



## Memorandum

**Date:** December 06, 2019

**To:** Governing Board  
San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority

**From:** Jessica Davenport, Deputy Program Manager  
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**Subject:** Improving Equity and Community Engagement in the Measure AA Grant Program

The staff of the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority (Authority) has reviewed the equity and community engagement recommendations of the Authority’s Advisory Committee (AC). Staff has concluded that the Authority should implement these recommendations as outlined in this memo and will bring specific action items back to the board for discussion and/or action as they are ready.

### **Background**

Measure AA states, “The Authority shall give priority to projects that... Benefit economically disadvantaged communities,” or EDCs. The Governing Board and the AC have both expressed a strong commitment to achieving this goal.

The Grant Guidelines provide the following definition of EDCs, “An economically disadvantaged community (EDC) is defined as a community with a median household income less than 80% of the area median income (AMI). Within this set of low- income communities, communities of particular concern include those that: are historically underrepresented in environmental policymaking and/or projects, bear a disproportionate environmental and health burden, are most vulnerable to climate change impacts due to lack of resources required for community resilience, or are severely burdened by housing costs, increasing the risk of displacement.”

The Grant Guidelines also provide the following description of benefits to EDCs: “A proposed project’s ability to provide benefits to these communities will be judged on the basis of the direct involvement and support of local community groups; a demonstrated track record working within communities; the use of proven strategies to increase relevance of messaging and outreach; and the ability to alleviate multiple stressors within communities, including, but not limited to, addressing the need for additional recreational amenities, resilience to climate change, reductions in pollution burden, greater civic engagement, and enhanced leadership development opportunities.”

## Work to Date

The Authority has invested significant time and resources in exploring options for improving equity and community engagement in the Measure AA Grant Program. Work to date has included:

- **June 2018 – Environmental Justice (EJ) Panel.** Three EJ experts, including members of community-based organizations (Phoenix Armenta, Anthony Khalil, and Douglas Mundo), provided insights and suggestions regarding how the Measure AA grant program can better engage with and serve EDCs at the June 29, 2018 AC meeting.
- **August 2018—EJ Panel Follow-Up Document.** Authority staff prepared a follow-up document to the Environmental Justice Panel with input from AC members.
- **September 2018 – Equity Performance Measure.** The Recommendations from the Advisory Committee to the Governing Board on Performance Measures and Annual Report Format, presented at the Sept. 21, 2018 Governing Board meeting, included the performance metric “Percentage of projects providing benefits to economically disadvantaged communities”.
- **October 2018 – Formation of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee.** Authority staff presented a Proposal to Develop a Community Engagement Program for the San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority. Rather than endorse the proposal, the AC decided to form an ad hoc subcommittee to explore how best to engage with and provide benefits to EDCs. This occurred at the October 5, 2018 AC meeting.
- **February 2019 – Hiring of Equity Consultant.** The Authority allocated \$25,000 to hire an Equity Consultant to develop recommendations for the grant program. The consultant was tasked to:
  - Identify recommendations, opportunities and challenges associated with the Authority’s overall approach for integrating racial and environmental justice into its operations over the life of Measure AA;
  - Identify gaps in the Measure AA grant program related to serving and engaging EDCs; and
  - Recommend approaches, strategies and actions for addressing those gaps.
- **March 2019– Brainstorming on Near-Term Recommendations.** Equity consultant, Nahal Ghoghaie Ipakchi, led a brainstorming session to identify potential recommendations for benefiting EDCs that could potentially be incorporated in the Authority’s third grant round.
- **June 2019 – Equity Improvements for the Third Grant Round.** At the June 7, 2019 Governing Board meeting, the Authority approved the staff recommendation to extend the application due date for the third grant round to give applicants more time, as suggested by equity experts, and add a reference to tips for meaningful community engagement.
- **September 2019 – Release of Equity Consultants Report.** The report, Establishing an Equity and Community Engagement Program that Benefits Economically Disadvantaged Communities, was based on input obtained through interviews and focus group discussions with community leaders and equity experts.
- **October 2019 – Release of Ad Hoc Subcommittee’s Report.** The Report of the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Recommendations to Benefit Economically Disadvantaged

Communities was based on discussions at three meetings and a survey of subcommittee members. In addition to reviewing the equity consultant's report, the subcommittee reviewed best practices from others, including the Greenlining Institute, Asian Pacific Environmental Network, and Portland Metro Parks. The subcommittee screened the equity consultant's recommendations for consistency with the Authority's mission, prioritized the recommendations based on feasibility and expected impact, and identified gaps. The report categorized recommendations as "Near-Term – 6-12 Months", "Short-Term – 1-2 Years", and "Long-Term – 3-5 Years".

