

California State Coastal Conservancy Strategic Plan Engagement Report

August 2022

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Executive Summary

Purpose

The State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) has been guided by a series of five year Strategic Plans for the past twenty years. The current plan was adopted in November 2017 and set goals and objectives for 2018-2022. In the spring of 2022, the Conservancy embarked on an outreach and engagement effort to develop a new Strategic Plan for the five year period of 2023-2027. The goals of the outreach dovetailed with the Conservancy's new policies since the last Strategic Plan, including the Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) guidelines, Project Selection Criteria, and Coastal Access Project Standards.

Engagement Strategies

During the Spring of 2022, over 1,000 individuals were engaged to understand their Coastal Resilience needs and to better understand how the Conservancy can modify their programs to meet the needs of organizations, with a significant focus on equity. Outreach included online and in-person focus groups and listening sessions, and an online survey and interactive project mapping tool. While the Conservancy reached out to existing partners, a significant component of the outreach focused on reaching communities and inviting organizations who were new to the Conservancy, including community based organizations, tribal nonprofits, organizations focused on equitable coastal access, organizations serving people with disabilities, and organizations focused on workforce development.

Acknowledgements

Many members of the Coastal Conservancy staff participated in the Strategic Plan engagement process. The Conservancy was assisted by a consulting team from Calm Waters Group that included: Marcus Griswold (Lead), Jerry Bowers (Strategic Planning), Jessica Lass (Strategic Communications), Arlin Benavides, Carl Olton, and Monica Dwight (Engagement Specialists).

We appreciate the time and thoughtfulness of everyone who provided input into the draft Strategic Plan. Their ideas and insights helped the Conservancy to understand Coastal Resilience needs and how to better meet the needs of its partners.

Introduction

The State Coastal Conservancy (Conservancy) has been guided by a series of five year Strategic Plans for the past twenty years. The current plan was adopted in November 2017 and set goals and objectives for 2018-2022. In the spring of 2022, the Conservancy embarked on a statewide outreach and engagement effort to develop a new Strategic Plan for the five year period of 2023-2027. The Strategic Plan update creates an opportunity for the Conservancy to hear from partners – nonprofit organizations, tribes, local governments, community groups, state and federal agencies, private landowners, conservation organizations, and the public – about their vision and priorities for the Conservancy's work.

The Mission of the Conservancy informed the outreach and engagement process. The State Coastal Conservancy's vision is of a beautiful, restored, and accessible coast for current and future generations of Californians. The Conservancy acts with others to protect and restore, and increase public access to, California's coast, ocean, coastal watersheds, and the San Francisco Bay Area.

The Conservancy has three core program areas:

- Enjoy the Coast – increase outdoor recreation and access for all Californians
- Protect & Restore the Coast – natural resources open space conservation & enhancement
- Climate Ready – adapt to climate change impacts and increase resilience of natural areas

Since the last Strategic Plan, the Conservancy has adopted Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (JEDI) guidelines and updated its Project Selection to incorporate JEDI recommendations. This Strategic Plan will also inform the Conservancy's grantmaking programs that are expected to receive significant funding over the next five years to address Coastal Resilience.

Community Engagement Goals

Through the outreach described below, Calm Waters Group and the Conservancy staff engaged a broad range of organizations and individuals. The Conservancy achieves its goals through partnerships with other organizations, nonprofits, tribes, and other government agencies. These are critical partners to

the Conservancy and were included in the engagement process. Many of these entities are familiar with the Conservancy and are interested in this plan because they want the Conservancy to help support their projects. The goal of the outreach was to hear from the Conservancy's partners and to reach new partners, including leaders in workforce development, community-based organizations, equitable and inclusive access, and tribal nonprofits, among others.

Calm Waters Group worked with the Conservancy to engage with potential partners that may not have worked with the Conservancy before to bring forth ideas that will benefit underserved communities and tribes, and that will support improved equity approaches in funding and programs.

