

# Climate Crossroads: California's Readiness to Act on Climate Resilience

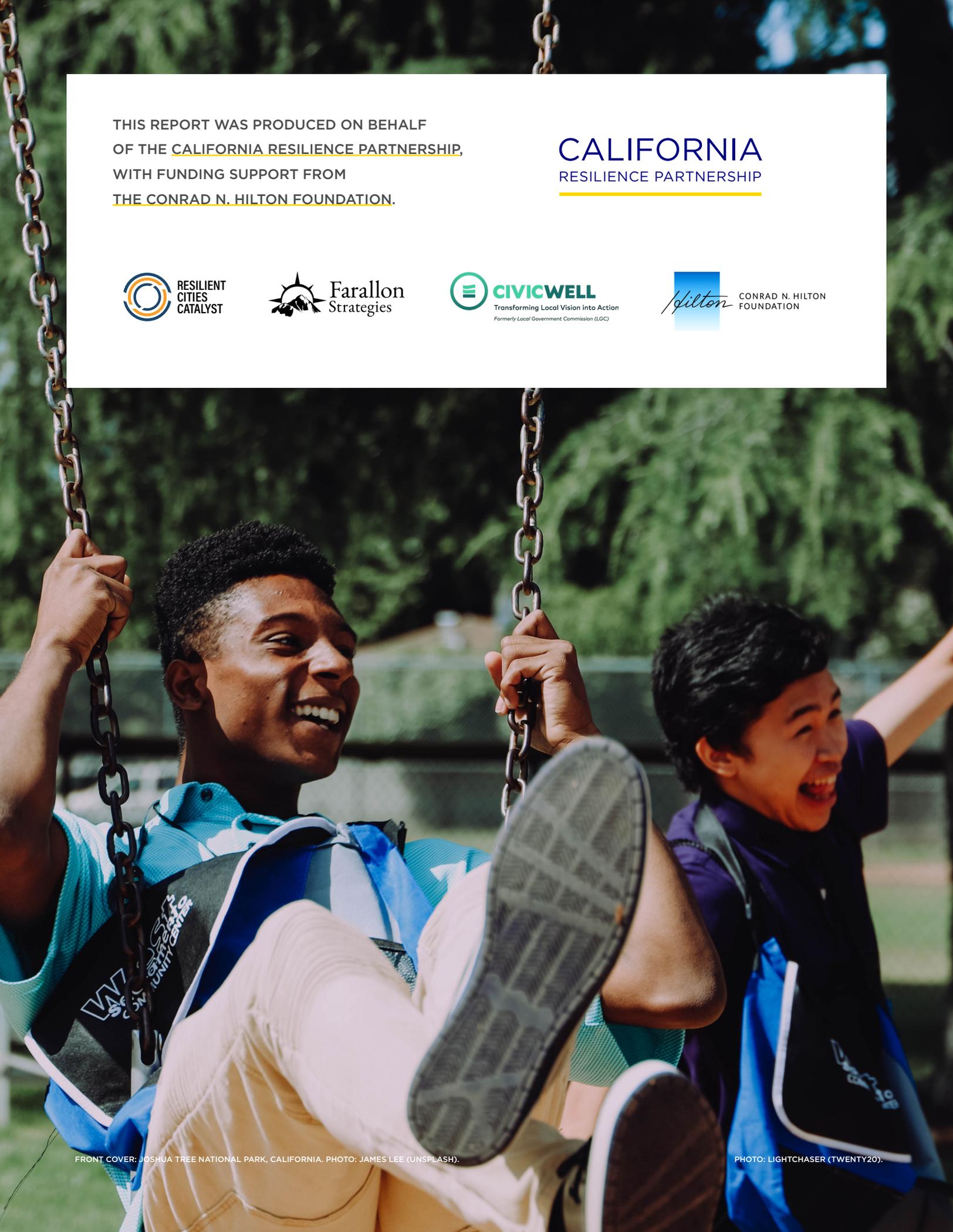
**VOLUME 1: RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

**CALIFORNIA**  
RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP

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# CALIFORNIA RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP



## LETTER FROM THE CALIFORNIA RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP ADVISORY BOARD CO-CHAIRS

As co-chairs of the California Resilience Partnership Advisory Board, we are proud to release this new report, which we hope will serve as a guiding resource for policy makers, local decision makers, regional actors, and community based organizations alike. This report represents a baseline of the readiness of California's regions to take on the important and difficult work of resilience building. It offers key insights from leaders and practitioners from community based organizations, local governments, regional collaboratives and other key players in California's climate resilience. The report details where we are and how far we need to go in order to build systems that will be able to manage and adapt in these turbulent times.

And the stakes are very high. We have a generational opportunity to right historical wrongs, setting up our communities for success in the decades to come. If we fail to act now, not only will we exacerbate the risks to vulnerable communities who will be most impacted by climate change and the other pressures of the 21st century—but we could very well intensify the inequities between California's communities who are ready today to take action, and the largely historically marginalized ones that require additional capacity and support to take action and build resilience.

Simply put—we could look back a decade from now and realize that in our desire to seize the moment and urgently act we spent billions of dollars in the wrong places and on the wrong projects.

