



Summary of Feedback from 2023 Community Outreach and Listening Sessions

Introduction

In July and August of 2023, [San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority](#) (the Authority) staff met with community-based organizations (CBOs) at three different Community Outreach and Listening Sessions along the shoreline: Tiscornia Marsh, Herons Head, and Arrowhead Marsh. The intention of these sessions was to provide a space for connection, learn about a restoration project in-person, and hear from representatives of CBOs about how the Authority can make its funding more accessible to those serving [Economically Disadvantaged Communities](#) (EDCs). These findings will be shared with participants, agency partners, and will inform the development of the Authority's Equity Guidelines.

The discussions were prompted by questions covering four topics: Applications and Grants, Project Benefits, Meaningful Engagement, and Outreach and Partnerships. Participants provided many valuable suggestions, which are summarized below, but not all of them can be implemented by the Authority, due to the limitations imposed by its [enabling legislation](#) and requirements of [Measure AA](#). Therefore, in each section, we have divided the feedback into two categories: "Areas the Authority could help address" and "Areas that Authority Partners could help address" to emphasize how the network of agencies and restoration practitioners can work together to make funding and project work more accessible to historically excluded communities along the shoreline of San Francisco Bay. In cases where participants made similar comments in different sections, the comments are not repeated for the sake of brevity.

Contributing Organizations*: AYPAL, Bayview Hill Neighborhood Association, The Canal Arts, Climate Resilient Communities, Communities for a Better Environment, Earth Team, East Oakland Collective, East Oakland Hood Planner, Literacy for Environmental Justice, Marin Audubon, Marshmallow Minds, Multicultural Center of Marin, Mycelium Youth Network, Point San Pedro Road Coalition, Resilient Shore, San Francisco Boardsailors Association, and Youth United for Community Action.

**Each CBO participant was offered a \$200 stipend for their time and feedback.*

1. Applications and Grants

Question: How could grant funding be made more accessible to you? Examples we have implemented: simplified application, rolling deadlines, technical assistance.

Areas the Authority could help address:

- **More Technical Assistance.** Help applicants who know what they want to do but not how to do it. Provide guidance for project development and share past project examples. Offer office hours and workshops as advisory time for applicants. Actively

- support grantees with fulfilling pre-disbursement grant requirements (“conditions precedent”). Continue to provide feedback on why denied proposals are not a fit and help connect applicants with resources.
- **Networking.** Connect applicants with partners doing similar work, as well as with landowners and references for contractors. Incentivize partnerships by clustering applications with complementary projects. Provide spaces to share project ideas and build support. Connect restoration agencies with education CBOs to engage students in field trips and hands on work.
 - **Lower barriers.** Requests for Proposals and applications should be shortened, and agencies should examine which requirements are truly necessary (what is statutorily required versus longstanding policy). Make the application language more approachable (less conservation jargon) and provide materials in multiple languages. Make clear that operating costs are allowable, that overhead is billable up to 20%, that progress reports can be brief, and that advanced payment is an alternative to reimbursable payments. Make eligibility and solicitation criteria more easily understandable to applicants and continue to push for more flexibility.
 - **External funding.** Connect applicants and grantees with private foundations and other funding sources. Work with flexible funders to provide funding for areas the Authority cannot fund and help identify sources for maintenance funds.
 - **Spread the word.** Beyond usual channels, meet communities where they are and find points of contact to share about funding opportunities, especially with translators present (more in “*Meaningful Engagement*” section). Focus more on women and BIPOC-led organizations which are historically under-funded for their work.

Areas that Authority Partners could help address:

- **Funding for proposal writing.** This can be providing funding to CBOs directly or dedicating funds for restoration agency partners to write grants for CBO partners. One example shared by a participant: funder required simplified one-page pre-proposal, conducted phone calls with 50+ applicants, selected group of 10 finalists and those finalists receive funding to support their time spent writing a full proposal; of the 10 finalists, 5 were selected to receive project funding.
- **Dedicated support or fiscal sponsor to help with government requirements,** such as insurance, permits, and landowner agreements.
- **Mini grants of \$5,000** or so to develop project ideas and help organizations build capacity to apply for larger grants in the future.
- **Provide grants that focus on interdisciplinary issues** like mental health benefits of being in nature, arts, culture, and workforce development. Need to bridge gap between where people live and the shoreline (watershed trash issues become shoreline issues; it is all connected).
- **Provide grants that focus on education.** Students can discover their interest in habitat restoration through education and there is a need for more funding for this area.
- **Systems change.** Government grants are cumbersome and make it difficult to be a

lead applicant for CBOs located in overburdened communities working against multidisciplinary issues in the face of climate change. Funders and government agencies, including the Authority, should provide flexibility in their requirements (see “Lower barriers” bullet above) while advocacy to reform unjust systems is also needed.

