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Seven Best Practices for Engaging Communities to Create a Healthy, Resilient Region for All

BARHII
Bay Area Regional Health
Inequities Initiative

THE BAY AREA REGIONAL HEALTH INEQUITIES INITIATIVE (BARHII)

BARHII is the coalition of the eleven Bay Area public health departments, founded to address the preventable decade-long differences in life expectancy that exist by race, income, and neighborhood. BARHII convenes public health staff across the region to identify emerging public health trends and advance best practices for health equity.

Over the last two decades, the BARHII public health framework has become a nationally recognized guide for improving the living conditions, institutional inequities, and social inequities that cause people to live shorter, sicker lives. The framework appears in public health textbooks and trainings, guides health departments' strategic planning processes, and has been adopted by the California Department of Public Health Office of Health Equity as their guiding framework. The framework is supported by several implementation guide books, including the BARHII Toolkit, which assesses public health department readiness for health equity, and the Social Determinants of Health Indicator Guide.

Additional BARHII publications provide research and solutions on a wide range of issues affecting health equity, including land use, housing affordability, economic opportunity, and climate change. BARHII has delivered trainings to thousands of Bay Area public health department staff and their allies. Learn more at www.barhii.org.

Community Planning for a New Climate

Catastrophic wildfires, extreme heat, record-setting storms and droughts.

The intensifying effects of climate change pose a clear threat to the health and well-being of Bay Area residents. This is particularly true for communities that experience health inequities—the systemic and unjust disparities in health outcomes that exist by race, income, neighborhood, language, immigration status, and other factors. These communities are at greater risk of exposure to climate-related health threats, are more vulnerable to those threats, and have less access to the resources necessary to respond effectively.[1]

We must act now to create a region where everyone can be healthy as our climate changes. Increasing our resilience requires planning for the physical effects of a warming world—from wildfire smoke to rising seas to new infectious diseases. It also calls for reversing the long-standing inequities that undermine the ability of our communities to withstand and recover from climate-driven disasters. This includes addressing chronic stressors such as housing unaffordability, income inequality, and structural racism as well as acute crises such as pandemics and economic fluctuations.

To respond effectively, we need a groundswell of resilience supporters—many voices raised together to champion a shared agenda. The communities that endure health inequities can be powerful allies in this effort—if they are engaged authentically in designing and advancing solutions that address the core issues affecting their health, security, and quality of life.

While this work is substantial, no one needs to take it on alone. The community-based organizations (CBOs) that serve impacted communities are well positioned to help. They have first-hand knowledge of the vulnerabilities

"For public health, climate change is the defining issue for the 21st century."

– Margaret Chan, Former Director-General, World Health Organization

and resilience factors in their neighborhoods. They often have critical insights into past planning efforts, historic barriers to action, and emerging opportunities. They can identify approaches that resonate with diverse audiences and those that drive people away. And they typically have substantial experience with "base building"—harnessing the power of large groups of individuals to change policies and institutions.

Partnerships between CBOs and government agencies can build local capacity to address the complex challenges presented by climate change. And deep collaboration during the planning process can catalyze the broad public support that is needed to adopt and implement bold resilience solutions that benefit all Bay Area residents.

As the saying goes, "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." This report lays out a path for transforming our resilience planning practices so that, together, we can go farther, fostering a healthy, resilient future for everyone who calls the Bay Area home.

The Bay Area in Transition: Changing Priorities and Practices

The Bay Area is awakening to the climate change crisis. Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions are gaining traction across the region. And the effects of climate change on critical infrastructure, natural systems, and communities have become the subject of intense study and debate.

Concurrently, many public agencies are exploring solutions to racial, economic, and health inequities and are piloting new community engagement approaches that aim to bring the voices of those most impacted by injustice into the conversation about solutions. This transition is supported by new laws and policies that establish baseline standards for community engagement and dedicate resources to support participation by historically excluded groups.[2]

Now is the time to integrate these efforts, engaging our communities deeply and authentically to develop equitable climate resilience strategies and empower disenfranchised populations to bring those strategies to fruition.

Yet while a growing number of planners and decision-makers recognize the importance of engaging communities in resilience planning, they struggle to do so effectively. Agency staff are undertrained and overburdened. Project timelines leave little room for new activities. Budgets are tight and funding sources inflexible. The prospect of change feels daunting, cumbersome, and uncomfortable.

