

State Coastal Conservancy
Equity and Environmental Justice Guidelines Development
10/16/19 Bay Area Focus Group – Final Report 11/19/19
Facilitated by Nahal Ghoghaie Ipakchi

Summary:

In October of 2019, Nahal Ghoghaie Ipakchi of EcoEquity Consulting, was tasked with facilitating focus group discussions with Bay Area community-based Environmental Justice and Equity leaders to provide insight and guidance on the State Coastal Conservancy's (SCC) efforts to update its policies, programs, and practices to prioritize equitable access to environmental, social, and economic benefits to California's coastal region. EcoEquity identified and invited participants based on their unique and extensive backgrounds in equity-based work in the Bay Area. All ten participants were asked the questions laid out in this report during the 90 minute focus group, and were provided \$100 stipends for their time. Extensive notes were taken, and the majority of the responses are integrated in the following report via narrative descriptions, paraphrasing, as well as some direct anonymous quotes.

The discussion focused on identifying ways in which the SCC's current programs and operations can be improved to more adequately institutionalize Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) into its program priorities, grant funding, contracting, hiring practices, partnerships, communication, and community engagement. Discussion themes included:

- Perceptions of the SCC and government agencies
- Barriers to community engagement
- SCC's grantmaking process
- Capacity building for both community-based organizations and for SCC staff
- SCC staff diversity and cultural competency

Key Findings:

1. The terminology that is currently being used to discuss equity often comes across as jargon, and should be reassessed and refined on an ongoing basis.
 - a. Objectives of the work tend to get lost in the jargon. When these programs are referred to as "Equity" or "JEDI" it risks a false premise of positive actions from the government without recognizing the negative histories that have gotten us to this existing inequitable system.
 - b. Referring to communities as "vulnerable" or "under-resourced" frames these often relatively resilient communities in a deficit-based framing, which is not empowering nor respectful to the individuals and neighborhoods in question.
2. The true cost of genuine and robust community engagement processes is far from being adequately recognized. Community based organizations are often expected to bill at rates that are only a fraction of their more technical (engineers, academics, scientists, etc.) counterparts. Budgets should allow staff time for relationship-building activities that can help to develop trust while healing community trauma.

3. Quantitative indicators and methods make it difficult to fully understand the expertise of the applicant, as well as their often more holistic, qualitative, yet very effective methods. Government staff and individuals tasked with scoring proposals should take the time to meet with applicants and learn about their community engagement methods and their indicators of success.
4. Grant scoring criteria needs to be more holistic and should explicitly include and encourage projects that enhance shoreline and watershed stewardship through non-traditional methods, such as arts, culture and more creative means. Frontline communities are less interested in and connected to the typical SCC-funded types of projects, such as habitat tours, beach cleanups, etc.
5. The grant application language that strictly emphasizes the shoreline or watershed-based location of the project should be amended to be more inclusive of projects that are relevant to frontline communities. Projects that take place closer to where these communities reside can still be effective at helping residents recognize how their at-home behaviors can impact shoreline and watershed habitat health.

Beyond these key takeaways, focus group discussions explored a wide range of issues related to how participants would like to see the SCC address a legacy of inequities, including the severe deficit of investment by government programs up until this point. This report provides a summary of the questions asked by the focus group facilitator and the responses provided by community-based EJ and Equity leader participants.

Discussion Questions and Answers

1. Perceptions of and overall experience with the State Coastal Conservancy

1.1: Have you ever engaged with the Coastal Conservancy before today's focus group?

- a. The majority of participants shared that they have heard of the State Coastal Conservancy prior to receiving the invitation to this focus group.

1.2: What are your experiences engaging with the Coastal Conservancy?

- a. A couple of the participants had previously applied to SCC funding.
- b. One Richmond-based participant shared a general positive experience as an Explore the Coast grantee, but also shared that when they were denied on other proposals they felt the SCC provided unclear expectations of what they wanted in the application.
- c. Others had considered applying to SCC funding, but decided against it, as the language was not inclusive enough and the requirements seemed tedious and burdensome to the point of discouraging them from applying at all.

2. Community engagement (Barriers)

2.1: How do you define meaningful community engagement?

- a. Participants did not feel clear on what specific types of activities the SCC considered as "community engagement."
- b. True community engagement is not fully funded the way it should be. The true cost of community engagement is far from being adequately recognized.
 - i. One participant shared a related experience about the City of Oakland's planning department and East Oakland Collective (EOC) working together on the East

Oakland Neighborhood Initiative, where EOC had to invest unpaid time and energy into a restorative justice process to help educate City of Oakland Planning Dept staff. The participant shared that EOC's work should have been funded - it is emotionally and time costly to be vulnerable in this work. This type of work should be billable under community engagement.

- ii. Another participant mentioned that outreach-related billing rates are significantly lower than engineering rates for example. They further explained that, "Funds need to recognize the lack of trust between communities and agencies, and the fact that much time and energy needs to go into restorative justice, mediation, and if needed development of partnering agreements. They went on to state that, "Communities are also spending a lot of their unpaid time educating agencies on how to effectively engage their residents."

2.2: In your opinion, does the Coastal Conservancy's outreach reflect that engagement style you would support? What would you change?

- a. Participants agreed that agencies need to do a better job of meeting people where they are, saying "Don't talk to people about future disasters, talk to people about what they're living through and dealing with right now."

2.3: What type of outreach would be more effective?

- a. Ideas from the group included: posting translated flyers/ board meetings notices; targeted outreach campaigns to orgs and community leaders already reaching community members; bringing meetings to the community.

2.4: What would you need to be able to engage in this kind of program?

- a. Support proposals that include higher hourly billing rates for community engagement and equity-related professionals.
- b. SCC staff could make more of an effort to meet with new prospective applicants from CBOs and learn about the different methods of engagement.
- c. Bridge the institutional divide between board members/ decision makers and community members, since the board is supposed to represent the community.
- d. More specific responses to this question included the following:
 - i. Grants seem to primarily go to people/large agencies the SCC already knows, not necessarily to the best applicant or most deserving.
 - ii. Board members hear a "sanitized" version of community needs. Are board members ever meeting with community groups directly?
 - iii. Judge proposals based on criteria other than quantitative metrics. Bringing a bus of kids to the beach seven times is HARD - Why is this what all groups are judged on?

2.5: How can community engagement be more community-led, or at least co-led with community?

- a. More respect of, and efforts to center and appreciate the community:
 - i. "Don't expect community members to trek out to a meeting and then have them sit in the back in the corner." Put them front and center so they feel it was worth the effort to explore opportunities with government/ previously untrusted entities.
 - ii. Staff hired for EJ should be a community representative, ideally from the community. Don't hire external "equity experts" as consultants who don't understand cultural differences, and other inter- and intra-community dynamics.

3. Grantmaking

3.1: What barriers do grant applicants run into when applying for and managing grant funding, especially from the State of California?

- a. Terminology like “disadvantaged community” and even “under-resourced” are vague and focused on deficit. Agencies can and should be more specific about the problem they’re trying to solve, e.g. engage black and brown communities.
- b. Be very specific about what types of “community benefits” would be considered as fundable.
 - i. “What is SCC’s theory of change?” Why exactly does the SCC assume people need to stay overnight at the coast?
- c. Break down language to discuss what these grants are really getting at and what do they really mean? The current language is esoteric and inherently is upholding the existing inequitable system.
- d. Current grants have maintenance and operations requirements. These activities should be sole sourced to community based non-profit groups to give the work to communities. Right now this exists through community improvement districts and green benefits districts, but those are funded through taxes. We need these grants to be alternative sources of funding for similar programs to allow “DACs” to have such districts and beneficial programs.

3.2: What technical assistance from gov’t would help applicants and grantees? Need for technical assistance for underrepresented community prospective groups to apply for funding, and how?

- a. Planning grants are very crucial. Participants shared that they need funding for the person to person contracts with community members participating in these programs.
 - i. Restoration groups don’t prioritize connections to local community members, but they keep receiving funds. They asked how the SCC can expect small grassroots organizations to compete with large NGOs?
- b. Help connect more innovative and creative proposals to the grant goals, as these types of proposals won’t make it through the current applications process. The language doesn’t reflect the fact that arts and culture are the most effective means of engaging communities.
- c. Could the SCC be the liaison between a landowner and community organization?

3.3: How can Agencies use grant funds to encourage and grow community engagement (ex. scoring criteria in grant programs, requiring letters of support from community groups, metrics for planning projects, etc.)?

- a. Again, the aspect of terminology came up, as described in the following comments:
 - i. One participant shared that calling this work an “Equity” program feels like an issue for many. “It’s more about the ‘INequity,’ not ‘equity.’ It is the negative history we’re trying to correct that is the fundamental problem; people tend to get lost in the jargon.
 - ii. Addressing “inequity” might additionally tie in better to the board’s perception of relevance to their own work, and therefore lead them to be more supportive of these projects. (Decisions they and their predecessors have made in the past likely has led to further inequities.)
- b. More work on expanding the scope (including geographic) of funding to be more holistic and inclusive.
 - i. A participant asked, “Why is the language of the criteria so restrictive? Nature doesn’t always exist ‘out there.’” What about projects that need to be funded at an inland site where communities reside, rather than on the shoreline/coast? Location restrictions etc. are part of “white environmentalist mentality.”
 - ii. Another participant shared their opinions on Prop 68 and prop 1 grants, saying that these planning grants paid neighbors to be part of the process and gave employment opportunities. These were a positive examples of state funded community involvement.

- c. Scoring criteria could better reflect the SCC's goals of meeting frontline communities where they are to help them start engaging in these funding programs.
 - i. Example: Martin Luther King Jr. Shoreline is an area that needs to be restored – rather than making CBOs finesse their application to match current scoring criteria, the SCC can meet local communities where they are by including arts/culture, creativity, and innovation as criteria.
 - ii. Participant recommended that the SCC try not to put so much weight on the number or quantifiable amount of people engaged in a process, but to consider the depth and reach of those connections.
 - 1. They believe that metrics of success shouldn't be about the number of people that show up to an engagement event, but it should be about talking to the RIGHT people and developing solid, lasting relationships with those people. Having these liaisons will prove much more effective than having 1-time, 1 hour conversations with 10 times more people.
- d. Applicants need more background info, including the intent of the funding. CBOs/NGOs need to understand what types of projects SCC is looking for; SCC needs to clarify scoring rubric and make that transparent from the get-go.
- e. Currently, SCC's grant programs follow a traditional approach to rewarding institutional grantees. To engage a broader set of grantees, SCC may need to change their measurement of success. Participants felt that these grant programs have been set up with assumptions about communities that might not be true or relevant:
 - i. The number of people who are engaged is not the only thing that is valuable; it is about who is involved (community ambassadors?) and/or how deep the engagement is.
 - ii. The SCC can better engage with local communities by:
 - 1. Recognizing that place-based communities need tailored programs and scoring criteria.
 - 2. Creating two separate funding tracks, one specifically for CBOs/NGOs, and another for larger established agencies.
 - 3. Equity expertise should be paid for by the grant.
 - 4. Equitable distribution of the grant should be a requirement included in the application, so that CBOs get a larger percentage than the typical players who often serve as the lead applicant. (right now it's the other way around - i.e. Sierra Club will get a \$200k grant and will pay "community partners" \$5-10k)
 - 5. Recognizing that the communities SCC is trying to engage can't keep traveling to the coast, but they can learn about how their behaviors impact coastal ecosystems and start at home. The current fundable programs are not sustainable nor relevant to DAC communities because all of the work should be place based.
 - a. Still in the "White Environmentalist" framework that requires people to leave their neighborhood and travel far away to be "outside" and to experience nature.
- f. Consider restructuring the application to allow for non-traditional applicants to be successful. For example, allow applications via video tours to show the product of their work, interviews with impacted community members, and other alternatives to writing technical narratives, etc.