The way to avoid this disastrous outcome is for all of us to follow the recommendations detailed in this report: center community perspectives in public decision making and project design; lower barriers to entry to access funding; provide dependable, multi-year funding for core capacity in local governments and their partners; and bolster equity and environmental justice organizations across the state.

We are thankful for the work of all our partners in developing this report. We also invite all readers to join in our work at the California Resilience Partnership. Do not hesitate to reach out to learn more about our work, and explore how you can get involved.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sona Mohnot".

Sona Mohnot  
Co-chair, California Resilience Partnership  
Advisory Board; Associate Director, Climate  
Resilience at the Greenlining Institute



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Young".

Emily Young, PhD  
Co-chair, California Resilience Partnership  
Advisory Board; Executive Director, The Nonprofit  
Institute at the University of San Diego

The background image shows a city street at dusk. In the foreground, a person is riding a bicycle across a crosswalk. To the left, several pedestrians are walking. The street is lined with tall palm trees, and a traffic light is visible on the right. The overall scene is a typical urban environment.

## BACKGROUND

California is facing significant impacts as a result of a changing climate. Local and regional agencies and organizations play a key role in supporting the State's long term resilience. With this understanding, combined with the State's historic 2021 budget surplus, the State legislature and Governor Newsom allocated \$3.7 billion to support climate resilience (and \$15 billion for climate overall)—the largest climate budget in California's history and the starting point for significant climate change investment. In May 2022, Governor Newsom announced a \$47 billion investment in climate change, a \$32 billion increase from 2021. This presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to create long-term resilience across the State by leveraging community and project level investment to realize outcomes that can help build community resilience for Californians today, and into the future.

## NEED

In order to realize the greatest impact, this historic investment should accelerate the support of people and communities through the implementation of projects that accrue local benefits, as well as support broader regional climate resilience activities.

Accomplishing this cross-sectoral and intersectional goal will require a concerted effort to 1) directly confront systemic inequities in funding opportunities, 2) fund projects and collaborations that advance broad community resilience (as opposed to strictly climate resilience), and 3) generate momentum and catalyze organizational capacity so that any given initiative can drive communities to normalize and operationalize resilience.

## PROCESS & METHODS

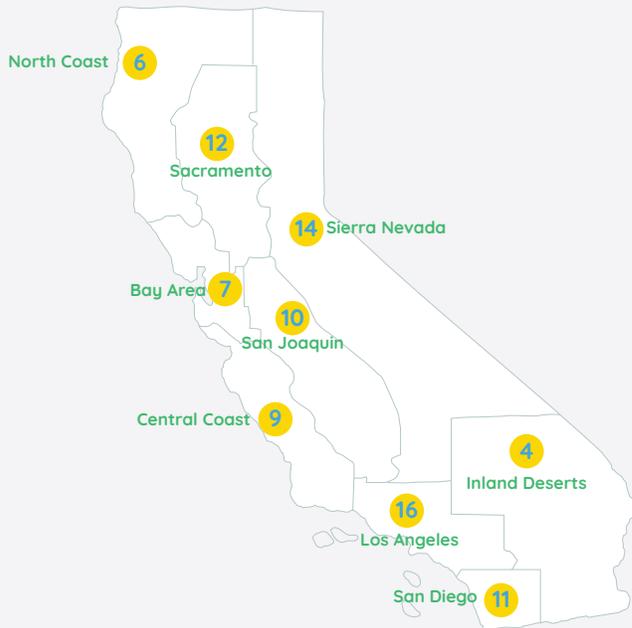
To meet the moment, the California Resilience Partnership (CRP) team conducted a Statewide landscape analysis, covering every region of California, in order to collate widespread inputs. CRP's findings were then placed into a cogent set of insights that can be used to highlight where opportunities and gaps exist, revealing opportunities to make the greatest impact through State investments. The Statewide analysis was grounded in a review of existing funding sources to inform the perspective and generate a baseline of the work. Materials reviewed include the State's own comprehensive climate assessment and strategy processes, diverse perspectives on climate risks facing California, frameworks for action, best practices in effective adaptation project development, approaches that center equity in adaptation efforts and engagement, as well as [our own recent report](#) on priorities for resilience funding in California.



SAN DIEGO. PHOTO: SEAN PAVONE.

## Statewide Engagements by Region

### Number of Roundtable and 1:1 Meetings



The breadth of this project encompasses a synthesis of hundreds of local, regional, and state perspectives on the current needs today and visions for the future. Through a set of tactical research objectives, this project was designed to best reveal implementation recommendations for State funding programs. As a whole, the project sought to understand how funding (design and deployment of) and governance (structures for effective resilience support) are and/or are not supporting climate resilience, and where, and then sought out answers through the following activities in parallel:

### 1. Desktop Research:

Included reviewing a case set of 14 State program grant guidelines, analyzing historical distribution of California Climate Investments (CCI) and California Natural Resource Agency (CNRA) bond funding, and looking at indirect stakeholder perspectives from the 2020 Annual Planning Survey and the recent OPR regional workshops.