This report aims to address these and other barriers to action by providing practical suggestions for public agencies to successfully engage communities in local and regional resilience planning efforts. We also offer recommendations for policymakers and agency leaders on structural changes needed to position our public institutions and community-based organizations for success.

These recommendations are based on our experience with public engagement processes throughout the Bay Area and beyond, including resilience planning, disaster response, and community health initiatives.

We are indebted to the many individuals throughout our region who have dedicated their careers to advancing the practices described below and we are grateful for all they have taught us. We hope this report inspires others to share their successes and challenges so that we can continue to learn in this rapidly evolving field.

In 2019, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) voted to amend the Bay Plan to incorporate environmental justice and social equity into the planning, design, and permitting of projects in and along the San Francisco Bay.

For the Adapting to Rising Tides project, the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) worked with the Bay Area Regional Collaborative (BARC) to pilot deep community engagement processes in two under-resourced locations. Nuestra Casa in East Palo Alto was commissioned to design and implement community engagement efforts aimed at understanding how sea level rise intersects with ongoing community challenges and examine strategies to increase the physical, economic, and social resilience of their neighborhoods.

Seven Best Practices for Engaging Communities in Resilience Planning

We have identified the following seven best practices to facilitate engagement that empowers communities and improves health outcomes for those most at risk from climate change.

$ 1. **Budget** Wisely for Effective Community Engagement

⇄   2. **Expand** Engagement through Interagency Partnerships

   3. **Co-Design** Your Process with Community

¡Si! 是!   4. **Make** Engagement Activities Accessible and Relevant for All

   5. **Identify** Locally Meaningful Vulnerabilities and Assets

   6. **Prioritize** Community-Supported Resilience Actions

   7. **Collaborate** to Bring Equitable Solutions to Fruition

For each best practice, we include implementation tips and examples from planning processes in the Bay Area. We also provide an in-depth case study of these best practices in action from a community engagement pilot that BARHII co-designed through partnership with the Bay Area Regional Collaborative (BARC) and the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) as part of the Adapting to Rising Tides Bay Area project.

NOTE: These recommendations are organized sequentially to follow the phases of a typical resilience planning process.

$ 1 Budget Wisely for Effective Community Engagement

"If you want an inclusive process, you need to include funding in your budget for local community groups to collaborate with you. Please value our expertise, our local relationships, and our time. Don't hire consultants and then ask us to do the work for free."

– Roxana Franco,
Nuestra Casa

Budgets reflect our values. Successful community engagement requires allocating adequate financial resources to the right entities to meaningfully shape the planning process and the resulting plan.

Make equitable engagement a budget priority.
Identify equitable community engagement as a central goal of your project and allocate your project budget accordingly. Ensure that the budget demonstrates your commitment to equitable engagement by sufficiently funding the engagement process, from compensating participants fairly for their time to prioritizing resources for training and educational sessions for community members, community-based organizations, and institutional partners in the content areas they will need for their effective participation.

If your agency is creating a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the project, clearly describe your community engagement objectives and community engagement budget.

Contract with CBOs.
To connect deeply in community, hire grassroots community-based organizations to help design and carry out engagement activities. If creating an RFP, include scoring criteria that benefit CBOs or require sub-contracting with local organizations. In grant proposals, invite CBOs to be co-applicants with you for funding.

Make contracting easy.
Small, short-term government contracts can be burdensome for community-based organizations to administer. Seek to provide sustained, multi-year funding commitments. Speak with your procurement office or general counsel to design simple contracting procedures. If you

can't arrange simplified procedures, identify intermediary organizations that can provide support with contracting and administration issues, such as fund advances and invoicing.

Diversify your engagement partners.

No community is a monolith and engaging the diversity of the community will require partnerships with multiple organizations. Develop relationships with CBOs long before the project begins to expedite collaboration. As the project approaches, map out relevant CBOs and the populations they serve. Then contract with multiple organizations that are trusted by impacted communities to support your engagement process.

Hire and train agency staff.

Compliment your investments in community partners with well-trained community engagement staff within your agency. Ensure agency staff are trained in community engagement, cultural competency, facilitation, and community organizing approaches, and speak languages present in the community. Establish communities of practice to support adoption of new strategies and learning from successes and mistakes.