4. Capacity Building

4.1: How do you and your groups need support with capacity building? Education/ funding/ relationships/ advocacy/ technical skills.

- a. If there are new contracting (not just grant) opportunities, these should go directly to the nonprofit (instead of an external consultant – consultants can't even be a consistent liaison, because of govt code 1090).
- b. Are there pathways for DAC community residents to work their way into SCC and other agency positions? (without requiring advanced degrees)
 - i. Build capacity at high school and graduate levels.
 - ii. Fellowships shouldn't just be tied to academic accolades
 - iii. Look at local community colleges and develop programs with staff and students there.
 - iv. Need to recognize place-based expertise: give people opportunities to enter with different expertise aside from higher education.

4.2: Need for SCC staff capacity building.

- a. Team staff how to ensure meetings to be more accessible; prioritizing local community centers as venues.
- b. Requiring program budgets to include payment for participants who show up, provide child care, food, etc.
 - i. If you don't pay, don't ask communities to attend. Those days are over.

4.3: What skills do you want Agency staff to have, particularly for interacting with grantees and communities?

- a. More robust outreach and communications efforts. For example; posting flyers about board meetings with location and time info in spaces that reflect genuine interest in community attendance and input.
 - i. Send out exciting invitations to churches and other community centers to share with members saying that the Board wants to learn about issues and solutions directly from community members themselves. Create a targeted campaign with community leaders then pay them to design and post flyers, send invitations or create PSAs on the radio to get the word out.
 1. Public won't feel like engaging with a website they're not already visiting. They're not searching for meetings to attend. CBOs, churches, etc should be liaisons.
 - ii. Respect and humility when engaging frontline community members.
 1. "When community does show up, provide space for them to feel honored. Don't sit them in the back of the room."
- b. If your event discusses equity, make sure the presenters are culturally sensitive to each vulnerable group that shows up.
- c. Stop calling these communities "DACs", even "underrepresented" or "under-resourced" or "multi-stressed" is better than "disadvantaged"

4.4: How do we ensure that the Conservancy staff/ board understands EEJ issues and meaningfully integrates them into their programs and policies? [Diverse board/staff, EJ equity liaison, etc.]

- b. *In what ways do Conservancy staff need to be prepared to work with communities?*
- c. *What skills and abilities do staff need for interacting with grantees and communities?*
- d. Need to recognize that these communities shouldn't be viewed as a checklist. "Cultural competency" makes it feel offensive, we're not playing with people's lives. Can't codify these real, dire issues by calling it JEDI. Need to hire a cultural officer to embed these concepts into the agency's culture.

5. Staff Diversity and Cultural Competency

5.1: How do you suggest the Conservancy increase diversity and what questions should the agency be thinking about as it works to increase diversity?

- a. Agency staff should be vetted and trained by community leaders.

5.2: How does the agency best support an increasingly diverse staff?

- a. The SCC can create at least one position that focuses on Environmental Justice, and make sure to hire someone from the communities we're talking about

5.3: How important is diversity on the board of the Conservancy and what suggestions do you have to address this? Seven-member Board is appointed by the Governor, and heads of State Senate and Assembly.

- a. Board members need to be accountable and present in their communities. The existing distance between the SCC board and community is a major problem. How can these board members engage with their constituents instead of going through multiple layers of intermediaries?
 - i. One idea was to have public engagement pop-up meet and greet events at cafes to show the communities that board members realize the purpose of their jobs, and so they can hear directly from community members. This will help them be more relatable and eventually understand the culture of their communities, instead of fear them.

State Coastal Conservancy
Equity and Environmental Justice Guidelines Development
11/8/19 Statewide Focus Group (Webinar) – Responses
Facilitated by Mari Rose Taruc

1. Introductions

Participants & Overall Experience with SCC

Questions: What are your community experiences with the State Coastal Conservancy, or the coast?

- a) Maria Morales, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates, Asian Pacific Environmental Network. Live close to coast. Don't work w SCC.
- b) Andrea Leon-Grossmann, Azul. Our Executive Director Marce is on SCC board. Worked on Coastal Commission's Environmental Justice Policy & implementation.
- c) Tiffany Eng, California Environmental Justice Alliance. Member organizations have worked on power plants, ports, & inappropriate land use on the coast.
- d) Jessica Tovar, Local Clean Energy Alliance. Worked with EJ organizations like Communities for a Better Environment to address refinery pollution on coast, as well as power plants that release toxics on coast. Heard of SCC but not worked with them.
- e) Viviana Franco, Lot to Spot. Funded by SCC on Dominguez Creek in LA River, with low-income communities of color, as well as low-income students.
- f) Tere Almaguer, People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights. Love the coast. Don't work on coastal issues or SCC. Interested in exploring.
- g) Lisa Juachon, Sama Sama Cooperative. Don't work w SCC. Love the coast. Our kids summer camp is located on the Oakland estuary. Kids have done a day surfing outing that was sponsored by group that programs for kids of color who don't normally get to do this activity. We have done kayaking at Bayview in San Francisco, led by Literacy for Environmental Justice.

2. Grantmaking

Questions

- a) What are the main barriers for vulnerable communities you work with to enjoy and access the coast?
- b) Are current Coastal Conservancy programs advancing equity and environmental justice? What type of projects should be eligible for funding that are currently not eligible?
- c) What barriers do applicants and grantees have in accessing Coastal Conservancy funding? How can they make these programs more accessible to DACs? [What are the

types of assistance needed in developing an application, and then, implementing the grant? What are some successful examples?]

Summary

While participants didn't initially identify their work as coastal issues, they were able to better to connect to it when they expanded the definition of coast to include watersheds (rivers, estuaries, coastal ecosystems, etc). The name "Coastal Conservancy" is a barrier because they see it as representing affluent communities now occupying the coast, as well as largely white environmental organizations doing conservation work; SCC should consider describing themselves (by name, or description) to be more inclusive of the bigger picture of the coastal watershed and diverse cultural uses of it, especially recognizing indigenous stewards of the land and coast. This approach to introducing who the SCC is opens up organizations and communities of color to see their work as belonging to what the SCC should support and fund. Top ideas for funding are establishing education programs by indigenous peoples about the coast, transportation to the coast from low income neighborhoods, and outreach by community-based organizations in EJ & communities of color to get them interested in coastal programs.

Responses

- We are restoring the watershed with Hummingbird Farm; how water flows into the Bay. We want to better understand how SCC could fund these types of projects. Our youth tend not to access the coast. If they learned about the coast & felt the healing that comes with the coast, then that would encourage them. We can provide opportunities for them, to have coast be accessible by public transit. Understand the waterways. Look at environmental racism in southeast SF and legacy of contamination; they're starting to clean it up but it's because of luxury condo developments. Make sure there's equity in access. We are connected to the kayak collective; great EJ ally gives history of creek & watershed connected to Sunnydale; holistic picture of connection. Do ceremony on the beach; restrictions on fires but would be better if can overcome those barriers.
- Echo previous comment. We work with youth organizations; they felt like the coast wasn't accessible-- that the coast was for rich people & not for them. There are issues of public transportation., use of police, communities where they don't feel welcome, pollution. A lot of communities of color who have been organizing for back-to-land programs; these connections expand their history & cultural ties (like SE Asian); especially new generations to connect & acknowledge indigenous people & histories to forge relationships. SCC should make the coast be more accessible & relevant; do the education to make it more accessible.
- Yes do & fund outreach. State grants usually don't pay for outreach but they should; they think it's overhead but it's not. With the Climate Ready Program, the grant limited it to 25% overhead that included outreach. They have to prioritize meaningful outreach; and it matters who does outreach; CBOs (community based organizations) know those communities. Make it a mandate on the grants. Like Prop68 prioritized outreach in application; weight on score needs to be higher.

- On outreach, it's notable that many of us haven't heard of SCC & the funding. Environmental awareness is integrated into culture. It would be beneficial to look at funding groups who aren't overtly environmental groups; look into community & cultural groups to fund & invest in reaching out to these groups (that SCC hasn't touched). The name Coastal Conservancy definition sounds limiting; because watersheds are more accessible, and Bay; redefine "coastal".
- We do a know-your rights postcard on which parts of the coast are public—all beaches; tool to prevent harassment. Transportation is a huge issue in access; we used to have busloads of our Bay Area folks accessing coast through the Expo bus line; a single trip to beach without multiple bus trips. In SoCal, beaches that are more accessed by POC (people of color) are the ones next to industry; CPUC just extended life of 4 dirty power plants; raise equity in how we manage these issues. Outreach is key. Clean beaches for everyone, not just the dirtier beaches for POC.
- In Oakland Chinatown, the community hardly accesses the beach/coast. If we looked at the watershed, then we realize they interact a lot with the coast through the estuary at Lake Merritt. There are issues with herons roosting in Chinatown, that these birds poop on cars, so they cut down the trees the birds lived in but that created problems; This urban community does interact with the ecosystem. SCC can do better to lift up this coastal-estuary integration, that the coast isn't cut off by the 880 freeway. These land zoning impacts are not the fault of the community.
- There's subsistence fishing in San Francisco, in the Bayview, where POC fish in water next to the dirty PG&E power plant. Did SCC fund any of that campaign to get signs about mercury in fish, consumption education (but done poorly so need to continue & improve that effort). Outreach is needed. Hearing SCC name sounds like large white nonprofit, so problematic from onset. Power plant issue on pollution discharge. Need to address the swimming of folks in these polluted waters from power plants, spills, crude, gasoline, etc. Glad SCC offers grants for climate & sea level rise. There has been a lot of disconnect with pollution issues. For recreation, there were a lot of barriers mentioned in terms of access, especially related to youth programs. Want to see safe spaces on the coast for POC and immigrant communities, our rights to be there as low income, communities of color. SCC should look into cultural and ancestral practices around water and nature; fund this and an education component; programs that bridge elders & youth so we don't lose that.
- Fund education with intergenerational elements. Example is since the SF Bay is in Ohlone territory, Ohlone people could do the education about the coast instead of SCC or non-native folks; establish this program especially for youth education about the coast. We think there would be huge interest in learning from indigenous people. Lift up these types of indigenous land education more.
- Make sure there is job training for young folks who are interested into getting into environmental and coastal jobs.