The goal of the engagement was to get input to guide the work of the Conservancy for the next five years. Participants were asked for feedback on priority issues that Conservancy work could help address, potential projects, technical assistance needs, and thoughts on SCC work as a whole. Here are some of the questions discussed through the engagement:

- What are the most pressing needs and what should the Conservancy prioritize?
- What is the most important single thing the Conservancy could accomplish in the next 5 years?
- What are the most pressing coastal resilience issues or needs in California that the Conservancy could help address and how?
- What are the barriers to addressing those needs and how could the Conservancy help to overcome them?
- What type of support outside of funding would help you achieve your coastal resilience goals?
- What challenges or barriers do you face, how can the Conservancy help address that challenge?
- What are successful examples the Conservancy should be aware of?
- What are the specific JEDI challenges and opportunities for the issues discussed and how could Conservancy help address them?

Summary of Outreach Activities

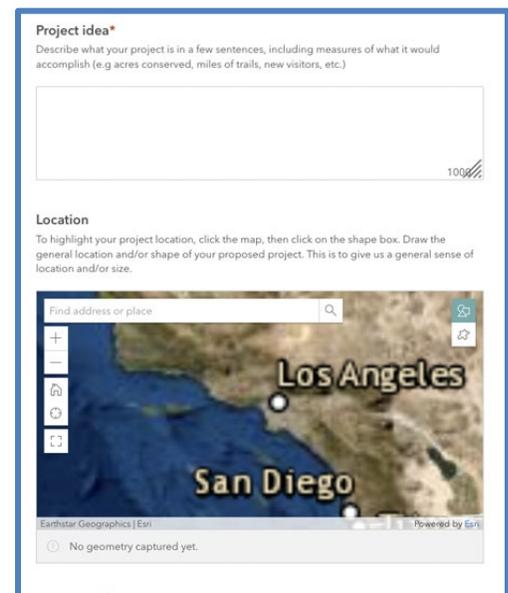
During the Spring of 2022, Calm Waters Group and Conservancy staff led a process to engage coastal communities through online and in-person focus groups and listening sessions, and through an online survey and interactive project mapping tool.

In addition to existing Conservancy contact lists, Calm Waters Group helped Conservancy staff to identify and reach out to new organizations, including community based organizations, tribal nonprofits, organizations focused on equitable coastal access, organizations serving people with disabilities, and organizations focused on workforce development.

Online Survey and Map

An online survey was distributed to the Conservancy's email listserv and during each outreach event and through social media networks. A summary of the Survey is provided in Section 3.

An interactive, online project map form was developed allowing participants to add information on their project ideas to a map. One hundred and twenty seven projects were submitted on that form. In addition, Together Bay Area had completed a similar exercise and provided all of its project ideas for implementing Pathways to 30x30 to the Conservancy. This exercise helped the Conservancy see where partners had identified potential projects and informed the metrics developed in the Strategic Plan.



Project idea*
Describe what your project is in a few sentences, including measures of what it would accomplish (e.g. acres conserved, miles of trails, new visitors, etc.)

Location
To highlight your project location, click the map, then click on the shape box. Draw the general location and/or shape of your proposed project. This is to give us a general sense of location and/or size.

Find address or place

Los Angeles
San Diego

Earthstar Geographics | Esri | Powered by Esri

No geometry captured yet.

Written Comments

The Conservancy received emails and letters providing written comments on the Strategic Plan over a two month period. Some of these comments encouraged prioritization of specific geographic areas or types of projects. Other comments articulated broader themes or priorities for consideration in the plan.

Outreach Events

The Conservancy and Calm Waters Group participated in many different events with a structured discussion to get input from participants. Collectively, more than 1,000 people participated in these events. Some events were open to the public, some targeted participants with particular experiences, perspective or knowledge. The discussion in each session was tailored to the group and topic. A complete list of all of these events is provided below.