No community is a monolith, and engaging the diversity of the community will require partnerships with multiple organizations.

Recommendations in Action:

The City of Oakland used an RFP process to select an equity facilitation team to support community engagement for the Oakland Equitable Climate Action Plan.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) has multi-year contracts with several CBOs for community engagement to support the development of Plan Bay Area.

2 Expand Engagement Through Interagency Partnerships

The Bay Area's resilience challenges are complex and multi-dimensional. Building partnerships with other public agencies can expand the project team's capacity to address those challenges—especially in the realm of community engagement. Interagency partnerships can also help integrate important themes such as health and draw in new supporters to champion plan implementation.

Share responsibilities.
Reach out to staff in other agencies and departments to understand their community engagement resources and community relationships. Explore opportunities to collaborate in the design and execution of engagement activities.

Create an advisory committee.
Form a committee of staff from relevant agencies and departments to support the engagement process. Bring community members and agency staff together on committees to learn from each other.

Include a health perspective.
Local public health departments can be particularly important partners. Health departments have connections with a wide variety of residents facing health concerns and may be able to build relationships between the project team and the populations they serve. Health departments also consider the root causes of social, economic, and health inequities and collect population-level data on issues affecting health. These insights can help ensure that resilience strategies address unfair and preventable health disparities and benefit the entire community, which can help protect communities from the recurring cycles of unjust environmental and health burdens.

Recommendations in Action:

The City and County of San Francisco engaged staff from 28 departments, including the Department of Public Health, to shape its Hazards and Climate Resilience Plan.

3 Co-Design Your Process with Community

To increase community resilience, we must build the power of communities to positively shape their future. This begins with the resilience planning process itself. Delegating power to the community to shape the outreach process is a critical step in fostering democratic participation and community-driven civic leadership.

Make a plan.
Work with community members, including contracted CBOs, to design effective community engagement for each phase of the planning process and metrics for measuring success—before the project launches. Engage these partners in other elements of project planning so they can act as effective intermediaries between residents and the rest of the project team. Establish shared decision-making structures between government and community leaders so that expectations about collaboration are clear[3].

Understand the context.
Ask community advisors about the local landscape, including previous government actions that may affect the community's opinion of government in general and your agency specifically. Use this information to shape your engagement approach.

Leverage related efforts.
When designing the project timeline, align with other community and public agency processes, looking for opportunities to sync timelines and build on prior efforts. For example, identify existing events that your community partners are hosting that could include resilience planning activities.

"Historically, many planning processes have been extractive, with no discernible benefit for marginalized communities. To rebuild trust, we have to be clear from the very beginning about what residents will gain from this process—and in what time frame."

– Mariana Moore,
Ensuring Opportunity

Build climate capacity.
Provide trainings to agency staff and community partners in climate communication, climate science, and resilience solutions to establish a shared vocabulary and common baseline of understanding. Offer trainings on how to navigate governmental systems.

Step back and observe.
Invite CBO staff or other community leaders to lead planning sessions, workshops, and other engagement activities instead of agency staff. Note any differences in these community-led events and discuss how to modify your engagement process accordingly.

Plan to adapt.
Keep convening your community partners throughout the process to allow for evaluation, iteration, and refinement of your community engagement activities. Build flexibility into the project scope and budget to be responsive to changing conditions and community needs.

Delegating power to the community to shape the outreach process is a critical step in fostering democratic participation and community-driven civic leadership.

Recommendations in Action:

A coalition of community organizations in East Oakland partnered with the City of Oakland to secure a Transformative Climate Communities grant for local equitable climate planning. City staff and community groups collaborated on the scope of work, goals, and budget for the project. The resulting community-driven plan led to a $28 million implementation grant.

¡Si! 是!

4 Make Engagement Activities Accessible and Relevant for All

Resilience planning provides an opportunity to discover what matters most to diverse populations, forge new connections, build trust, and inspire action. Engagement activities should be designed thoughtfully to achieve these goals, with creative design innovations that resonate with impacted communities.

Employ a "no wrong door" approach.
Many community members approach climate resilience from a different perspective than agency planners, focusing on their lived experience and concrete impacts to their health, safety, and well-being. Discuss the project from the perspective of the community. When participants raise topics that appear outside the scope of the project, consider how those issues might be relevant and connect the participants with agency staff who can help. Use interagency collaboration to help integrate the community priorities you hear into the plan.