3. Community Engagement

Sample Questions

- a) How do you define meaningful community engagement, and in your opinion, does the Coastal Conservancy's outreach reflect that engagement style? What would you change?
- b) What are the best methods you have seen for community engagement and power-sharing in project development by government agencies? Are there agencies or organizations who are doing community engagement right?
- c) How can the Conservancy use its grant funds to encourage meaningful community engagement among its grantees (for example, scoring criteria in grant programs, requiring letters of support from community groups, or having metrics for planning projects)?

Summary

Focus group participants want to see improved engagement & representation of indigenous people, especially in educational and storytelling roles about the coast and their ancestral practices. There's also public education that needs to happen to dispel the myth that people of color pollute or ruin the coast. Ways to engage communities of color more about the coast are through ethnic media, street fairs, local parks & rec centers, and community groups; this way brings more culturally relevant ways to coastal access.

Responses

- Take leadership from first nations people. See canoe journey with Intertribal Friendship House where they are reclaiming ancestral practices on coasts and waterways. This is connected with Oregon/WA Nisqually & Hawaiian canoe journeys. These indigenous coastal activities should be encouraged and funded.
- Seaweed collection on north coast from Pomo folks. So much of this resource has been depleted because of non-indigenous activities and disturbance, so people need to understand that. But nature conservation efforts are closing access to certain areas even for indigenous folks misses the mark on cultural uses.
- Pacifica Pier is all POC fishing & crabbing. They need to be informed about radiation & pollution (some of this education via signs posted happened many years ago; unsure if anyone is doing this work now). There's this idea that POC are just polluting; that POC impact is negative. Light bulb went on with Filipinos, Mexicans, Blacks fishing in the Bay & their knowledge of fishing & how they make money or feed their families. We need to switch up this narrative that we're the ones harming the ocean. There are benefits to POC practices on the coast that need to be recognized (like our farming practices). This public education about positive POC stories on the coasts need to happen.
- Yes on POC & indigenous culture comments.
- Even more outreach to ethnic media & street fairs to promote coastal activities for communities of color. Meet our people where we are to provide access to the beach.
- There's a way to integrate more with our local parks & rec centers & community groups for outreach & community engagement to bring culturally relevant ways to coastal access.

4. Board & Staff Awareness; Accountability & Transparency

Questions

- a) How do we ensure that the Conservancy staff/board understands EEJ issues and meaningfully integrates them into their programs and policies? [Diverse board/staff, EJ equity liaison, etc.]
- b) What additional steps should the Conservancy take into consideration in order to develop its guidelines and make sure they are implemented in a way that advance EEJ? For instance, should they focus on program guidelines, decision making process, staff capacity, staff training, etc.?
- c) Based on our conversation today, what is one thing you believe the Conservancy should prioritize?

Summary

Elevate & normalize indigenous people and other POC to be the face of coastal stories instead of white SCC staff or other environmentalists as the experts. SCC needs to see & take a stand against the destruction of coasts, rivers & waterways—whether that be against pollution, climate change, or privatizing waterways. Please make sure that SCC has an indigenous or tribal focus group to weigh in on this EEJ process.

Responses

- When I think of coastal programs and who lead them, it's not great that white government folks are leading them or are the face of experts. We need to give room for indigenous and other POC to be the face of these coastal stories. SCC can do better partnerships with communities of color & pay for local expertise. SCC needs to be aware of power dynamics with communities of color. We acknowledge that this can be awkward because we are talking about systems of oppression, capitalism, institutional racism & classism; acknowledge these.
- SCC needs to hire people of color, especially native folks & their knowledge.
- See the Run for Salmon program. How do we amplify how all our waterways are connected; even endangered. What's the responsibility of SCC to prevent the privatization of water & rivers, so that salmon & people & sacred practices can flow. Need to see commitment to honor what's been destroyed. This is a big reflection of native peoples in CA. How can we be active in different legislation to go against things that would be harmful to waterways and indigenous ways? What's SCC responsibility to not cause more chaos & climate change?
- Please make sure that SCC has an indigenous or tribal focus group to weigh in on this EEJ process.

California State Coastal Conservancy
Equity and Environmental Justice Guidelines Development
Sacramento Focus Group
SUMMARY

“Equity is a skill you have to develop”

For ease of navigation this summary is organized as follows: Responses to questions are presented as thematic segments, divided into a summary, key takeaways and procedural ideas, and example quotes/phrases.

OVERALL PERCEPTION

Overall participants had relative positive perception of the Conservancy, despite a mix of interaction and engagement.

Key takeaways

1. Information that Conservancy puts together does make its way to interested partners and potential partners.
2. Conservancy has demonstrated some level of flexibility and responsiveness for modification with grantees, along with understanding of importance and need of community engagement and environmental justice.
3. There is still some work to clarify ability, capacity, and jurisdiction the Conservancy must support non-profit partners, especially grantees.
4. There is an awareness and concern for “planning fatigue” compared to direct action.

Recommendations:

- Continue to establish and institute a culture of FLEXIBILITY as much as is allowed.
- Continue to support the PEOPLE doing the work, inside the Conservancy and with Partners.
- Continue to clarify role, ABILITY, and jurisdiction of the Conservancy compared to other agencies that play a role in coastal access and management-- especially as community non-profits are looking for support.

Quotes

“...we haven’t had any partnerships with the Conservancy. The extent of my participation has been a webinar that Jose led for the Conservancy. I’m on the Listserv and get information there.”

“My entire position was funded by that program. Working with [our Project Manager} was great, she was helpful at starting our small nonprofit, understand how our grant works, and how to do the reporting for its quarterly. We had certain measurements in our agreement, but we were even able to modify that agreement according to our needs as they changed. [Our Program Manager] and some interns at the Conservancy came out surfing with us once and were really engaged at that level. It helped that they were close by.”

“Our experience has been with good with Coastal Conservancy, and I’m the kind of person who would totally talk trash in focus groups. As an agency, they have been really proactive and working with community and getting community buy-in...I think the conservancy has done a good job of having dual goals, and actually investing resources in knowing that different groups that would otherwise have less access to this issue, and knowing they have to provide that support so that these groups are informed and engaged.”

“...there’s a ton of planning fatigue’. There are little implementation funds, little capacity for the kinds of threats they’re talking about. These are folks who have very small shops, very little technical know-how, but they’re trying to address sea level rise in the context of tech companies trying to protect their property from sea level rise and leaving other communities vulnerable.”

“While we have these programs out there and they do great work, there’s a severe mismatch between how people can access those programs and how they navigate the jurisdictional issues.”

GRANTMAKING/PROGRAMS

Even though not all participants had received Conservancy funding, since all had non-profit experience, there was much to share. Overall there was general agreement on how to keep the burden of grant applications and reporting equitable for smaller organizations which are often tasked with a bulk of community engagement and environmental justice tasks.

Key takeaways

1. Keep flexibility in terms of scope for a grant, so if at some point throughout the project a new need arises and there is a need to pivot, there is some flexibility from the funder.
2. Community based organizations often know best in terms of access and equity issues but their expertise may not be valued as such.
3. Applicants are wary of having to put together applications repeatedly for different requests since they are labor intensive.
4. Organizations and communities are wary of “equity funding” going to bigger organizations and perpetuating inequitable funding practices.

Recommendations

- Be SPECIFIC. For example: Who are you talking about? What demographic? What population? Who do you think this will help? Before you think about tools like technology, what are you trying to address?
- Be able to identify and define extractive and tokenizing practices, as they feed into oppressive and racist structures, and how to counteract or put in restorative practices.
- STATE decision-making: How are decisions made? What is the power structure of your organization?
- DESIGNATE appropriate people and decision-making steps for the process. State how you will change the decision-making framework to make sure the community has a say in how this is rolled out.
- Note MEASUREMENT. What's the feedback loop in the end? Is there scalability and replicability for this model so that you can pass on this equity approach to become a core part of your institution and others?
- Provide and support MODELS of how to successfully apply for and receive a grant.

Quotes

"We've published two reports on these issues, and the struggles with grant-making process. What should they focus on? I would say everything."

One of the things we've learned is that when it comes to EJ and social justice, it's not only a commitment, it's a practice. That's what makes the commitment real. If you commit, but don't change your practice, it doesn't mean anything. I think we've been stuck for a while at the commitments, but not really looking at the practices -- the trainings, the board make-up, the programming, the policies."

"We're talking about equity, not equality. [We] get a lot of letters asking for support for a bill. At first it sounds great, streamlining the process for guides working on federal managed lands. But there's no explicit language in the bill that says with a focus on disadvantaged communities. So, I think we need to think about carving out specific resources for organizations that don't have the same access but are equally as deserving. We're all talking about equity, right?"

"There's this group is getting millions of dollars that isn't supposed to go to people like them. It should go towards long-term impactful and mentorship programs, because they have grant-writers who can argue their point, and they have the awards from Silicon Valley funders, from executives...I think their program is extractive. I saw a lot of funders gravitate to them, a lot of white-savior complex, we get to capitalize on black and brown kids who are vulnerable and continue to get funding and money for our dream."

"We've been learning what works and what doesn't and how to sniff out fake equity from real equity. Some of the practices we have now: anyone who wants to apply to the social equity track for this advising program we run (entrepreneurs who are developing technology) we force everyone who goes through the process to attend a webinar "what is equity and what isn't." This

unpacks the history of policies, and says that if you're really serious about equity, you have to address the history of inequity."

"California has a small EJ grants programs because they recognized these white-led non-profits would get all the grants, and these small grassroots orgs had no way of competing. Some of the examples you were giving for screening for fake equity, at the same token, if you don't have a separate track for those who are smaller and don't have the space to do that. For larger grants, that rigorous screening is helpful for screening out the larger, white-led orgs that are all buzzwords and not commitment. But for small orgs, we almost never apply for grants because they're so burdensome and we don't necessarily know what the follow through is."

"One of the things that frustrates me about state grants is that there isn't any part of it that is universal so that you don't have to start from scratch every single time (like a Common app)."

"People need to see one person who has gone through the process. They need someone sponsoring the process or encouraging them throughout the way. Like a grant counselor who helps you throughout, or sponsors/nominates people who wouldn't otherwise apply."

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Participants had much to say on community engagement as well and it was often tied to funding support for it. Generally, community-based organizations are wary of deficit-based language and approaches to community engagement, as well as who is tasked with and funded for community engagement, often not being the same groups, and perpetuating inequitable funding partnerships.

Key takeaways

1. This takes Emotional Labor and should be recognized and compensated as such, especially if it's key to grant funding.
2. Evaluate how to support and fund Community Engagement as frontloaded process to funding so that it leads to authentic outcomes rather than trying to fit community engagement to predetermined outcomes.
3. There is a need and opportunity to provide community-based organizations with professional development that increases their impact.