Kick Off Webinar

The Conservancy hosted a webinar on March 28, 2022 to kick off the strategic planning process and provide an overview of the engagement and opportunities to provide input. [The recording of the webinar can be found here.](#)

Listening Sessions and Focus Groups

The Conservancy and Calm Waters Group held 26 focus groups, listening sessions, and workshops. Focus groups were smaller meetings to discuss specific issues or topics in depth with invited participants, listening sessions had online, open registration, so that anyone could join. The Conservancy held two in-person workshops, one in Ft. Bragg and one after a Conservancy Board meeting.

We held listening sessions organized around geographic areas or broad aspects of the Conservancy's work. Specific focus groups included community based organizations (CBO) working in specific regions, workforce development, access for people with disabilities, and an intertribal focus group that included tribes and tribal nonprofits.

Meetings with Other Organizations

The Conservancy also presented the Strategic Plan and obtained input at meetings held by other organizations including: Bay Area Regional Trails Collaborative, Together Bay Area, San Diego Climate Collaborative, North Bay Watershed Association, and Santa Cruz Mountains Stewardship Network.

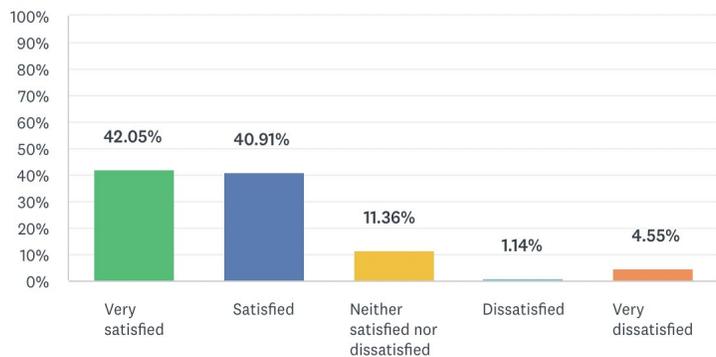
Table 1 Outreach Events and Attendance

Date	Attendees	Event	Type
3/28/22	120	Strategic Plan Public Webinar	Webinar
4/8/22	100	North Bay Watershed Association	Existing Conference
4/25/22	36	Central Coast Climate Collaborative	Focus Group
4/26/22	32	Bay Area Regional Trails Collaborative	Existing Meeting
4/27/22	70	BayCAN	Existing Meeting
4/27/22	25	Fort Bragg Town Hall	In Person Workshop
4/29/22	7	Resource Conservation Districts	Focus Group
5/4/22	18	Workforce Development	Focus Group
5/5/22	20	SCC Board Meeting Workshop	In Person Workshop
5/9/22	10	Santa Cruz Mtns Stewardship Network	Existing Meeting
5/10/22	29	Santa Barbara/San Luis Obispo	Listening Session
5/10/22	36	Santa Cruz/Monterey	Listening Session
5/11/22	10	Bay Area Community Based Organizations (CBOs)	Focus Group
5/12/22	15	Access for People with Disabilities	Focus Group
5/17/22	25	Coastal Resilience Network	Listening Session
5/17/22	11	Central Coast CBOs	Focus Group
5/23/22	8	Outdoor Equity	Focus Group
5/24/22	15	SF Bay Joint Venture	Existing Meeting
5/24/22	12	Intertribal Focus Group	Focus Group
5/25/22	110	Bay Area Counties	Listening Session
5/25/22	33	Wetlands Recovery Project	Listening Session
5/26/22	14	Together Bay Area	Existing Meeting
5/26/22	12	South Coast CBOs	Focus Group
5/31/22	47	Humboldt/Del Norte	Listening Session
5/31/22	130	Wildfire Resilience	Listening Session
6/1/22	7	North Coast - CBOs	Focus Group
6/1/22	1	Landscape Stewardship Network	Focus Group
6/1/22	21	Malibu/Santa Monica Mountains	Listening Session
6/1/22	11	LA/Ventura/OC/San Diego	Listening Session
6/7/22	24	San Diego Climate Collaborative	Focus Group

Survey Results

One hundred and seventy one people participated in the online survey. Participants were split proportionally across the coastal counties, with a slightly larger percent from the South Coast. Nearly a third of participants were from non-profit organizations, followed by local government staff and individuals. The fewest number of participants came from faith-based organizations, federal or state agencies. Nearly half of the participants had not worked with the Conservancy previously.