2. Project Benefits

Question: What do you consider a direct benefit to you and your community? For example, trails, picnic areas, bathrooms, shaded areas to escape the heat on hot days, culturally relevant interpretative areas and signs, flood protection, jobs, and job training.

Areas the Authority could help address:

- **Public access** to shoreline via beaches, recreation areas, trails, play areas (including nature-based play), shaded areas, and accessibility areas. Repair and renovate access points that are not accessible or poorly maintained.
- **Community-driven projects** with peer-to-peer outreach, bottom-up development of project elements, and coalition building. Community should be defining what capacity building means for them (tap into community knowledge) to create a sense of ownership. Hold events that are not just clean-ups, but also opportunities for exercise and community-building.
- **Multi-benefits of habitat restoration.** Provide stronger messaging of multi-benefits of marsh restoration (migration corridors, air quality, water quality, carbon sequestration). Address community concerns about flooding to create sense of buy-in and ownership of overall habitat restoration.
- **Stipends & workforce development.** Allow grant funds to pay residents to attend workdays. Residents won't trash a marsh they helped restore or clean up but need more incentive to take time out of their lives to do so. Consider engaging unhoused communities in restoration projects for workforce development.
- **Leveraging.** Once a CBO receives one grant, the vote of confidence helps them receive more grants from other funders.

Areas that Authority Partners could help address:

- **Environmental education.** Engage youth in a two-way relationship with nature and to ramp up toward future restoration, consider education as a process to arrive at future restoration.
- **Long-term maintenance.** Support communities and CBOs to find partners and funding sources for restoration site maintenance and management.
- **Push cities to implement general plans** that include community projects in under-resourced areas.

3. Meaningful Engagement

Question: What resources do you need to engage with a project? For example, food and childcare, stipends, etc.

Areas the Authority could help address:

- **Include community in restoration.** Create community around restoration, rather than restoring and leaving.
- **Funding for comprehensive planning** at subregional level (such as Operational Landscape Units) and acting on the repeatedly stated needs of communities in those plans.
- **Relevant signage,** images, and multi-lingual text. Work with communities to develop meaningful, approachable, and useful signage at public access points, especially when sensitive habitat is a concern.
- **Rebuild trust.** Analyze how well past plans were implemented in communities, follow through on plans, don't ask community members to repeat themselves with each new plan.

Areas that Authority Partners could help address:

- Establish a “champion” at land management agencies to help direct funding to and **push forward community projects** in their jurisdictions. Could be community engagement director or similar role.

4. Outreach and Partnerships

Question: What is the best way to reach your community? What would you need to form meaningful partnerships with landowners or organizations doing restoration?

Areas the Authority could help address:

- **Expand outreach** to non-environmental and environmental justice groups to include interdisciplinary organizations like direct service providers, churches, community centers, food banks, etc. Go to communities you're not hearing from and tap into existing networks.
- **Show measurable results** and accomplishments, conduct case studies, and communicate progress on plans developed with communities.
- **Networking** through special events, convenings, happy hours with landowners, CBOs and project partners to foster connections.

Conclusion & Next Steps

The feedback from the Community Outreach and Listening Sessions will inform the development of the Authority's Equity Guidelines. Staff will seek a recommendation on the

Equity Guidelines from the Advisory Committee and approval from the Authority's Governing Board.

Authority staff are committed to continually working to build trust with underserved communities and to making our grants more accessible to them. Staff will encourage partners to review this document and implement the changes suggested by participants so that the broader community of restoration funders and practitioners can learn from these sessions, as well.

Acknowledgments

Staff wishes to acknowledge and thank the Advisory Committee's Ad Hoc Subcommittee on Equity, which has been instrumental in developing the Equity Guidelines. The Subcommittee recommended holding the Outreach and Listening Sessions in person on the shoreline and including a grantee-led project tour. The structure of the sessions fostered an informal setting for sharing ideas and building relationships, rather than an extractive experience of seeking comments on a document. Staff also wishes to acknowledge and thank the outreach session participants, who provided insights into the challenges they face, as well as suggesting practical improvements to our grantmaking practices, based on their years of experience serving their communities.