Recommendations

- Language MATTERS. While there may legal terms applicable, be aware of how that contributes to deficit-based language, while still ensuring SPECIFICITY.
- Support equitable PARTNERSHIPS and BUDGET TRANSPARENCY. Are those partnerships provided equitably? Is it clear in the budget how each organization in the partnership is being funded for comparable work?

- Avoid PARACHUTING-- ensure there is clarity of where you are in the process to determine your authenticity in engaging.
- Fund Community Engagement as part of the PROCESS before necessarily knowing full well some outputs and outcomes--which will be determined from the engagement process.
- Consider capacity support for nonprofits-- professional development (ex: nonprofit accounting)

Quotes

“We’re talking about performative equity versus authentic equity. Youth Outside trainings teach about deficit-based language. Even the term “disadvantaged communities” -- focuses on what we don’t have versus what we do have. How do we empower these communities? How do you talk about us?”

“What does meaningful community engagement look like?” (frustration at the rubric, if the people making the decisions don’t come from the communities being served). Instead of “directly benefits”, we say “provides meaningful, assured and direct benefits.” (adding more words that add accountability).”

“It’s the definitions that are the problem. For example, often there are partnerships where there is a large organization that needs a smaller org to get the grant, then pays the smaller org at a lower rate than they pay their staff, or even worse, doesn’t pay them for this work, but expects the smaller org to do it for free. Lot of grassroots orgs will go along with it because we’re strapped for resources or partnerships with important people.”

“Are you parachuting into this community? What is your history working in that community? Do you even have a staff member that’s from there? An office there? Did you suddenly decide to do work there because the census tract said that it was going to start getting funding from the state?”

“I think there’s also a chicken and the egg thing about community engagement. You can’t really do it unless you have vague objectives --- because you haven’t looked at what the community wants. Otherwise, you’d have specific objectives, but that means you haven’t really done community engagement because you already have a clear idea of what you want to do.”

“In previous work, our community engagement entailed not even meeting them halfway, but piggy backing on their events and being a listener most of the time. Instead of “come to us! Wherever we may be... I’m saying to meet people where they are and see if you can plug into that. It’s such a heavy lift to come out.”

“Coastal Conservancy sites are places where communities of color haven’t been that engaged. People don’t really know what the org is. Even if the meeting was held at Oxnard, people wouldn’t really know what it is. How do you break the cycle of not knowing the agency because

they don't know about it, and then the org doesn't listen to them because they haven't heard from them? I would love an analysis of coastal access all throughout the coast."

"One of the things a peer introduced to us was the question of "how ready is your agency to do community engagement?" Some questions asked: sufficient budget for engagement, your department has control over design, scope and narrative."

BOARD/STAFF EJ AWARENESS

This had two components: One was a matter of how the Conservancy Board was reflective of this work (that was unclear to participants) and the other was how to ensure and support that the Conservancy increased its awareness of Environmental Justice. Overall there was agreement on a need to continue to expand the narrative and definitions of what constitutes access and being considered an "environmentalist" "conservationist" or "outdoorsy."

Key takeaways

1. Definitions and a narrative of who "fits in" is still too narrow-- there is a need for more intersectional work and narrative expansion.
2. Social structures still matter in relation to this work-- more than individual actions, family and community actions resonate strongly.

Recommendations

- Continue to DIVERSIFY the Board and Leadership (as permissible) and look for ways for communities to connect with leadership.
- Continue to HIRE for increased diversity that increases capacity of Conservancy staff to meaningfully engage communities and review grants accordingly.
- Support messaging that DEMONSTRATES and shows what diversity of experience to coast access looks like.

Quotes

"I also think we have to look at who is advising the ED, who are they getting their advice and support from? That's a huge indicator. Both of the nonprofits I've worked for have white male ED's with white friends supporting it, with an almost completely dominant white male board."

"We've been talking about access this entire time, but nothing to me about Coastal Conservancy evokes the messaging of access. For example, the name..."

"Redefining what environmentalist is... There are several old, grassroots orgs rooted in the community that take kids outside, but don't consider themselves outdoor or environmentalist orgs and don't apply for grants under that umbrella."

“Changing the model of what’s the right way to access nature, figuring out the kinds of facilities people want to see, whether the facilities cater to the kinds of things communities of color would like to do.”

“For example, a developer that is proposing and submitting application for developing a huge hotel with camping and small cabins and hike-in campsite. People wonder if they’re applying for funding for low-cost accommodations as locals don’t want that beach developed.”

“The intangible barriers to being outside- communities who are working all day outdoors not wanting to be outdoors, people near the coast that don’t access it, even though issues affecting agriculture also affect the coast.”

“I was visiting my family in Lynwood and we went to the beach. My dad did not join us at first, but then he saw how much fun we were having, and he took off his shoes and kept his shirt on and went into the water. And when my parents celebrated their 46th wedding anniversary, they decided to go to the beach on their own. Family is really important in Latino culture and being there with their nieces and nephews that day really enticed my parents to have a follow-up visit to the coast-- they hadn’t done that.”

“When I was in high school, I would take the bus ride from Pico Rivera to Santa Monica for three hours. Even though it was fun to see the beach and water, I was poor, had no money for food or anything else outside. Then at 11pm I’d catch the last bus and head back. Sometimes, we’d miss the last bus and we’d have to walk to downtown LA, and then get home eventually. Those were formative trips to the beach because it extended my view of what was possible. I wasn’t restrained to Pico Rivera and instilled a bit of adventure in me. So many kids don’t get to experience that.”

ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

Participants will be looking to see what comes of this, what is the follow up, and ultimately how this changes practices that reach back to the communities they work with. There is an excitement that Equity is now more common of a term, but there is still concern that its meaningful and impactful action is lost in trendiness that will not result in actual outcomes.

Key takeaways

1. This is a PROCESS-- while there are benchmarks for evaluation, this is based on PRACTICES and ongoing learning.
2. This takes time, and it should be reflected in practices (agendas, meetings, etc.) as well as strategy documents (strategic planning).
3. This includes CULTURAL changes that are systemic and interconnected-- hiring more diverse staff will not result in meaningful change if the cultural space still does not include enough redesigned for a more equitable and inclusive work culture.

Recommendations

- DEDICATE the time. Be clear in the number of hours, sessions, etc., that you devote to your staff to have equity be an ongoing learning process.
- Address NEED while being wary of TRENDINESS.
- Bring in EXPERTISE where necessary as you build it internally.
- Consider an Equity Impact Review in the same way we have an Environmental Impact Review.

Quotes

“It’s fascinating to be in a time in CA that I no longer have to convince people to care about equity. Now I must make sure they’re talking about the same thing I am. We need to have a standard, a national threshold, so that we’re all talking about the same thing. And, equity is new so its evolving and changing. So, it’s not like Equity 101, but the latest research on how to deliver it...there’s always continual learning. I would love agencies to have to do a certain number of hours on equity learning on a yearly basis.”

“Once your EJ statement is complete, I would add that to the criteria: how does your project uphold our statement and commitment to EJ? So, it’s not a statement that doesn’t do anything. Then you need someone with content experience to vet the answer, as opposed to people who might think it sounds good, but don’t know how to measure it accurately.”

“Hiring POC can work, but that only goes so far, and it can also be really dangerous if the staff hasn’t been ready to hire POC’s or do the work necessary to include them. At the organization I worked for, I realized I was hired because I brought diversity to that space. The only thing motivating these ED’s to become more diverse was to get more funding. That’s dangerous and messed up. They wanted Youth Outside funding but had received feedback that they didn’t reflect the communities they served. It’s hard to be the person harmed in that process to also be the whistleblower calling out the problems in the funding.”

“It is a rising trend. The EJ movement has been successful in getting people thinking of equity, but then you see funding streams prioritizing EJ. But what I’ve noticed is that in my region, we’re the only EJ program in our area. But now there are more white, large organizations that now suddenly want to work in that space, in order to get funding. So, the question then is “how are funding programs being prescriptive about what specifically these orgs need to do. It’s not just hiring, but what specific process will you do?”

“I think it’d be interesting as a culmination of this if they had a five-year strategic plan of how to infuse the agency with an EJ approach to the work they’re doing.”

**California State Coastal Conservancy:
Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines
Focus Group**

San Diego Region

INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, Estolano Advisors (EA), on behalf of the California State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy), facilitated a focus group comprised of representatives from key environmental organizations in San Diego. The purpose of this session was to gather feedback on coastal and environmental equity issues in the region to inform the Conservancy's inaugural Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines (JEDI Guidelines). A diverse set of nonprofit organization representatives shared their impressions of and experiences working with the Conservancy. They also suggested ways to improve the agency's internal and external practices and better serve environmental justice communities.

Hosted by the Ocean Discovery Institute in the City Heights neighborhood of San Diego, the focus group lasted two hours with representation from seven organizations working on issues related to youth literacy, environmental advocacy, and/or coastal access, particularly in economically disadvantaged and politically underrepresented communities. Participants responded to a set of questions prepared by EA who helped guide the conversation and gather focused feedback. Topics discussed included the Conservancy's grantmaking process, community engagement style, and staff diversity and awareness of environmental justice issues.

I. SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK

The focus group revealed broad support of principles outlined in the strawperson outline. There was strong support for the Conservancy to bolster grantmaking efforts to further support environmental justice organizations in the San Diego area. Participants questioned about how JEDI will inform actual policies, staff and board recruitment practices, and grant program guidelines. Some participants also expressed concern about the ability of the Conservancy's staff and Board to meaningfully engage with San Diego organizations given their physical absence in the region. The following key themes and ideas that arose during the focus group discussion.

Barriers to Coast Access are Physical, Social, and Psychological

Participants described the multiple barriers preventing low-income communities, black communities, and communities of color from accessing and enjoying the San Diego coast. Whether it's parking, lack of convenient public transit options, or traffic, participants agreed that transportation is an underlying barrier for low income communities in accessing the coast. Participants noted that some communities, such as National City, are physically restricted from accessing the beach due to industrial activity along most of the coastline. Other barriers included high cost of overnight accommodations and lack of storage facilities at the beach.

Participants spent a significant amount of time discussing social and psychological factors that prevent people from visiting and "feeling comfortable" at the coast. Participants pointed to the fact that communities lack general education about the coast, including lack of awareness about public access, lack of swimming competency, and fear of marine wildlife. For instance, one participant shared that "a young girl [in one of their programs] was afraid of getting in the water because someone mentioned stingrays," which could have been avoided if they knew the "stingray shuffle." Lastly, a participant pointed to "overt racism that some of [their] students have

experienced going to the beach.” Others stressed the importance of understanding how experiences inform individuals’ perception of the coast, particularly for low-income communities and communities of color.

Investment Needed in San Diego’s Environmental Justice Communities

While several participants’ organizations have received funding from the Conservancy, there was general agreement that more can be done to ensure Conservancy’s funding reaches environmental justice communities.¹ Grant recipients expressed appreciation for the thousands of students they have been able to serve through the Conservancy’s programs but acknowledged that there is a lot more work to be done in the communities they work with and elsewhere, such as southeast San Diego. Several suggested that the Conservancy analyze its grant award history to better understand which communities have not yet received funding.