"Oftentimes, what ends up happening is an outside agency will come and ask for 'meaningful community engagement,' which consists of a couple of session in 1-2 months, without compensating the attendees for their time, they present in a language they don't understand, and usually come to the community at the end of a project. They gather their 'data' and leave without sharing their results to the community members who participated. If they do share the results, it's usually in a language the participants do not understand and usually the participants' feedback is not in the reports. That is not meaningful community engagement, that is just a box being checked off to say they are being inclusive in the process. This needs to stop!"

**– Adriana Fernandez,
Nuestra Casa**

Coming Together When We're Physically Apart

In a world that's increasingly online, it's important to provide virtual community engagement opportunities that are accessible to everyone. Choose tools that appeal to people with a wide range of technical proficiencies and platform preferences, as well as those who do not have high-speed internet, a laptop, or a large space to participate in lengthy virtual meetings. To accommodate differences in vision, hearing, and mobility, employ accessible design techniques such as text-to-speech compatibility and visual descriptions of images and videos. Offer content in multiple languages spoken in the community. Always provide technology tutorials at virtual events and identify individuals who can offer technical support in multiple languages.

Here are some digital engagement activities to consider:

Virtual workshops
Videoconferencing tools offer an alternative to in-person events. Use breakout rooms to facilitate small group discussions. Share recordings of presentations for those who can't attend to encourage broad participation.

Focus groups
Reach out to members of impacted populations and arrange conversations by phone or video to hear their perspectives.

Surveys
Use surveys to gather input from a large audience quickly. Offer online, phone, and mail-in options.

Office hours
Recruit team members and community leaders to host virtual office hours for community members to discuss the project.

Digital games
Enliven your process with fun tools that educate and gather public input.

Create accessible materials.
Choose language that is clear and understandable to diverse audiences, including non-experts with varying educational backgrounds. Review draft materials with community partners who have deep cultural competency to identify overly technical terms and other communication barriers. Provide a glossary of terms to build shared understanding for consistent use throughout the project.

Eliminate common barriers to participation.
Bring events to where community members congregate. Host events on evenings and weekends when most people can attend and consult with community leaders to avoid conflicts with major cultural events. Select meeting locations where the community feels safe, including those who fear discrimination from ICE, law enforcement, or other government agencies. Find places that are accessible for people with differences in sight, hearing, and mobility. Provide food and childcare. Offer stipends for participation and travel.

Speak the language.
Translate materials into languages spoken in the community. Use multilingual facilitators and interpreters. Discuss with community partners if events should be in English or another language. Provide headsets for simultaneous interpretation. When possible, use multiple screens to show presentations in two or more languages.

Offer many ways to engage.
At community events, provide multiple ways to participate, such as oral comments, written input, and hand sketches. Offer alternatives to conventional workshops, such as one-on-one interviews, small-group discussions, pop-up workshops, mobile workshops, and surveys. Ensure there are activities for people of all ages, including youth.

Share what you heard.
During each phase of public engagement, report back to the community what you heard, how their contributions are influencing the planning process, and what decisions are being made next. Provide user-friendly written summaries to ensure public input is documented accurately and use multiple communication methods to reach impacted communities. Share this information with the planning team, advisory committees, and decisionmakers as well.

Recommendations in Action:

Shore Up Marin, a multi-racial environmental coalition, has used innovative strategies to engage residents from low-lying underserved areas in planning for sea level rise, including an eco-literacy course on grassroots resiliency planning and a climate equity comic book. They are partnering with public agencies and non-profits to inform habitat restoration efforts at Tiscornia Marsh in San Rafael's Canal Area.

The Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) developed "The Mayor of Bayville," an online game, to gather input for Plan Bay Area. The game is available in multiple languages.

The California Coastal Conservancy recently discovered it could use funding from California's Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund (GGRF) to provide free meals for the community at public engagement events on climate change.

5 Identify Locally Meaningful Vulnerabilities and Assets

By examining the social, financial, and political stressors and resources within a community, we can better understand how climate change exacerbates current challenges and how the community's capacities can be harnessed to address those challenges. Exploring this broad context makes resilience planning more relevant to people's lives and helps communities integrate climate action into their existing values and priorities.