Some of the survey questions asked about respondents' experience working with the Conservancy and ways the Conservancy could improve. For these answers, respondents who had not worked with the Conservancy were removed from the analysis. 85% of respondents were Very Satisfied or Satisfied with the Conservancy's performance.



The survey asked participants to describe the Coastal Conservancy in one word. The answers are provided in this word cloud. Many of the most frequent responses were positive, like “collaborative” and “essential”. Other responses suggest areas for improvement, including “bureaucratic” and “confusing”.



Participants were asked what approach to grant solicitation worked best for their community or organization. Respondents preferred pre-proposals followed by an invitation to submit full proposal. Other popular grant making strategies included targeted grant rounds and pre-proposal consultations.

Survey responses related to barriers to public access, coastal resilience priorities and ways the Conservancy could better support under-resourced communities are summarized in the themes that follow.

Key Themes

Throughout the engagement, we asked for input around priorities, challenges, and opportunities for the Conservancy to support action. As discussed above, some engagement events covered all aspects of the Conservancy’s work, others focused on a specific issue area or geography. Here are some of the questions discussed through the engagement:

- What are the most pressing needs and what should the Conservancy prioritize?
- What is the most important single thing the Conservancy could accomplish in the next 5 years?
- What challenges or barriers do you face, what resources (other than funding) are needed?
- What are examples of effective community-based projects you are aware of?
- What strategies would foster a more inclusive project planning/implementation process for Conservancy grants?

Priorities

Coastal Access

Common barriers to public access identified through the engagement were lack of public transit, private development, limited parking, and unmaintained or inaccessible facilities. Some participants identified feeling unwelcome or unsafe as a barrier to coastal access. The lack of coastal access for tribes was identified as a barrier; tribal focus group participants expressed that they did not have access and privacy for cultural practices. Some participants noted that support is needed for working with unhoused communities, many who live along the shoreline, to support equitable outcomes.

Specific recommendations for improving coastal access for people with disabilities included provide information about where accessible access to the coast exists; funding transportation; expanding wheelchair accessibility at the coast, creating an advisory group of people with various disabilities, and providing Conservancy staff with training.

Across the state, coastal communities noted the challenges faced with stewarding coastal ecosystems as the number of visitors increased, indicating a need for additional signage, education, trash receptacles, and long-term maintenance in the face of increased usage.

Coastal Resilience

Participants were asked to identify priorities for increasing coastal resilience. Many participants identified the need to adapt to sea level rise, the anticipated flooding impacts and the need to protect coastal habitats into the future. Participants shared concern about loss of habitat and loss of public access due to sea level rise. Participants noted a need for projects that address sediment impaired watersheds, dam removal to allow sediment to flow to the beaches and fish to migrate upstream, acquisition of floodplains, and storm and flood water capture. Other coastal resilience priorities included: drought, wildfire risk and extreme heat. Many participants encouraged the Conservancy to support nature-based solutions, watershed approaches, and strategies that implement other statewide plans like the 30x30 initiative.

Some participants also suggested the Conservancy work to increase public awareness of climate change impacts, through partnerships with cultural institutions and museums, and non-traditional partnerships such as the Ad Council.

Working with Tribes

Tribal focus group participants identified the need to return lands to tribes. Participants encouraged the Conservancy to consider cultural easements and co-management as mechanisms that give tribes access to culturally important sites and to integrate tribal knowledge into restoration practices. Tribal focus group participants also described the need access to the coast for ceremonies, and specifically described the need for privacy for some cultural practices. Tribal focus group participants identified the need for transportation to the coast and affordable lodging at the coast. Tribal focus group participants suggested the Conservancy provide staff training on working with tribes, update its tribal engagement policy, and consider an audit of past tribal engagement of what has and hasn't worked in the past. Finally, tribal focus group participants recommended that the Conservancy improve its practices working with tribes to communicate earlier, build relationships, have more face to face meetings, and make it easier for tribes to work with the Conservancy, both in terms of resources and time.