A participant who unsuccessfully applied for a grant surfaced several issues with the application process. As a small nonprofit, they stressed that the Conservancy should “acknowledge everyone’s needs may not be the same.” They suggested for individualized technical assistance and more flexible guidelines. Others shared their frustrations navigating the agency’s funding restrictions, which often limit expenditures to “bus trips and gas” and activities that take place on the coast. A participant described the challenges in doing programs at the beach when community members do not feel comfortable going in the first place. In order to truly connect people to the coast, the participant noted that, “it takes something local in their neighborhood” where they can “build skills and learn about the stingray shuffle” among other things. Other participants agreed and expressed interest in more flexible grant guidelines that allowed programming and outreach within the communities they work with, many of which are not coastal. They further advocated for other bodies of water, such as wetlands, that are more familiar to their respective communities to be eligible for Conservancy funding. Participants believed funding for programming in communities is vital to adequately addressing the social and psychological barriers that keep communities away from the coast in the first place.

Current Outreach Efforts Have Room for Improvement

There was general agreement that the Conservancy’s current outreach efforts in San Diego could be vastly improved. Participants were grateful for the opportunity to shape the JEDI Guidelines but felt that the agency has not been active in the region. One participant shared, “Out of all the years I’ve been at my organization, [Conservancy staff] have only come out once.” Participants offered ideas for the Conservancy to improve their outreach practices. This includes proactive engagement with environmental justice organizations that may not be grantees, webinars for interested grant applicants, and better promotion of upcoming Board meetings - particularly when they take place in the San Diego region. All participants welcomed more “face-to-face time” with the Conservancy.

¹ Though the focus group did not focus on defining environmental justice communities, we generally understood those to mean inland communities that rank highly on the CalEnviroScreen tool.

At least one organization expressed interest in helping shape the Conservancy's grant making priorities and process. For instance, one participant shared their experience at a workshop run by California Department of Parks and Recreation, where the Department worked with organizations in the area to help shape the Request for Qualifications language for an upcoming funding opportunity. This allowed organizations to both feel included in the process and helped organizations anticipate application requirements. Other participants supported this level of transparency and engagement. At least one organization representative expressed interest in direct support applying for Conservancy funding.

Staff Diversity Does Not Equal Inclusion

Participants discussed the benefits of having a diverse staff but stressed that diversity alone does not guarantee inclusion. As one participant noted, agencies should be "very cognizant about not tokenizing people into positions. Forced diversity is not necessarily inclusion of voice." Others agreed and advocated for reforms in the Conservancy's employment process. Someone suggested for the agency to mirror efforts being done by the California Coastal Commission – which involves a staff committee responsible for developing employment policy recommendations. Another participant went a step further calling for deeper investment in Human Resources to find the "right people" and a shift in hiring values where "on-the-ground experience is valued more than a master's degree." Participants also suggested that the Conservancy should practice cultural humility² by hiring from the beneficiaries of their programs, such as young adults that are knowledgeable of their own communities but may not have an advanced degree. Participants were in strong agreement that the Conservancy should make concerted efforts to diversify staff in a way that advances inclusion at all levels of management.

The Governing Board Should Reflect California's Diversity

Participants expressed dissatisfaction with the current Board's composition and felt it should include more regional, demographic, and occupational diversity. Given that all members are appointed by either the Governor or the California Legislature, participants perceived the Board's membership to be highly exclusive and out-of-touch with stakeholders in San Diego. Participants offered several ideas to remedy this, including reserving a seat for a resident from a disadvantaged community³ and expanding the board membership with more Southern California representatives. A participant noted the Explore the Coast Advisory Board as an example of a diverse Board, citing a variety of the board member's organizations and occupations. Participants stressed the importance of transforming the Board in a way that reflects an equitable distribution of power and decision-making to the communities that will be served from the Conservancy's programs.

² For purposes of this report, cultural humility is a "practice of self-reflection on how one's own background and expectations impact a situation, of openness to others' determining the relevance of their own identities to any given situation, and of committing to redress the effects of power imbalances." (American Library Association, 2017). In practice, this may look like a restructuring of Conservancy staff promotion and decision-making in a way that principally values the perspectives of environmentally burdened black communities and communities of color.

³ Disadvantaged community was in direct reference to communities ranked highly in the CalEnviroScreen tool.

II. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR JEDI GUIDELINES

Focus group participants provided several suggestions for the Conservancy to consider when developing the JEDI Guidelines. Participants would like to see equity and inclusion as clear, discernable priorities throughout Conservancy's activities ranging from grant administration processes to Board composition. The group's key recommendations are listed below.

Expand Eligible Programming Costs, with a Focus on Environmental Justice Areas and Regional Collaboration

In order to address the various types of barriers to accessing the coast, participants advocated for more flexible grant guidelines that expand eligible program costs, prioritize funding to environmental justice areas, and incentivize collaboration between organizations. Grant recipients conveyed that their grant awards limited their ability to develop programming to address the social and psychological barriers identified during the focus group discussion. Through more flexible guidelines, participants would like to conduct outreach, educational workshops, and other activities to address the social and psychological barriers that prevent communities from setting foot in the beach in the first place. They also supported flexible funds for programming around other bodies of water, such as wetlands, which may be easier for inland communities to access.

Participants also acknowledged that Conservancy funding has not been distributed equitably throughout San Diego. Many suggested this could be addressed by modifying the grant scoring criteria to prioritize awards in environmental justice areas that have not received funding historically and areas that have not received funding in recent years. To do this, the Conservancy would need to analyze its own grant award history and proactively engage organizations that work in identified underfunded areas. A participant also made the case for fewer, but larger grant awards that encourage partnerships between organizations in a region. Others supported the idea of sharing financial resources, citing the potential for deeper impact and reach to communities that continue to lack adequate access to the coast.

Establish a Presence in San Diego Through Proactive Engagement and Comprehensive Technical Assistance

Participants strongly agreed that the Conservancy should expand its outreach and engagement activities in the San Diego region. They believed this could be accomplished through a multi-pronged approach that includes proactive one-on-one conversations with environmental justice organizations, frequent promotion of Board meetings, and comprehensive technical assistance for grant applicants. Although there is no Conservancy staff located in the region, participants welcomed the use of technology, such as video conferencing and webinars, for Conservancy staff to communicate with San Diego organizations. Based on the anonymous survey distributed at the onset of the meeting, participants selected "email" as the most welcome communication channel.

Participants were particularly interested in more transparency and collaboration around the grant application process. One participant cited efforts done by other agencies as exemplary

cases that allowed organizations to shape the language of a proposal. They recommend the Conservancy to mirror these efforts in a way that includes former grantees and new applicants, especially those serving low-income communities and communities of color. To gain a better understanding of the Conservancy's impact in San Diego, participants were also interested in data that shows what organizations received grants and communities impacted. This would allow both Conservancy staff and grantees better assess grant programming for future rounds. In addition to this, participants suggested for more tailored technical assistance when applying to and implementing grants.

Build a Staff and Board Reflective of California's Diversity

While participants supported diversifying the Conservancy's staff and Board, they advocated for transforming the agency's personnel in a way that embraces cultural humility and shifts decision-making to historically marginalized communities. Several participants recommended the Conservancy to build off efforts being undertaken by the California Coastal Commission, which seeks to diversify through a staff-driven process. In order to avoid tokenization of black people and people of color, they also suggested for deeper investment in staff recruitment efforts to identify individuals with qualified experience working with environmental justice communities. This could include hiring individuals who were beneficiaries of grant programs. In addition to modifying hiring practices, many were in support of ongoing cultural humility training for staff that strays away from "diversity achievement" assessments.

Aside from Conservancy staff, participants strongly advocated for changes in the Board's membership to better reflect California's diversity. They strongly believed representation from various occupations (e.g. not just scientists, but educators, doctors, etc.) and regions, particularly in disadvantaged communities, brings a different perspective to the work and, thus, a critical step to achieving more inclusive and equitable outcomes.

III. NEXT STEPS

At the end of the focus group, EA informed participants of the next steps for the JEDI Guidelines. All the participants were grateful for the opportunity to provide feedback that will inform the JEDI Guidelines. They also expressed strong interest in remaining involved in the process, including seeing the outcomes of this and other focus groups. During the next phase of the JEDI Guidelines, we recommend the Conservancy staff to continue to meaningfully engage with stakeholders in a transparent way that allows them to understand how feedback collected is incorporated.



**California State Coastal Conservancy:
Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Guidelines
Focus Group**

Los Angeles Region

INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, Better World Group (BWG) facilitated the Los Angeles Region focus group to inform the State Coastal Conservancy's (Conservancy) development of "Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) Guidelines." These guidelines, formerly referred to as the "Equity and Environmental Justice Guidelines," will serve as the agency's guiding principles to advance equity and addressing environmental justice across California's coast through the Conservancy's grant programs, communications, community engagement, and capacity building – internally and externally -- amongst other areas.¹

The process to develop the Conservancy's JEDI Guidelines began in February 2019 with an online survey. The agency synthesized the survey results and drafted a strawperson outline of the JEDI Guidelines. In October 2019, the Conservancy engaged BWG along with other consultants state-wide to coordinate focus groups to receive input on regional priorities, community engagement, grantmaking and staffing. From October 2019 through November 2019, five focus groups were conducted each representing a different geography and various stakeholders. The Los Angeles focus group was comprised of environmental and social justice advocates. The Conservancy also engaged with tribal nations one-on-one to solicit feedback.

After reviewing the reports and memos from each focus group, the Conservancy staff will identify priorities areas to address in their draft JEDI Guidelines, which will be released in December 2019 for public comment. The public comment period ends March 2020. The Conservancy will then review public comment, revise and release the JEDI Guidelines to the public in time for the Board to consider it for adoption at their April 2020 meeting.

This report provides background on the Conservancy and the JEDI Guidelines development process, a summary of feedback obtained from the Los Angeles region focus group, and participants' key recommendations on how to improve the Conservancy's policies and programs.

I. BRIEF HISTORY: ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE ALONG CALIFORNIA'S COAST

California bolsters a robust, diverse coastal landscape that mirrors the rich diversity of its population. Often described as a state with iconic, idyllic beaches, the state's admired coastline has also supported a legacy of environmental injustice reflected by a history of policing and discrimination either by design through policies that limit engagement and coastal access or through private actions.

In 1976, the state established the California Coastal Act (Coastal Act) with a primary charge to increase access to the coast *for all people*. The Coastal Act charges the California Coastal Commission (Commission) with authority to oversee development in the coastal zone. The coastal zone, however, is complex. To develop in the zone, environmental, social, and economic considerations must also be considered in tandem. Therefore, the Commission works together with local, state, and non-governmental organizations to manage the coast.² However, historically, underrepresented groups, such as tribes, Black people, and people of color, have disproportionately lacked equitable access to beaches, proper representation within agencies in California.

