California Strategic Growth Council

Listening Tour Phase I Summary
Community Assistance for Climate Equity at the Strategic Growth Council

Background
The purpose of this document is to provide a high-level overview of the Community Assistance for Climate Equity (CACE) team's listening tour efforts to date. The focus of this engagement was to understand challenges faced by under-resourced communities in accessing funding to implement community-driven solutions as well as opportunities to address those challenges through SGC's technical assistance (TA) and capacity building programs. Between January and April, the CACE team engaged over forty entities including local and regional government agencies, professional organizations, non-profits, philanthropies, and community groups. This initial phase involved in-person interviews and phone calls with stakeholders who are familiar to SGC and our various programs and provided perspective from various sectors and regions. Further, a portion of the engagement took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, offers insights into how the State can support communities to be resilient both to climate impacts as well as other disruptive change.

General capacity needs and barriers
The following capacity needs and barriers were expressed across stakeholder type and regions, highlighting the significance of these challenges and the impact the State could have by addressing them through various TA and capacity building programs.

Upstream challenges
Lack of awareness and understanding about state funding programs: Local government agencies and community-based organizations sometimes lack an understanding of the full suite of funding programs and TA opportunities available to address local issues. Information about programs themselves can be hard to find and interpret, especially around eligibility for certain project types.

Lack of planning guidance already in place: One of the most common challenges faced by communities is the lack of access to funding to implement, develop, and update plans and technical guidance. This poses a barrier around competitiveness for certain programs as well as being able to be responsive to community-identified solutions.

Lack of existing relationships and partnerships: State funding programs often require partnerships between various public agencies and/or community-based organizations. In many cases these relationships do not exist or are not sustained past the completion of a funded project in a way that can lead to similar initiatives. Further support and investment around collaboration is necessary across sectors of government and with community organizations.

Lack of local technical resources: Many State funding programs require robust technical inputs during the application and implementation phases. Often, without local technical capacity or access to free TA, under-resourced communities can overlook or choose to avoid potential grant programs.

Ensuring Community-driven Solutions
Lack of trust: Commonly, low capacity and under-staffed jurisdictions lack formal processes and relationships to be responsive to community-identified solutions, which can increase tension and lack of trust between entities. Moreover,

marginalized communities are often hesitant to engage with local government due to a lack of cultural competency and sensitivity. When relationships are in place, state programs are often not designed or scaled to effectively bring CBOs in as funded partners.

Bridging Intersections: CBOs that have not historically focused on climate are increasingly recognizing the importance of engaging in topics related to land use, environment, natural resources, and sustainable community development. Efforts to build capacity within these bridge organizations can help to ensure more meaningful community engagement on key topics.

Securing Funding

Accessing Grants: Siloed funding sources with conflicting requirements, technical and time-intensive application processes, and short application timelines were all repeatedly identified as major barriers to accessing State grants. Under-resourced communities often do not have the available staff time, technical expertise, and/or existing partnerships in place to respond to grant opportunities, even if the programs are intended to support communities like their own. Limited capacity is a considerable problem for local governments of small municipalities, where staff often take on multiple roles or only have the bandwidth to respond to immediate issues. This in turn can mean that staff have limited capacity to build relationships with community groups, across agencies, and with the State itself to identify and collaborate on funding opportunities. Increasingly, as State funding programs look to connect local agencies with community-based organizations, the lack of existing relationships and networks can make the grant-seeking process challenging.

Administering Grants: Grant administration often requires extensive data collection and evaluation, with the associated time and energy input often so burdensome that communities are reluctant to pursue grant opportunities. Quantitative data is often prioritized over qualitative data, which often results in major project accomplishments going unrecognized. Small organizations use loans to execute grant activities for grant programs with a reimbursement payment system, and delayed reimbursement can cause them to accrue a significant amount of interest. Additionally, communities that do apply and are unsuccessful are rarely provided with feedback on their applications, limiting the ability of entities with limited resources to prepare successful proposals in future rounds.

Sector and Demographic Specific Findings

Challenges and corresponding needs were found to vary by sector and populations. Intersections among these sectors and populations can reveal magnified vulnerabilities that are important to consider when working with populations that face a multitude of resource barriers. While not exhaustive, prominent challenges to sectors and population groups include:

Agriculture Sector: While there are many programs and incentives to support soil and water conservation, it is incredibly challenging to make these investments on leased land. This is a serious equity issue for small, medium, and minority-run farms who operate on leased land and do not have certainty from season-to-season or year-to-year, whether they will be there. Moreover, those who administer and/or provide TA support for these programs often do not come from the communities they are serving, are monolingual, or do not have the training to work with diversified, organic systems. This highlights the need for culturally competent TA programs to ensure resources are reaching those most in need and that all agricultural communities can implement climate-smart practices.

Immigrant Communities: Barriers faced by immigrant communities when engaging in planning and grant application processes span unique resource needs, xenophobic assumptions, and a limited understanding of the citizenship categorizations that immigrants can fall under. Stereotype-based assumptions about what immigrant communities need or value further compromise trust as well as lead to the creation of ineffectively designed programs and resources. Increased capacity is required to ensure that portions of the immigrant population are not further marginalized through limited access to stakeholder engagement. For some communities, this might mean providing translation of public documents and events into dialects or languages that are present in the targeted community. However, translation services are sometimes difficult to access or costly. Additionally, the immigration status of an individual may contribute to fear or mistrust when interacting with government entities, underscoring the need to collaborate with and support the capacity of immigrant-serving organizations.