Use empowering research methods.
Choose participatory research activities to help define indicators, collect data, and analyze results. Try methods such as community resource mapping, walk audits, and photovoice projects to empower residents to identify and reflect on issues that affect their lives and identify prospects for positive change. Whenever possible, compensate residents for their efforts.

Consider health.
To help make climate vulnerability and asset assessments relevant to residents, consider how climate change could impact health conditions, behaviors, and outcomes and provide local data on those impacts.

Highlight inequities.
Consider historic patterns of discrimination and current racial, social, and economic inequities. Assess how climate change and climate-related interventions could affect those inequities. Reach out to your public health department to support this assessment.

Recommendations in Action:

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) engaged CBO leaders to design a resilience mapping tool that documents climate stressors and social vulnerability factors.

BARHII designed a decision support tool for human-centered resilience planning. The tool considers health indicators, such as average life expectancy, and local capacity, such as institutional readiness and opportunities to leverage existing processes.

6 Prioritize Community-Supported Resilience Actions

Resilience efforts are most likely to be successful when they reflect the needs and desires of those most affected by climate change. This calls for elevating solutions that are generated by community members, evaluating options with community members, and selecting community priorities.

Articulate your values.
Work with community members to craft a vision and guiding principles for the plan. Refer to these documents frequently during the process to remain aligned with these values.

Share your knowledge.
Provide a holistic understanding of the planning context to build trust and foster creative problem solving. Communicate about all aspects of the project, including highly technical elements, to inform the design of community-based solutions.

"It's important to engage with community partners early and often to ensure that projects align with a community's unique local culture and needs. Projects developed this way are more likely to be successful and sustainable than those developed for the community by outside parties."

**– Nahal Ghoghaie,
Bay Conservation
Development Commission**

Recommendations in Action:

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District (BAAQMD) contracted with the West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project (WOEIP) to co-lead the development of the AB 617 West Oakland Community Action Plan. The plan's strategies were selected based on the community's knowledge of West Oakland, the health issues confronting residents, and local data.

Nuestra Casa, a CBO in East Palo Alto, developed an environmental justice parent academy to teach residents about the impacts of climate change on their livelihoods and gather feedback to inform resilience planning for the western approach of the Dumbarton Bridge.

Seek out community-driven solutions.
Design your engagement process to allow ample opportunities for community members to propose potential resilience actions. Then collaborate with community members to evaluate potential actions and refine community proposals.

Adopt inclusive evaluation criteria.
Create evaluation criteria that reflect inclusive values, such as "furthers racial equity," "improves community health," and "avoids or mitigates unintended consequences." Create metrics to measure how well potential resilience actions meet these inclusive criteria. Identify how potential actions can provide multiple equity benefits.

Integrate input from engagement activities.
Frequently review the input gathered during your engagement activities. Consider how potential actions can be tailored to best align with the community's priorities.

Make decisions together.
Use protocols for shared decision-making between government and community leaders to select the most promising actions.

Resilience efforts are most likely to be successful when they reflect the needs and desires of those most affected by climate change.

7 Collaborate to Bring Equitable Solutions to Fruition

Community members deserve a central role in bringing resilience actions to fruition. This builds local capacity for communities impacted by injustice, produces tangible benefits that improve health and well-being, and catalyzes champions for future resilience efforts.

> "Structural inequality is what got us into this mess and fixing it is the only way out. That's why frontline communities need to be included in climate planning efforts in ways that empower them to lead the process, from project conception to plan implementation."
>
> – Phoenix Armenta,
> West Oakland Environmental Indicators Project

Engage in implementation.
Once the planning process concludes, engage the community deeply in implementation, with clear leadership roles for CBOs. Consider establishing a community advisory council or public review team to provide frequent feedback and help build momentum behind community-supported priorities.

Keep communicating.
Share data on your progress for ongoing accountability and trust building. Provide documentation of the investments and policy decisions that have been made to advance equitable resilience strategies. Measure baseline conditions in the community—including any disparities in health outcomes by race, income, and neighborhood—to understand the impact of your resilience strategies.

Reflect and revise.
Once the ink has dried, discuss with the community what parts of the engagement process went well and what could have gone better. Integrate the most successful aspects into future planning and implementation processes. Share your successes and shortcomings for continuous learning and improvement. Work with policy makers, agency leaders, and community members to remove structural barriers and scale up local innovations.