Community Based Organizations

Focus groups were held with community based organizations in each of the four Conservancy regions - North, Central, South Coasts, and the San Francisco Bay region. The input from these four sessions recommended that the Conservancy work to center and educate communities by giving them an opportunity to take a leadership role in project planning, including community-informed design, local workforce development, intergenerational storytelling, and citizen science projects. Participants highlighted the need to support equitable access by directly connecting neighborhoods to the coast through transit or bicycle access and to address financial barriers through low cost accommodations and low cost access to sports equipment. Participants stressed the importance of creating a feeling of safety for coastal visitors. Participants identified that restoration projects should address gentrification, support community stewardship, and watershed connectivity to underserved communities. Climate Ready work should address loss of coastal access to underserved communities, support access to coastal cooling in light of extreme heat in urban and inland areas.

Workforce Development

Workforce development was brought up by many participants across meetings, in addition the Conservancy held one focus group specific to the topic. Participants recommended the Conservancy include workforce benefits when evaluating grant projects and pay for training. It was suggested that the Conservancy use its projects to support job pathways, diverse career pathways, mentorship, paid training, and apprenticeships. The Conservancy was encouraged to leverage the resources of other workforce initiatives, community organizations, unions, community colleges, and state programs that are building workforce training program especially for hard to reach communities. The

Conservancy was also encouraged to continue to support the California Conservation Corps and the local Conservation Corps.

How the Conservancy can address challenges or barriers

Reduce Barriers in Grant Making

Numerous participants cited the grant process as a barrier to funding, particularly for small nonprofits and jurisdictions. Many organizations noted the challenges with reimbursement grants, delays in funding, and the low indirect cost rates. Survey respondents suggested that the Conservancy reduce reporting requirements and allow for full indirect cost rate recovery. Suggestions included workshops throughout the grant process to help identify the best fit for funding and continued support on grant management and administration including technical support on project development, writing grant applications, and developing budgets.

Build Capacity

Participants recommended that the Conservancy provide funding directly to community organizations and make it easier for them to receive grants. These grants should support for long term outreach, relationship building with communities, and capacity building. Specific recommendations included providing funding for participation and organizational development. Organizations also asked for capacity-building support to help understand and navigate government structures to achieve project outcomes.

Support Project Planning

Many participants encouraged the Conservancy to continue to fund project planning. Participants also suggested the Conservancy should play a convening role, bringing together organizations to accelerate coastal resilience projects and build capacity within under-resourced communities. The Conservancy could support organizations in creating a corridor of funding that takes a project from concept to planning/design to permitting and then to implementation with multiphase or multiyear grant programs. Participants recognized the role of the Conservancy in serving as a bridge between grantees and other government agencies and decision makers. Many participants asked the Conservancy for help working with other agencies. As noted by participants, for new projects or smaller organizations, some community groups may not be aware of what agencies exist or what they do.

Technical Assistance

Participants noted the value they place on the Conservancy staff's expertise. They suggested working groups of staff support development of, and technical assistance on a range of topics. Across most of the meetings participants asked

for assistance with permitting, noting the unique role the Conservancy can play in supporting organizations. As noted by participants, support needed for getting project permits submitted and approved

Transparency & Staff Training

Participants recommended that the Conservancy provide more staff training on a variety of topics, including increasing accessibility and engagement practices. Tribal focus group participants suggested Conservancy staff explore training on cultural humility, to move beyond land acknowledgements, and to be transparent in communication with tribes. Participants also recommended that the Conservancy provide more transparency about its funding decisions. Tribal focus group participants recommended an annual audit of work with tribes and other JEDI work to identify ways that the Conservancy could improve its practices.