safety, recreational opportunities, and climate mitigation strategies to foster a thriving community and prepare for climate extremes. In the coming years, Conservancy aims to reach out to communities that are in hazard zones or have not received our funding with the intention of funding more climate resilience planning for frontline communities.

Recognizing the importance of tribes' traditional ecological knowledge in creating a climate-ready future, the Conservancy is funding acquisition, co-management, restoration, and fire

fuel reduction projects led by tribes. These projects included a grant to the Pala Band of Mission Indians to implement fuel treatments on the Pala Indian Reservation in San Diego County. The Tribe used tribal ecological knowledge and hired within to reduce fuels and clear vegetation around structures and along roads on approximately 119 acres of tribal land.

### **Goal 5: Organizational Goals**

To successfully provide public access and implement climate adaptation projects, we must prioritize transparency, recruit diverse applicants for Conservancy jobs, and train and promote our team in a way that reflects California's diverse community values. The Conservancy is committed to fostering diversity across all levels, enhancing our team's problem-solving capabilities, and bringing new skill sets to address our agency's priorities. We aim to be transparent and accountable in our efforts, sharing information about our work and achievements with stakeholders and the public.

In 2019, Conservancy staff participated in implicit bias training. This training aimed to help hiring managers and staff recognize and understand their personal biases and cultivate conscious decision-making in all processes at the Conservancy. This includes making hiring decisions based solely on candidates' qualifications, selecting partners based on their project and community outreach, and encouraging projects to consider and address barriers that may disconnect communities from the project's benefit.

As part of the 2020 Black Lives Matter movement's call to action, four staff members organized additional training modules, which were delivered in 2021. Staff members felt compelled to train their colleagues to create a more meaningful and impactful training experience around microaggression, examples of allyship, moving from allyship to solidarity, and tokenism vs. genuine praise. The training was well received, and those who participated received a certificate.

The Conservancy has made extensive changes to our recruitment and hiring practices to increase the diversity of our candidate pools. Previously, the Conservancy focused on candidates with master's degrees and significant experience in conservation, which limited the number of qualified candidates. To address this, staff explored ways to hire early-career conservationists, broadening the pool of candidates and providing career development opportunities for young Californians. We now frequently hire project staff at the Staff Services Analyst (SSA) level and train staff within program units to qualify for the entry-level Conservancy Project Development Analyst I (CPDA I) classification. This approach has significantly increased the diversity and size of our candidate pool. The Conservancy's workforce analysis for 2023 demonstrates a 45% increase in diversity in the Project Manager classifications since 2017. In 2023, the Conservancy promoted 20 staff, helping to retain our staff and support their professional development. Our agency also worked diligently to address salary disparity issues among the Coastal Zone Management Agencies project staff with CalHR, resulting in substantial special salary adjustments for CPDAs in 2024.

In 2021, the Coastal Conservancy created a Diversity and Inclusion Human Resources position, concentrating on workshops for workforce, analysis, planning, training, and equitable hiring practices from CalHR trainings. This position also coordinates bi-monthly meetings to discuss

and evaluate ongoing hiring practices. These meetings resulted in creating a bank of questions to use in interviews and statement of qualifications for all Conservancy classifications, designed to ensure an unbiased perspective. The HR team also developed and maintains an outreach distribution list to support hiring managers in reaching and recruiting a broad range of job candidates.

In late 2022, Coastal Conservancy hired its first full-time Tribal and Equity Liaison position to support key projects and help implement the JEDI Guidelines. In the past year, she coordinated ten internal staff training sessions, including a session on working with community-based organizations and others session on experiences with tribal advisory committees and tribal cultural humility. In addition, staff are encouraged to participate in the JEDI Committee meetings, held bi-monthly. The Tribal and Equity Liaison offers open "office hours" for staff to consult on specific questions related to their work. We also now have a tribal guidance document to assist staff, though the document is ever evolving as our agency is learning. Our Tribal and Equity Liaison was promoted to this role from the Conservancy's South Coast program, as she has been one of many key staff supporting the JEDI cultural shift at our agency.

Finally, we obtained funding from NOAA to develop tribal and equity training for the staff and the other state Coastal Zone Management Agencies. Key staff from each agency have been coordinating in 2023 and aim to implement evergreen trainings in 2024.

## **2024 and Beyond**

Although the Conservancy has made progress over the years, we acknowledge that much more significant work remains to support systemically excluded communities wronged by government for generations and bear disproportionate environmental burdens. In the next year, we aim to complete the following tasks with the support of key staff across our agency:

- Update the Conservancy Tribal Consultation Policy with tribal input and receive feedback from tribes on active grant barriers.
- Coordinate Tribal Monitoring and Cultural Resource protection protocols for project staff.
- Document best practices for outreach across various grant programs, which can be implemented agency wide.
- Host a Parks Related Anti Displacement training for staff.
- Develop staff training on implementing Coastal Stories elements into restoration and coastal access projects.
- Evaluate and develop quantifiable metrics in our database tracking systems to implement equitable restoration projects and explore ways to share power with the community on these projects.
- Outline lessons learned from projects working directly with CBOs.
- Complete a geospatial analysis of where Conservancy funds have been awarded in the past, where unsuccessful applicants were, and find gaps in funding systemically excluded communities.
- Read, analyze, and share project applicant and management survey data with staff.