Recommendations in Action:

Alameda County contracted with Resources for Community Development (RCD), a local affordable housing and community development non-profit, to help implement its Heat Preparedness Program.

The City of Richmond launched an open data dashboard to help community members track implementation of its Climate Action Plan. The tool focuses on sustainability and health equity indicators.

Making Waves: Piloting Community Engagement in Adapting to Rising Tides

In 2017, the Bay Area Regional Collaborative (BARC), the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) launched the Adapting to Rising Tides (ART) Bay Area project.

The ART project was the first regional-scale effort to plan for sea-level rise and other climate impacts for the Bay Area's communities, natural systems, and critical infrastructure. The initiative was funded by a Caltrans Sustainable Communities Grant, with matching funds provided by MTC / Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA) and built upon the ART program established by BCDC.

In 2018-2019, the Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) worked with BARC to create a unique strategy for public health and communities to pilot deep community engagement processes in two under-resourced locations.

This work had three goals: understand how local vulnerability and resilience factors impact our region, strengthen the ability of community organizations to positively shape resilience planning, and increase the capacity of public agencies to meaningfully partner with community-based organizations to understand local conditions and improve climate resilience and health equity.

The process began with a site selection exercise. To select the target locations, the team used multiple data sources, integrating information on climate vulnerabilities, physical and social vulnerabilities, community capacity, and opportunities to leverage existing resilience efforts. A variety of health data was used in this assessment, including average life expectancy, housing habitability, air and water contamination, access to greenspace, healthcare access, and exposure to extreme heat.

BARHII then identified local partners to lead public participation efforts in the selected communities. Organizations were selected based in part on their deep roots in the community and their interest in expanding their capacity to work on resilience issues in connection to underlying community issues and vulnerabilities.

Going forward, we hope to see a robust, sustained investment in our region's community-based organizations—empowering residents to craft holistic, integrated resilience solutions and build power to bring their ideas to life.

BARHII contracted with three community organizations—Nuestra Casa and Youth United for Community Action (YUCA) in East Palo Alto and Ensuring Opportunity in East Contra Costa County.

These organizations worked with public agency and non-profit partners to design and implement community engagement efforts aimed at understanding how sea level rise intersects with ongoing community challenges and examine strategies to increase the physical, economic, and social resilience of their neighborhoods.

Engagement activities included community meetings, walking tours, one-on-one interviews, and surveys. Community organizations helped frame key resilience issues and possibilities. Public agencies provided information on risk assessment, health indicators, and case studies as well as support on workshops and communication logistics. BCDC collaborated closely with each organization to ensure that presentation materials were accessible and relevant to community residents.

This outreach revealed a complex set of local conditions. For example, residents in East Palo Alto reported housing instability, water quality concerns, lack of jobs, and limited access to health care as barriers to resilience.

Residents called for strategies that addressed intense displacement pressures and offered pathways to employment. In East Contra Costa, many participants noted that housing insecurity, long commutes, and rapid demographic change eroded interest in collective action to address long-term problems such as sea level rise. And despite many climate vulnerabilities in waterfront communities, they found little public discussion of climate change or its local impacts.

This pilot had many positive results. Gathering community perspectives helped to shape the Adapting to Rising Tides findings, creating a more holistic view of the region's resilience challenges and opportunities. The process of co-creating engagement activities and sharing knowledge also fostered new relationships between the participating community organizations and public agencies, which has led to additional joint projects. In addition, the contracts with community-based organizations increased local capacity to address resilience.

Going forward, we hope to see a robust, sustained investment in our region's community-based organizations—empowering residents to craft holistic, integrated resilience solutions and build power to bring their ideas to life.

Recommendations for Policy Makers and Agency Leaders

Today, many structural barriers impede public agencies from effectively partnering with communities impacted by injustice in climate resilience planning efforts—putting the health and well-being of millions of Bay Area residents at risk. Policymakers and agency leaders should collaborate with community members to identify and remove these barriers to lay the groundwork for future success.

We recommend taking the following three actions:

1. Build the funding pipeline for equitable engagement in resilience planning

It's no secret that our government investments in equitable resilience planning are woefully insufficient. To help our communities address current climate-driven disasters and prepare for the climate challenges that lie ahead, we need to establish robust, ongoing funding streams for communities impacted by injustice to play leadership roles in resilience planning efforts.