- **October 2019 – Adoption of Near-Term Recommendations by the Full AC.** The AC adopted the Near-Term Recommendations in the ad hoc subcommittee's report after discussing and reaching consensus on some wording changes. They intend to discuss the Short-Term and Long-Term Recommendations at future meetings.

Detailed descriptions of the methods and resulting recommendations developed by the equity consultant and the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Recommendations to Benefit Economically Disadvantaged Communities can be found in their respective reports.

### **Implementation of Recommendations**

Staff has reviewed the AC Near-Term Recommendations and concurs that the Authority should implement these recommendations. Staff will begin developing actions to implement the AC's Near-Term Recommendations. Staff will also consider whether and how to implement recommendations in the equity consultant's report and other recent reports on improving equity in grant programs.

Some of the AC Near-Term Recommendations would take relatively little staff time and funding to implement. For example, the following recommendations could be implemented quickly and easily:

- **Adopt guiding principles of building trust and fostering partnerships**, e.g.,
  - Authority staff and grant applicants should strive to build trust with community-based organizations in economically disadvantaged communities.
  - Authority staff should foster partnerships between community-based organizations and local government agencies and other project implementing entities.
- **Visit economically disadvantaged communities** residing along the bay shoreline (i.e., staff visits, AC tours and board tours) to better understand issues and potential opportunities.
- **Allow submission of a letter of inquiry** to determine if the proposed project is ready for funding and would make a strong application.
- **Improve accessibility of Measure AA communications materials including readability for broader audiences.**
- **Examine the feasibility of extending compensation to community members and leaders** for their participation and contributions.

Other recommendations would require more staff time and/or funding to implement, such as the following:

- **Amend scoring criteria to show stronger nexus/relationships with EDCs.** Staff will need to explore the best way to achieve the intended outcome of this recommendation, i.e., more grants for projects with meaningful community engagement that truly benefit EDCs. This outcome may be best accomplished through two different approaches:
  - **Staff recommendation to Governing Board to revise the Grant Program Guidelines and Request for Proposals** to more clearly define the criteria used for assessing whether a project includes meaningful community engagement and tangible benefits for EDCs. This recommendation could provide directions to grant application reviewers to give higher scores to such projects or create two “scoring tracks” of equal weight, one for EDC-focused projects and one for projects that do not have that component; and
  - **Creation of a separate small grants program** for projects led by community-based organizations so that they need not compete with larger agencies/organizations and projects. This would require developing slightly different interpretations of the eligibility and prioritization criteria, compared to the main grant program. Funds could be set aside for this program through the annual budget process. This program could operate on a rolling basis and could include technical assistance in grant writing. This would offer an additional and more flexible (rolling basis) track for project/funding support; it would not preclude community-based organizations from participating in the main grant round.
- **Conduct community outreach, including workshops for prospective applicants.** Staff will need to consider whether we have the capacity to do this, working in partnership with community leaders, or whether an outreach consultant should be hired.

Staff will bring specific action items back to the board for discussion and/or action as they are ready. We propose the following schedule for upcoming board meetings.

- **February 2020.** Information item on proposed framework for a small grants program to benefit EDCs.
- **May 2020.**
  1. Action item requesting adoption of the Proposed Budget for Fiscal Year 2020 -21, including new line item for the proposed small grants program; and
  2. Information item on proposed revisions to the main Grant Round 4 materials that will address all relevant AC Near-Term Recommendations, including revised scoring criteria in Grant Program Guidelines and the Request for Proposals (RFP) that clearly defines and rewards meaningful community engagement and tangible benefits for EDCs.
- **July 2020.**
  1. Information item on the Draft Small Grants Program Guidelines, RFP and application; and

2. Action item requesting to amend the Round 4 Grant Program Guidelines and authorize the release of the 2020 Request for Proposals and application form.
- **October 2020.** Action item requesting the authorization of the release of the Small Grants Program Guidelines, RFP and application, with applications accepted on a rolling basis.