- Simplify website navigation to make resources more accessible for potential and current grantees.
- Modify all duty statements to allocate 5% or more of the position's time to JEDI work and develop a creative list of what that could include.
- Use performance appraisals to develop upward mobility strategies for staff retention.
- Implement a Exit Interview process for outgoing staff.

| Principals                                     | Progress Made  | Future Goals   |
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| <b>Goal 1: Prioritize Equity</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Streamlined our funding programs to reduce complexity and redundancies.</li> <li>• Instituted a two-stage grant application process with a simple pre-application.</li> <li>• Developed grant application and management guidance for grantees.</li> <li>• Offered webinars, individualized pre-consultation sessions, and recorded short videos for grant applicants and awardees.</li> <li>• Established an advance payment process and reduced project withholding from 10% to 5% to better address financial realities.</li> <li>• Completed a prevailing wage memo to clarify requirements.</li> <li>• Created a "Tips for Equitable Workforce Development" document.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update Conservancy Tribal Consultation Policy, with tribal input; and receive feedback from tribes on active grant barriers.</li> <li>• Develop JEDI guidance documents to support staff with key project questions and outline best practices for community engagement.</li> <li>• Coordinate a Tribal Monitoring and Cultural Resource protection protocols for project staff.</li> <li>• Read, analyze, and share project applicant and management survey data with staff.</li> <li>• Simplify website navigation to make resources more accessible for potential and current grantees.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Goal 2: Enjoy the Coast</b>                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updated the 40-year-old Coastal Access Project Standards.</li> <li>• Defined ETC Priority Communities.</li> <li>• Established an ETC Advisory Board.</li> <li>• Established the new grant program, Coastal Stories.</li> <li>• Implemented 8 Explore the Coast Overnight projects.</li> <li>• Created "Tips for Meaningful Community Engagement"</li> <li>• Planned and built trails and amenities inclusive of all Californians.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop an all-staff training on integrating Coastal Stories into restoration and coastal access projects.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Goal 3: Protect &amp; Restore the Coast</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 63% of Conservancy funding has supported projects that benefit systemically excluded communities.</li> <li>• Promoted inclusive project with includes recreational access and climate adaptation strategies for all Californians</li> <li>• Provided workforce development for local residents and fostered education around habitat restoration.</li> <li>• Community Wetland Restoration Grant Program.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Host Parks Related Anti Displacement training for Staff.</li> <li>• Evaluate and develop quantifiable metrics in our database tracking systems to implement equitable restoration projects and explore ways to share power with the community on these projects.</li> <li>• Outline lessons learned from projects working directly with CBOs.</li> <li>• Document best practices for outreach across various grant programs, which can be implemented agency wide.</li> </ul>   |



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| <p><b>Goal 4:<br/>Climate<br/>Ready</b></p>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implemented Nature Based Solutions Projects.</li> <li>• Developed a Wildfire Resilience Program.</li> <li>• Conducted projects with tribes, including Land Back and co-management.</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Complete a geospatial analysis of where Conservancy funds have been awarded in the past, where unsuccessful applicants were, and to find gaps in funding systemically excluded communities.</li> <li>• Outreach to communities in hazard zones or have not received funding.</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Goal 5:<br/>Organizational<br/>Goals</b></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired Diversity and Inclusion, HR analyst.</li> <li>• Hired Tribal and Equity Liaison.</li> <li>• Provided implicit bias training for staff.</li> <li>• Obtained funding from NOAA to develop tribal and equity training.</li> <li>• Conducted 3-part JEDI Pods for staff.</li> <li>• Coordinated ten internal staff training sessions.</li> <li>• Held open "office hours" for staff on projects.</li> <li>• Held bi-monthly JEDI staff meetings.</li> <li>• Participated in CNRA roundtables.</li> <li>• Hired at the Staff Services Analyst (SSA) level and trained staff within program units to qualify for the entry-level Conservancy Project Development Analyst I (CPDA I) classification.</li> <li>• 45% increase in diversity in Project Manager positions since 2017.</li> <li>• Improved transparency within our agency on hiring and promotional practices.</li> <li>• Organized an outreach distribution list for job candidate recruitment.</li> <li>• Implemented exit surveys.</li> <li>• Improved our hiring practices. This included creating an interview question bank.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support implementing 5% or more JEDI into all work duty statements and develop a creative list of what that looks like to fulfill this.</li> <li>• Use performance appraisals to develop staff trainings/ upward mobility strategies for staff retention.</li> <li>• Implement a Exit Interview process for outgoing staff.</li> </ul> |