Rural communities: Rural communities are particularly challenged by a lack of capacity in the public sector, which often leads to local government employees filling multiple roles. This in turn allows very little time to dedicate to future opportunities, whether through planning processes or pursuing grant funds. With smaller, more spread-out populations, State programs, especially around GHG reduction, are often difficult to compete for. In many cases, despite updates to State program guidelines to incorporate rural set-asides and considerations, local agencies are still hesitant to apply without robust staff capacity to ensure successful implementation. In addition, California rural communities vary widely—for example, rural communities whose economies are largely tourism-based have different needs than those whose economies are centered on agriculture. In order to better support rural communities, assistance should augment staff capacity to build the networks and relationships needed to create plans and grant applications that are tailored to their community needs.

Tribal Communities: Many Federally recognized Tribes in California are in rural areas and face the same capacity constraints as other rural governments. While Tribes have a clearly defined relationship with the Federal government, the relationship is not as established with the State. The lack of relationships can mean that it is harder to learn about State grant opportunities, and to advocate for programs that are designed to fit Tribes' needs. State entities often lack knowledge of Tribal government and Tribal needs, which can compound the issue of inappropriately designed grant programs. For example, as sovereign nations, federally recognized Tribes are not held to the requirements that the State is able to place on municipal governments. In order to make State funding opportunities more accessible to Tribes, State entities should engage in sustained outreach and relationship building with Tribes, as well as build an understanding of Tribal governments and communities' varying needs and barriers to participation.

Wildfire Communities: Exposure to unwanted and unexpected fires drastically changes how a community approaches long-range planning. It highlights the critical need to invest in social infrastructure and coordination to establish fire-prepared communities and safeguard timber and tourism markets with relevant workforce development programs that advance technologies and practices that mitigate and adapt to increasing wildfire risk.

Workforce Development: Workforce development is increasingly being incentivized in climate-related programs, yet resources are not provided to sufficiently fund those efforts. State agencies that administer these programs should allow for funding of these components in order to more meaningfully address workforce development needs. On the applicant side, communities need additional technical support to incorporate workforce development strategies that create high-quality jobs into their climate plans and projects.

Opportunities to Enhance Capacity Building and TA Programs

These discussions uplifted the importance of building social infrastructure, especially for under-resourced communities. With strong social infrastructure, communities have access to more diverse, cross-sectoral networks for meaningful collaboration. This is critical in developing successful grant applications, executing multi-benefit projects, and supporting adaptive capacity and resilience. Listed below are opportunities for State-funded capacity building and TA programs to strengthen social infrastructure through program design and investment strategies. CACE is using this input to inform the development of TA Guidelines and the future Regional Climate Collaboratives Program.

Knowledge and Skill Building

- Create opportunities to educate local and regional government staff on topics of historical injustice, race equity, culturally competent engagement, and best practice policies
- Support local and regional governments to develop processes to respond to community-developed solutions and effectively include community in developing projects
- Help communities understand how State climate goals and local priorities intersect. Help match priorities to available funding programs on an ongoing basis
- Provide training or additional resources for any technical skills required to apply to funding sources, such as GHG quantification

Supporting Grant Success

- Provide long-term support to municipal governments that lack the staff capacity to conduct the planning and project development required to submit competitive grant applications
- Provide additional support for project reporting and evaluation, and create reporting metrics that demonstrate the full scope of project benefits
- Provide post-application TA for unsuccessful applicants to help strengthen proposals for future rounds

Expanding our Reach

- Create more effective processes at the State-level to engage under-resourced entities to inform funding programs earlier on
- Invest in networks of community-based organizations, especially those who have not historically engaged in topics related to climate
- Facilitate peer-to-peer networking to create broader regional support networks

Engagement List

This list is by no means comprehensive and represents only a small subset of the communities, organizations, and stakeholder groups engaging in these discussions. This summary represents findings from the first phase of a lengthy and iterative engagement effort that will be central to the development of further TA and capacity building efforts. Our listening started shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, which severely limited our ability to host in-person engagement with a broader set of community groups, local jurisdictions, and individuals. Our intention is to continue this work with a focus on building relationships with stakeholders representing and serving under-resourced communities.

- Alliance for Regional Collaboratives for Climate Adaptation (ARCCA)
- Bay Area Regional Collaborative
- Cal Bike
- California Council of Governments (CalCOG)
- California Climate & Ag Network (CalCAN)
- California County Planning Director's Association
- California Endowment & Rockwood Foundation: Building Power Cohort
- California Environmental Justice Alliance
- California ReLeaf
- California Rural Housing Assistance
- California Rural Legal Assistance
- CalWalks
- Center for Health Leadership & Practice, Public Health Institute: California Leadership Academy for the Public's Health
- Central California Environmental Justice Network
- Chico State and Grant Management Associates
- Climate Plan
- Climate Resolve
- Communities for a Better Environment
- Daily Acts: Leadership Institute for Just & Resilient Communities
- Emerson Collective
- Enterprise Community Partners – AHSC Team
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Environmental Health Coalition
- Funder's Network for Smart Growth & Livable Communities: Partner's for Places and Places Fellowship
- Green Cities California Network
- Greenlining Institute
- Humboldt County
- Institute for Sustainable Communities: Sustainable Community Leadership Academy & Partnership for Resilient Communities
- LA County Sustainability Office
- LA Thrives / Center for Community Investment
- Leadership Counsel
- Liberty Hill Foundation
- Local Government Commission
- National Indian Justice Center
- Pacoima Beautiful
- Planning and Conservation League
- Pueblo Unido CDC
- Regeneration Pajaro Valley
- Rising Sun Center for Opportunity
- Sacramento Native American Health Center
- San Francisco Foundation
- SF Federal Reserve Bank
- Sierra Climate Adaptation & Mitigation Partnership (SierraCAMP)
- Sierra Health Foundation / Smart Growth California
- Sustainable Solano
- University of California Cooperative Extension
- Urban Habitat: Boards & Commissions Leadership Institutes