Along some parts of Los Angeles' coastline, local aggression and policing threaten public access. Palos Verdes Estates' Lunada Bay, for example, has a history of hate, violence and aggression from a local

¹ California State Coastal Conservancy. Memo on Equity and Environmental Justice Guidelines. Retrieved from: https://scc.ca.gov/webmaster/ftp/pdf/scobb/2019/1903/20190314Board04C_EEJ_Guidelines_Memo.pdf

² UC Berkeley Law. The Past, Present and Future of California's Coastal Act. Retrieved from: <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Coastal-Act-Issue-Brief.pdf>

“surfer gang” known as the “Bay Boys.” For generations – with little consequence – these wealthy surfers have, “bombard[ed] outsiders with dirt clods, slash their car tires and assault them in the water,” according to a 2016 article in the Los Angeles Times.³

California state government has also had a history of intentionally or unintentionally leading exclusive policy processes that impact large parts of the population. Nearly two decades ago, the state enacted the Marine Life Protection Act (MLPA) directing the California Department of Fish and Wildlife to “redesign California’s system of marine protected areas to function as a network in order to: increase coherence and effectiveness in protecting the state’s marine life and habitats, marine ecosystems, and marine natural heritage, as well as to improve recreational, educational and study opportunities provided by marine ecosystems subject to minimal human disturbance.”⁴ The MLPA engagement process spanned the length of California’s coastline without much acknowledgement of or engagement with coastal tribes, who have thousands of years of coastal management knowledge. After learning about the effort, some tribes worked with the Fish and Game Commission to acknowledge tribal rights as part of the process the commission continued to present difficult barriers.⁵

Recently, several California state agencies have publicly recognized their roles in perpetuating environmental injustice and social inequity. Within the last three years, the Commission, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) and the Conservancy, have sought to develop policies and guidelines that better support environmental justice communities impacted by their policies, programs, and projects.

II. EFFORTS DEVELOPING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE GUIDELINES ACROSS STATE’S COASTAL AGENCIES

Under the California Department of Natural Resources, three state agencies oversee coastal zone management: the Commission, the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the Conservancy (see Berkley study) Unlike the Commission and BCDC, however, the Conservancy is a non-regulatory agency that works with state agencies, local governments, and other partners to restore and enhance coastal resources including public access.⁶

In 2016, California Governor Jerry Brown signed [Assembly Bill 2616 \(Burke\)](#) -- a coastal justice law that amended the California Coastal Act. The law explicitly requires compliance with, and enforcement of, civil rights and environmental justice laws. It also requires the governor to appoint a Coastal Commissioner who represents environmental justice communities. In 2019, the Commission adopted its first environmental justice policy that “provides guidance for Commissioners, staff, and the public on how the Commission will implement its environmental justice authority and integrate the principles of environmental justice, equality, and social equity into all aspects of the Commission’s program and operations.”⁷

In 2017, BCDC approved an amendment to develop social equity and environmental justice policies for the San Francisco Bay Plan. BCDC voted on revised recommendations in October 2019. According to BCDC, “the amendment must now be approved by the State Office of Administrative Law and the

³ Los Angeles Times. ‘Bay Boys’ surfer gang cannot block access to upscale beach, Coastal Commission says. Retrieved from: <https://www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-surfer-gang-enforcement-20160211-story.html>

⁴ California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Marine Life Protection Act. Retrieved from: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Conservation/Marine/MPAs/MLPA>

⁵ KCET. California Tribes Offer Critical Perspective on Marine Protected Areas. Retrieved from: <https://www.kcet.org/shows/tending-nature/california-tribes-offer-critical-perspective-on-marine-protected-areas>

⁶ State Coastal Conservancy. About the Conservancy. Retrieved from: <https://scc.ca.gov/about/>

⁷ California Coastal Commission. Environmental Justice and Social Equity. Retrieved from: <https://www.coastal.ca.gov/env-justice/>

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Office for Coastal Management. The policies will likely take effect in early 2020 depending on the state and federal approval process timing."⁸

Other state agencies, such as the State Lands Commission, have also adopted similar policies. Additionally in 2018, California Attorney General Xavier Becerra established the Environmental Justice Bureau under the California Department of Justice.

FOCUS GROUP BACKGROUND

As mentioned above, the State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) contracted Better World Group (BWG) to plan, coordinate and convene an equity and environmental justice centered focus group in the Los Angeles region. Feedback from the focus groups is intended to inform the development of the Conservancy's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Guidelines.

The goal of the focus group was to understand how stakeholders who work on environmental justice and equity issues in Los Angeles County perceive the State Coastal Conservancy's efforts to promote environmental justice and coastal issues in the region, and to garner feedback on how the Conservancy can improve their work on these issues. Prior to these focus groups, in February 2019 the Conservancy distributed an online survey on equity and environmental justice to its mailing list. Data gathered in these focus groups, will complement responses collected through the online survey and will be used to inform the Conservancy's final JEDI Guidelines.

To become more familiar with the Coastal Conservancy, BWG staff reviewed background materials about the Coastal Conservancy's programs and their ongoing efforts to develop the JEDI guidelines. Materials we reviewed included:

- The Coastal Conservancy's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan
- Background materials for the Conservancy's programs,
- Responses to the online equity and environmental justice survey
- Strawperson Outline of the Conservancy's JEDI Guidelines

Additionally, our staff participated in numerous planning calls with Conservancy staff and the other focus group facilitators to review materials, discuss strategy, and coordinate our efforts. The Coastal Conservancy staff provided an initial draft of questions for the focus group, which our team reviewed and edited for greater specificity. A final Interview Guide was developed with the input of the other focus group facilitators. The final Interview Guide included a total nine questions broken down into the following five categories:

- Overall Perception of the Coastal Conservancy
- Grantmaking/Programs
- Community Engagement
- Board and Staff Awareness of Environmental Justice and,
- Accountability and Transparency

To ensure some consistency across the five focus groups, all of the facilitators agreed to use the same questions.

In accordance with established guidelines for conducting focus group research, BWG developed an informed consent form that each participant was asked to sign. The consent form states the purpose of the focus group and the rights of participants to not have their name associated with any comments and

⁸ San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission. Environmental Justice and Social Equity Bay Plan Amendment Fact Sheet. Retrieved from: <https://bcdc.ca.gov/ejwg/BPAEJSEFags.html>

ensure confidentiality. To fully capture all of the comments shared BWG audio recorded the focus group. Following the focus group we transcribed the recording and deleted it once the transcription was complete. Each participant was also asked to fill out an anonymous survey to capture the demographics of the group. To compensate participation, we offered a \$100 stipend to each participant. Participants were asked to submit an invoice to BWG to receive the stipend.

Participants were identified using a combination of the Conservancy's stakeholder contact list and the personal contacts of BWG staff members. An initial email invitation was sent to more than 20 people, mostly staff for community-based organizations and non-profits focused on environmental justice, health and equity issues throughout Los Angeles County. To compensate participation, we offered a \$100 stipend to each participant. Participants were asked to submit an invoice to BWG to receive the stipend.

A total of 12 people participated in the focus group, which was held on October 16, 2019 from 10:00 am to noon. The group was comprised mostly of representatives of non-profits that focused on environmental justice, social justice and environmental issues across Los Angeles County. We also had a doctoral student whose research has included environmental justice and water, and a funder whose portfolio is focused on environmental justice. Women (7) had slightly higher participation than men (5). A majority of participants identified as Latino/Latinas (9), two people who identified as Black and one person preferred not identify his/her ethnicity. The group was relatively young with 9 participants under the age of 40. Four of the participants had previously applied for funding from the Conservancy, of those only 2 were successful, and one person was unsure.

I. SUMMARY OF KEY FEEDBACK AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Los Angeles focus group provided a range of guidance to the Conservancy to develop robust JEDI Guidelines. Notably, the group supported the strawperson outline and encouraged by the opportunity to provide input for the draft guidelines. However, the group did raise concerns around continued engagement, and ensuring their feedback is incorporated into the final guidelines. Few of the environmental justice groups have received funding from the Conservancy and provided more specific comments on the grant process. Below are summaries of key themes, notable quotes from participants and recommendations.

Grantmaking and Programs

To demonstrate a true commitment to environmental justice the Conservancy should ensure their grantmaking programs are structured to fund efforts "...to address the harm that has been done" from polluting facilities in coastal communities. During the focus group participants shared examples from Wilmington and south Oxnard, two coastal communities made up of predominately low-income, Latino residents living adjacent to major ports, and in the case of Wilmington oil refineries. Supporting these communities may also mean supporting organizing efforts to undo the historic overconcentration of pollution in this communities.

Investing in the capacity of non-profit and community based organizations (CBOs) with a history of working on environmental justice issues was another key theme shared by the group. A couple of participants emphasized their organizations have the capacity to do more significant work than "beach clean ups." There was a shared frustration of having to compete with larger, better funded, traditional coastal organizations for grant funding. There was also a frustration that more established coastal organizations often partner with smaller organizations, and end up taking credit for their work and do not share an equal proportion of funding.

It was suggested that the Conservancy should develop a system to track and analyze all of its grants to identify gaps in types of groups as well as regions. Despite being a Los Angeles based group, it was

noted that the Conservancy should also ensure it is distributing funds to California's Central Valley and Inland Valley which have a high proportion of overburdened communities. The Conservancy should focus outreach and technical assistance efforts in areas with limited investment.

Notable quotes:

"Wilmington is coastal, but there is a very, very small part that is actually available to the community and that is because the Port and oil refineries have taken that whole coast. So when I see 'protect' and Restore the Coast", in my head it's like protect the existing coast that has already been for wealthier communities and populations. And then 'restore', I'm definitely down for restoring the wetlands obviously they are so important and the water but also how are we restoring the access that folks have lost access to. So somehow incorporating what has already been lost and what people haven't even been able to experience that is so close to them and something like that I am not seeing here."

"... making funds accessible to address like the harm that has been done and being able to talk about environmental racism as part of their education and to also, you know, build that capacity for organizing work that needs to happen along the coast too, especially for EJ communities. We're working specifically in south Oxnard where there's just like this row of industry that separates the farm workers from accessing the beach and the port continues to buy, the port out there, continues to buy land and the Coastal Conservancy just stays quiet about it. There just like, 'Oh, well, this is not our issue.' You know, I think that their silence in perpetuating violence, you know, so I think it falls in the hands of community and if they are not aware of that, they are not prepared to do something about it, then it just seems to happen over and over again."

"I think the Coastal Conservancy should do a better job at investing in CBOs and leadership of color that's reflective of the communities instead of just, historically with some of the grantees that hasn't always been the case, you know, so you have people from the outside taking underserved and underprivileged populations out to the coast to do beach cleanups, which is like really gets me right here, because we're responsible for also cleaning the beach as well. So, we need to go beyond programming just to clean the beach, that's one point I want to make."