Policymakers should increase federal, state, regional, and local funding for equitable resilience planning. This could include leveraging traditional funding sources such as discretionary general fund spending and new sources such as a statewide or regional climate resilience bond or trust fund that pools resources. In addition, existing planning grant programs should be reviewed to ensure that all grant recipients adequately invest in equitable community engagement and advance healthy, equitable outcomes. This will require updating program goals, application scoring criteria, grant recipient requirements, and project evaluation procedures.

Philanthropic partnerships should be explored to close gaps in government funding and help catalyze new governmental funding sources.

2. Create enduring infrastructure to support meaningful engagement processes

In the Bay Area, many of our public institutions are not structured to effectively support meaningful participation by communities impacted by injustice in resilience planning. Likewise, few CBOs are well positioned to rapidly scale their efforts to participate in the many planning processes that will be needed to address the region's multitude of resilience challenges—and sustain those efforts amid fluctuations in government funding and planning cycles. We need to enact institutional changes now that better prepare our public agencies and our community-based organizations for the coming era of collaborative, equitable climate resilience planning.

These changes start by examining the structure of our public institutions. Every public agency engaged in resilience planning should be driven by an organizational mission, vision, and goals that prioritize meaningful participation by communities impacted by injustice. These values should be reflected in the agency's budget, with resources allocated to programs, projects, and activities that further these goals. They should also be reflected in the agency's staffing, with staff units assigned to equitable community engagement, hiring to ensure staff reflect the diversity of the communities they serve, and ongoing training for all staff in equity and engagement issues. Staff work plans should include ample time to cultivate meaningful relationships and build trust with community members—long before a planning process begins or a grant application is due.

Agencies should also undertake activities to enhance the capacity of CBOs to participate in future planning processes. This includes allocating sustained, multi-year funding contracts to CBOs, allowing these organizations to hire and retain staff who are focused on resilience issues. Agencies should provide technical assistance to CBOs to increase their administrative and fundraising capabilities and resilience expertise. And they should improve agency administrative processes, such as simplified contracting and establishing "CBO benches" to identify local organizations available for contracting.

3. Mandate robust community engagement in public decision-making

When professionals are faced with many competing demands, it's natural to prioritize meeting the minimum requirements—legal, policy, or otherwise—before undertaking other activities. This dynamic has frequently led to cursory community engagement processes, designed to meet only the baseline standards, rather than fostering healthy, equitable planning outcomes.

Fortunately, public agencies across California have begun to institute new requirements to help ensure equitable community engagement in their decision-making processes. For example, BCDC recently began requiring permit applicants to demonstrate meaningful community involvement for certain projects, including equitable and culturally relevant outreach and engagement and evidence of how community concerns were addressed.

Policymakers and agency leaders should adopt requirements that ensure robust engagement of communities impacted by injustice in all public planning and decision making. This should include standards for identifying health equity issues and communities impacted by injustice, methods for fostering meaningful community involvement, and accountability measures for making course corrections and addressing violations. These standards should apply to government-led processes as well as efforts led by project applicants to ensure community engagement responsibilities are shared fairly across the public and private sector.

Conclusion

Here in the Bay Area, creating a healthy, resilient region will be one of the central challenges of the twenty-first century. Success will require changes to our social and physical infrastructure as well as our programs, policies, and laws. It will also require changes to the way we plan for our future—making community engagement on par with other core planning activities, such as geophysical modeling and civil engineering, and leveraging the engagement process to empower impacted communities and eliminate health inequities.

We can make this new model of engagement the standard of practice across the region, creating cities and towns that are safe and healthy for all and setting a model for the rest of the country to follow. A new path lies ahead. Together, let's see how far we can go.

Endnotes

[1] Climate Change and Health Equity Issue Brief, California Department of Public Health, 2019

[2] See for example, the Bay Conservation and Development Commission's Environmental Justice policies adopted in 2019, AB 1628 of 2019 which expands California's definition of "environmental justice" to include meaningful involvement in decision-making, the Community Health Protection Program to implement AB 617 of 2017, and the Transformative Climate Communities program to implement AB 2722 of 2016.

[3] See the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Empowerment by Rosa González of Facilitating Power, 2019.

Acknowledgements

Credits

Useful Resources

Climate Change Adaptation Workshops: A Planning Guide for Local Government Staff
Alameda County, 2019

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