"When it comes to funding, we had applied for funding for something around, we do political education with our youth and adult members, so when we talk about lack of access to the beach a lot of it is because we are talking about all these underlying problems and issues and how systemically they unfold and so when we submitted a funding grant with that framework, it's not focused on like we are going to focus on cleaning up the beach!"

"One aspect of it is that I don't think they analyze the data as to where they are granting, who is represented in that grant funding and who is not particularly when it comes to inland communities. That includes the Central Valley, the California Central Valley, not just our (LA) Valley. So I think there is a lot more room for improvement in tracking and data analysis to include the overall grantmaking. And to use that information to do better outreach to the areas that are not receiving funding and provide technical assistance when organizations are unable to put together a proposal that fits their goals because I think that is another really key issue is that they have very specific mold and guidelines and oftentimes the very communities that need it for example an organization that is bringing youth at risk to the coast that's not what they do and now they are not going to have the time for the staff to do a good application. So those are all things that the Conservancy should be responsible for."

Recommendations:

- Modify grant program guidelines to support and prioritize work focused on reducing environmental burden in overburdened communities.
- Invest in building the capacity of smaller community-based organizations and non-profits with experience working in overburdened, low-income communities and communities of color.

- Reduce onerous requirements in grant applications that may dissuade smaller community-based organizations from applying for funding.
- Develop scoring criteria for grant proposals that takes into account meaningful community engagement.
- Collect and analyze data on types of organizations, geographies and programs where Coastal Conservancy has made investments to identify potential gaps.

Implementation support for grantees

Grantees of the Conservancy spoke well of their interactions with staff. They expressed appreciation for flexibility, time and support provided by the staff person assigned to their grant. However, the grantees also discussed challenges that emerged during implementation. A major challenge is the limitations of eligible funding, challenges with long waits for approval of revised scopes of work, which can delay reimbursements. Both grantees mentioned that they are subsidizing their Conservancy funded projects to implement them. Other participants who were not grantees of the Conservancy shared general frustration and issues with government grants.

Notable Quotes:

“The other thing is that you can’t buy food or water with the state’s Coastal Conservancy grant, so we had to raise additional funding just to be able to provide food at the meeting, which is, you know, kind of absurd to us, you know, if you want community to come, especially to the coast, everyone already mentioned it, food is very critical in making sure that happens. The other thing, just on the capacity side is like the fee for service, which is the hourly model. They require the hourly model to be broken out, across costs and then for you to attribute costs and then the, we’re a fiscally sponsored project, so their indirect rate is capped at a lower percentage that what ours is allowed. It has a fiscal sponsor, you know that means that, are indirect rate is a little bit higher so we have to subsidize some of the program now just to be able to do that... we are going to take kids and families on bikes, buses and trains up and down the coast to visit these places that we are talking about today. However, again, we can’t buy food or water, it’s an hourly cost, and we are subsidizing part of the program, so, it’s not in-kind. We’re subsidizing the program just to make it happen.”

“Similar experience at the staff level it’s really good but then there’s like this internal process or internal operation that slows decision making down. So we have a budget amendment or something that’s specifically a budget issue is what it has come down to, if there is a scope change we have to wait a long period of time for it to go through their internal process, then make it to the agenda to then get approved. So that slows it because we have to pay staff the work doesn’t automatically stop, like, our engagement our in the community work doesn’t just end or drop off for a couple months, we still have to keep doing that. So I think internal operations of how you connect staff to the Board.”

“We are funded, like I said earlier, on some grants, on some urban greening and Climate ready programming, and I think just reiterating the point that we don’t have to have two separate pots of money for programs. You know there is the education and access program and then there is the climate ready program, but there should be an overlapping components to it. The indirect costs, K brought it up and it’s right on point, there are those caps and they are an issue for I think all non-profits because there is a lot of indirect that goes into putting these projects forward and there is just not enough money, that’s just a much larger systemic issue and C alluded to that earlier. But you know our project is underfunded by \$400,000 and so we have to be able to figure out where we are getting that.”

“Government money and funding, and I agree... it’s super capacity driven in terms of like what do you have to set up and then also, I’m not sure, if we never applied for Coastal Conservancy, but a lot of government funding and why we don’t go for government funding is the wait time. So some of it is like reimbursement, some of it is grant but they will wait super long to give it to you or there is a funding

change they'll be like, "My bad, we can't do this!"... and so, that is like really hard on the bottom line of folks when you're having to wait 6 months to get in a check, but you're supposed to be doing this work, or you know, having to wait 9 months to get reimbursed or any of those things. So that also limits how people can engage when they just don't have just the cash flow to keep something afloat while they wait for folks to figure that out. '

Recommendations:

- Work with grantees from smaller non-profits and CBOs to understand challenges with grant implementation and identify potential solutions.
- Review internal process for approving budget amendments to reduce delay for grantees receiving reimbursements. Consider options for advanced payments if possible.
- Expand funding for activities related to community engagement.

Technical Assistance

Providing technical assistance (TA) to organizations with limited capacity to develop projects or submit funding proposals was discussed as a concrete action the Conservancy can take to diversify their grantees. However, groups feel strongly that technical assistance should not be forced upon recipients. Rather, effective technical assistance is most effective when it is driven by recipient.

Notable Quotes:

"I think encouraging partnerships between EJ and environmental organizations and non-traditional organizations that are serving other aspects and needs of the community would be like really important, and I think that facilitates learning between nonprofits as well – it's like ok – "ok I'm working with this EJ org who has experience in applying for these types of funds, I'm learning from them through this partnership and maybe in the future I can do my own application."

"I think with the technical capacity piece, I always get hung up on the agency providing you this TA or whatever but I think it should – I have seen other models where they actually invest in a community based organization to just hire a grant writer and work with them for the technical piece and facilitate that conversation with the community because you already know what you want. Some of us aren't fortunate enough to have enough unrestricted funding to have to pay 5,000 dollars 10,000 dollars to put something together. So whenever they offer TA it's not so much can you answer this this question in terms of tell me what it means but can you just give me some money so I can actually compete and put forward an application with the community."

"I just also want to tag if folks are thinking about technical assistance to be very thoughtful of what that is because sometimes technical assistance is forced down our throats as non-profits and it is super not helpful, time consuming and sometimes it feels a little degrading. In the sense that we are going to tell you how to do communications work knowing damn well we know how to do communications work we just need to hire or have the money to hire someone who does communications. So saying we are going to get you all together in a room to talk about how we do communications and PR, really we are all wearing ten hats. So the problem isn't that we don't know how to do it the problem is that we don't have the time, or person, or personnel to do that."

Recommendations:

- Develop a program to provide technical assistance to potential grantees to support project and application development.
- Partner with community-based groups to provide technical assistance or help design technical assistance program.

Invest in meaningful community engagement

Distinguishing between outreach and meaningful community engagement generated a lot of opinions and insights. There was consensus that comprehensive community engagement goes beyond sharing information and inviting people to public meetings, and requires intentionally engaging community residents in decision-making and taking time to understand the issues community residents are concerned about. Government agencies are seen as not prioritizing the time, energy and skill community organizations invest in building trust within their communities.

Notable Quotes:

“Distinguishing also between engagement and just outreach. They are very different. In my experience working with the Transformative Climate Communities on the evaluation side, having that distinction has been very useful. What is an outreach activity versus what is a more comprehensive engagement where people are actually having a say of some sort in program development and implementation. Instead of just saying, ‘Hey, come to a meeting we are going to give you more information about something.’”

“The other thing I see a lot in government is that they consider community engagement to be more like stakeholder engagement. So like, ‘Do we have all the agency people there, the influencers?’ True community engagement isn’t part of that. It’s like if you have a good organization that maybe is really engaged at that level that is community based that’s serendipity. But it’s not that kind of community engagement that I think a lot of us think is actually valuable and meaningful in terms of building relationships and doing community base building, because that’s just hard.”

“We define it as community informing design, community informing programming community informing policy and goals of the project, that’s true community engagement. Our experience with government agencies is that little to no resources are committed to community engagement and that’s why community engagement is done so poorly. If there is a real commitment to this equity piece, there should be specifically a percentage of funds that are set aside for any and all projects that are trying to deliver services towards community engagement. Because to get true community engagement it takes capacity and resources. Things like translation need to be taken into account, think like childcare need to be taken into account. Access to people, period. The other piece that is often overlooked is translation of the policy language into terms the community can understand. That’s a very hard process that a lot of us do for no resources. But that’s a key component right? That’s the reason why an engineer just can’t come sit and talk to the community because they will just speak jargon and no one is going to understand what that person says.”

“I always find it funny when people ask, ‘How do we engage the community?’ it’s like ‘How do you build a rocket?’ it’s not really that difficult you just have to do it, but you have to have intentionality with it. So where is the intentionality in terms of doing community engagement so everything that G just said in the terms of like what does it mean to provide this space, time, and energy behind doing real community engagement and not tokenization.”

“The people who work in the communities, know their community. And it may not follow what you consider your standard of success and sometimes that is what messes things up... our engagement is door-to-door. Our engagement is person-to-person. You have to develop trust and a relationship before you can invite one of the women to come. It is a different way of engagement. We do listening sessions, we do pláticas. We do different things. We go into people’s homes, we make a big bowl of menudo together and we are talking while we are making menudo.”

“I think many times on community engagement, it is an afterthought or something that someone always says, ‘Oh, we need to have community engagement, we’ve got to get people involved, etc.’ and so the resources aren’t there for implementing the programs. One of the things that has to be considered is the economics to the programs so that the work is respected and it is paid a living, not a minimum wage. And that it be taken into consideration by region. This is a state entity, so sometimes it sets a state standard. But LA is different than the Central Valley. So what they are paying folks in Central Valley might be a lot

less than in LA or even the San Francisco area. So I think having an integrated strategy that is not just about community engagement but how are you funding it so that it is equitable to the workers that are impacted.”

Recommendations:

- Define meaningful community engagement and develop qualitative metrics to measure and distinguish meaningful engagement from community outreach.
- Incorporate funding for community engagement in all of the Conservancy’s grant programs
- Allow for appropriate compensation of community engagement work by grantees.
- Consider contracting with community based organizations or non-profits to conduct community outreach for Coastal Conservancy programs.

Addressing Barriers to Coastal Access

Participants stressed many barriers for black communities, communities of color, and low income communities from accessing the coast across Los Angeles County. Not all access points are created equally, lack of affordable parking and public transportation remains a deterrent, policing is prevalent, and confusion around “what is public and what is not” causes undue stress.

Some participants emphasized a lack of comfort. One participant shared remarks they have encountered such as “they don’t belong there.” These experiences coupled with heightened policing at beaches, in affluent areas, makes visitors feel unsafe and unwelcome. Often, these experiences color the perception of access, and at times, push these communities out to locations that cost more time and money to access. Another participant noted that their community opts-out of visiting the beach out of fear, noting that policing at beaches harms immigrant communities that are already experiencing heightened surveillance.

Participants also agreed that public transportation and affordable parking would alleviate barriers to entry, stressing that the Conservancy needs to acknowledge that each community in the L.A. region is different, and thus, so are their needs. For more inland communities such as the San Gabriel and San Fernando Valleys, limited beach parking deters residents from driving long distances, and with minimal public transportation options, visitors from these communities may opt out of beach visits altogether.

Notable quotes:

“Being represented in the food. Like, they sell hotdogs and hamburgers like there is not a street vendor allowed there. Even in Venice they kicked out the street vendors. So that is another cultural aspect of who has access to these areas to support their livelihood but also who is reflected and how do they feel welcomed in these spaces.”

“There is a cultural aspect of who does the beach belong to and who should be able to go there. And so this conversation of ‘you too should be able to have access the beach’ – I work with communities all the time in south LA which is not that far from the beach who have never been. They have never been able to leave their neighborhood. For a whole bunch of reasons from: time, to people trying to figure out how they are going to pay their rent, to all the other things that go on in people’s lives.”

“I know I have been to Hermosa, I’ve been to Manhattan, I’ve been to Malibu and I’ve been to Dockweiler and Santa Monica, its complete different police presence and how they interact with people in all those places. And when you finally get there, there is this kind of culture do you still belong there. So there is that conversation, there is a whole lot that can be done to make it accessible in the structural realm with parking, access to food, being able to have open spaces, making sure that public property is there and then there is the cultural part of how do we also say that these beaches are for everyone.”

“...it’s really like the segregation of the beaches. People of color aren’t supposed to go to certain beaches, like Dockweiler or Long Beach. But if you go to Malibu you know you’re going to get messed with by the police or whoever, a crazy rich person or whatever...so I think that access question is really about the social access to any of the coast. Because it is all supposed to be public land but it is not treated like that.”

Recommendations:

- Contract with local vendors that understand the community’s needs. Equity should be reflected in economic development and supporting local communities and the local economy through food vendors and other contractors hired by the Conservancy.
- Work with local transportation authorities, or at local level with county and city to support public transportation to the coast.
- Work with inland communities to develop programs that support public transportation to the coast.
- Identify ways to stop excessive policing at beaches. The Conservancy, the Commission, BCDC and others need to work with local authorities to create a safe, welcome environment for all beachgoers.
- Develop better beach signage that indicates what is public, and open to all for access, and what is private. These signs should be designated and monitored by the agency.
- Prioritize investments in areas of the coast that are highly used by people of color to build up infrastructure.

Increase funding to improve coastal access

Participants expressed the importance of increasing funding for projects to improve access to the coast for vulnerable communities. Dependence on bond funding, by not just the Coastal Conservancy but all state conservancies was cited as a major challenge and source of frustration. Limitations on the Coastal Conservancy’s ability to use of Prop 68 for projects to increase access was called out as a significant challenge. One suggestion for promoting access to incorporate an access element to all of the Conservancy’s grant programs as a potential way to leverage funds to promote access.

Notable quotes:

“The huge elephant in this room is that we thought with prop 68 we got 5% for community access that was sold as providing services to communities and being able to get people to public lands including beaches. Well, the not so dirty secret is that that’s not happening, the Department of Finance shut that down totally, so one of my concerns, frankly with these listening sessions is how transparent are we being about that issue and the fact that Coastal Conservancy just like all the other Conservancies and agencies that got prop 68 funds have extremely limited bandwidth to allocate any of what they call their general fund or non-bond funds to these programs...we is broadly, in the state, we need to fix how we fund community access for grants to public lands in general and the beach specifically. For them to be done robustly, when we talk about reducing barriers or having better communication strategies using community transit, which is more effective than doing public transportation for a lot of our communities, who wants to be on the bus for four hours to get to the beach and have to turn around and come back? I think that to me is the biggest issue out there, is that we need to figure out a better way to fund these things.”

“We have a Coastal Conservancy grant for the City of San Fernando and that’s in that. One of the things that I think would have been great to have funding available for is if we are working in areas that are environmentally stressed, economically stressed, polluted that part of the community engagement or part of the scoring criteria or part of the funding is that those communities that are in that or wherever they are, - that there is programming to get them to the beaches. So there is community engagement that is

required but its community engagement plus access, plus exposure. That should be part of what we put in from the beginning, how are we going to get them there.”

“...making sure that every grant they award includes a community access element is really important because that way you can connect people to the coast in ways that are much more significant. Because that is where they invest most of their dollars, are in those watershed protection programs, it’s about urban greening so if we want to maximize and leverage where they invest most of their money, that’s where I think we can do it and that’s where we can incorporate programs that would include just more visibility about opportunities and accessing the coast and providing that community engagement piece that is so critical. And that is how you get that connection, plus that’s what they always talk about it’s about the watershed, about connecting the upper watershed to the Coast so that should make an impact.”

Recommendations:

- Incorporate public access to all of the Conservancy’s grant programs.
- Provide additional points to applicants that include plans to improve access for residents of environmentally overburdened and low-income communities.
- Work with Department of Finance to discuss potential ways to utilize Prop 68 funding for projects to enhance community access to public lands along the coast.

Building staff capacity on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion

The Conservancy, headquartered in Oakland, CA, has concentrated staff in the Bay Area and very limited presence in Southern California. Relatedly, the Board is primarily comprised of representatives from northern California. Participants expressed concern that the majority of the Conservancy’s staff and the Board have decision making and funding power over a region where knowledge gaps in community needs and engagement may be significant.

Building cultural humility is an on-going process of learning and unlearning

When asked how the Conservancy can better train and educate staff to address “culture competency,” around equity and environmental justice, many participants felt concern that the agency was seeking ways to “check a box.” The group detailed the reasoning behind why terms such as “cultural competency” are antiquated and harmful. One participant noted that the Conservancy needs to change the language and the intention behind the language to shift the conversation on this, “Maybe cultural humility or something else that shows that there is this ongoing process and it is not just you attend a training and that’s it. Or like you are a new Board member, you get this training to be on the board and then it stops there.”

Notable quotes:

“We have been seeing the example here in the city with planners and engineers who don’t know our streets, tend to not do a really good job of informing plans for infrastructure, it’s when they come to know our streets, live in it first person, or at least talk to the people who live there on a daily basis, that they get better informed about how to make a better plan. I think the same principle applies. Coastal Conservancy staff should know these beaches enough that they have a sense –I mean all of us have experience just from going around – we aren’t experts in this area per say but we are perceptive people. And I think that definitely goes a long way.”

“I feel like if they are not considering the different needs of different communities and regions then how do you actually achieve justice and equity? Then going back to your point [A] on parking I think again, knowing your community, like the San Fernando Valley parking is just another barrier, you can’t get there,

you have to drive there, we don't have a lot of public transportation options. We are not going to take the bus for four [or] five hours to get there to spend two or three hours and then come back all dirty with sand. So it's like thinking about which communities you are trying to reach what their needs are versus general guidelines for the state."

"I think ultimately they need internal JEDI guidelines for workforce development. That is what needs to happen. The staff that they hire in the future, build or develop, or are planning to hire need to be reflective of the communities they are trying to work in. We have seen other states do this, Minnesota does this in their parks and recreation department. If the Conservancy is looking at this now, that should be something they consider now."

"... having the staff be educated on EJ so there is always self-reflection in work that happen internally both with hiring but also making sure that the folks are thinking about the intersectional issues and aware of race, class, gender and all the other isms of privilege. And to have that not just as a one off but as something that people need to be constantly thinking and applying to their work both interpersonally and also in like grantmaking. Because sometimes when you plopp folks of color, folks from our community, into these organizations and staff, organizations that have not thought about that there are a lot of macroaggressions that can happen that stay there for a very long time."

"Moving it from that space to having community members and those living in the communities really being a part of the decision making process means having a spot for them in the decision making process, like, on the Board. So that would be something that would be good to see. How do we incorporate environmental justice seats in here? There are four public member seats, two appointed by the Governor, I don't know the Governor. One appointed by the Assembly the other by the Senate. These processes are very bureaucratic so I how does the Conservancy then bring these positions to communities so that they can be part of the decision making?"

Recommendations:

- Hire local staff in Southern California that stem from environmental justice communities and have an understanding of community based organizations, local geography, and relevant cultural knowledge.
- The Coastal Conservancy staff and Board should shift the conversation from "cultural competency" to "cultural humility" and develop on-going learning process.
- Develop internal JEDI guidelines for workforce development. The Conservancy should hire in ways that reflect the communities they serve. An example of effective workforce development plan for intentional hiring can be found in the Minnesota Parks and Recreation plan.
- Recruit members of the Coastal Conservancy Board that reflect diversity of California. Consider expanding Board to include more diverse representation.

JEDI Guidelines: Process and staying connected

Participants from the focus group expressed interest in reconvening after the release of the draft JEDI Guidelines to review and provide feedback on the guidelines as a group. They also noted interest in continued engagement throughout the process, as well as being kept abreast of opportunities to provide comments and feedback.

Notable quotes:

"I think that when we read the draft of the final that what we said here is reflected on it. Because there is nothing more upsetting that spending a few hours with your colleagues and, "Wait, is that the meeting we went to?" You spend three hours with them and everything they asked for, nothing is implemented. I think

that should be the first thing is [to] be respectful of what you heard that what we say makes sense not what you say makes sense. But maybe that we both agree makes sense.”

“I would hope that this governing board appreciates what all these focus groups are coming to the table to and more importantly that this advisory board is reflective of the voice that we are all articulating and that they then advise the fiduciary or the grant board on future EJ and other efforts to make their work more reflective of California.”

“...how do we ensure the board is actually checking, is there accountability around that? Because you are right, the board does have the say so. What I am afraid of is also we put this awesome plan, the JEDI stuff together but it’s just co-opted by the status quo. We are seeing that also in other government agencies where affluent communities can really start using that language very effectively to make their proposals sound just as competitive and that results in the same thing happening: the communities with the highest need don’t have access, there is no change. That evaluation piece is very key.”

“I think it would be useful to reconvene maybe this group, after the actual guidelines are made public, and review them as a group and provide feedback as a group. A couple of other things for example not capping engagement activities to a certain percentage which is something we have seen in Transformative Climate Communities and it’s been a pain. And then I noticed that the, for example, the “Explore the Coast Program” has an advisory board but the other programs don’t, and so are there opportunities to include a board in the other programs that the Conservancy has?”

Recommendations:

- The draft and final JEDI Guidelines should reflect focus group feedback.
- Develop a detailed implementation plan – that goes beyond describing vision and principles, and includes a roll-out plan. The Conservancy should glean from its sister agencies, the Commission and BCDC that have similarly developed guidelines and policies.
- Include an evaluation component.
- Making the draft JEDI Guidelines accessible: Translate draft guidelines into at least the top five languages spoken throughout the state.
- Re-engage focus groups after the release of the guidelines. Participants want to be able to reconvene and provide comments on the draft guidelines.