### 2. Stakeholder Engagement:

Conducted from January through April 2022, this process included assessing responses through a new survey and leading primary stakeholder workshops and interviews with climate resilience experts from the nine regions across the state, as defined by California's 4th Climate Change Assessment.

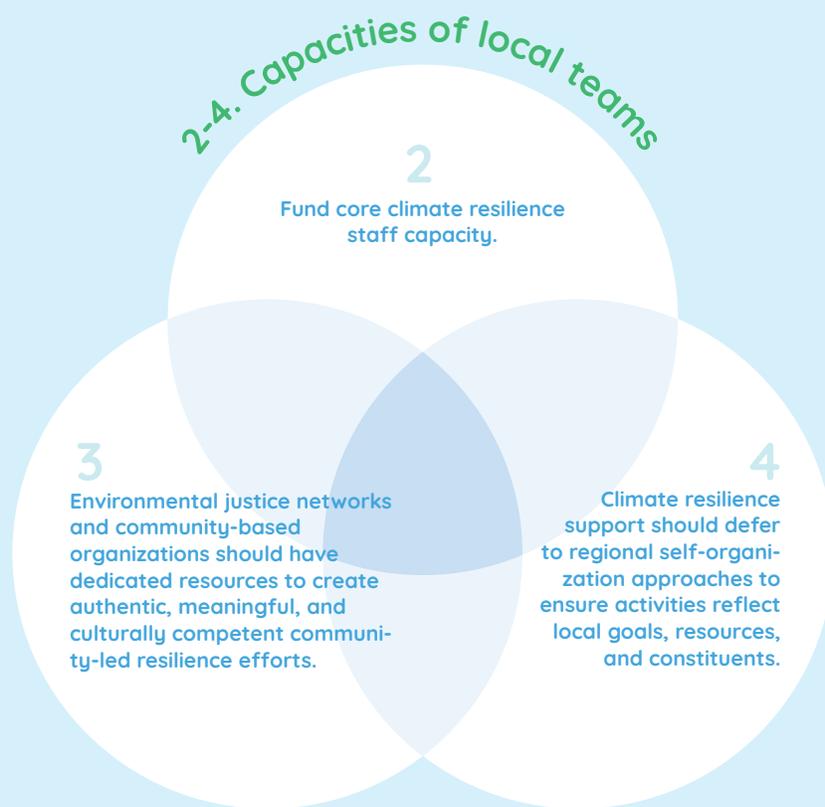
### 3. Ad Hoc Working Group:

Convened a cohort of 25 cross-sector climate resilience leaders, who provided feedback and guidance on activities through four meetings over the course of the project.

This collective analytic, conversational, and reflective effort has led to **six recommendations for catalyzing climate resilience in California**. Each includes a high level outline of the concept along with specific recommendations for action.

## 1. Rethinking the process and approach for Statewide grantmaking

Overhaul existing grant processes and structures to increase funding accessibility and ensure equitable activation of climate resilience Statewide.



## 5. State policy and other levers

Existing state policy levers should be utilized to augment existing local capacities, resources, and momentum.

## 6. Statewide grantmaking program design and learnings

Funding information and outcomes should be more consistent, transparent, and accessible to ensure more equitable allocation.

BROAD

ACTIONABLE

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Through hundreds of interviews with stakeholders across the state, we heard deep concern that smaller, lower capacity communities would be unable to compete effectively for the resources they need to build climate resilience. Municipalities, regional agencies and organizations, counties, and community based organizations (CBOs) of all kinds are lacking adequate staff and budget to develop the comprehensive and coordinated plans and projects needed to tackle this thorny challenge.

The CRP team's following recommendations to leaders, policymakers, and grant program managers stewarding billions of dollars in resources all speak to a broader opportunity for a paradigm shift in how we resource communities to come together and act in the face of climate change.

We also heard that community voices are so vital to making actionable, tangible progress on resilience project development and planning continue to be marginalized if not fully disconnected from the decision making, due to systemic inequities based on race, class, and region. This fragmentation is driven by an erosion of trust over time between government and communities, and the systems of decision making and resource allocation.

These two macro findings of our research—**1) the lack of core capacity and 2) weak partnership between government and communities**—point to the great risk facing the State: we could look back and learn that this unprecedented public investment ultimately exacerbated the underlying inequalities.



# 1

## OVERHAUL EXISTING GRANT PROCESSES AND STRUCTURES TO INCREASE FUNDING ACCESSIBILITY AND ENSURE EQUITABLE ACTIVATION OF CLIMATE RESILIENCE STATEWIDE.

We cannot build success out of a fractured system. Existing complex and onerous grant processes, timelines, and technical assistance bar the full spectrum of organizations from accessing necessary climate resilience funds. This is further hampered by short grant application submission timelines coupled with limited technical assistance. Structurally overhauling grant processes to reduce the complexity of applications and reporting will expand access and increase the opportunity for historically disadvantaged communities and new partners to win funding and work together to solve this existential challenge.

From the three core components of our research—desktop research, stakeholder engagement, and a stakeholder survey—we have drawn upon results

“ So much time and resources go into applying for a grant, and [grant writing] is not the only thing we do, in fact it’s not even what we do.”

- DIRECTOR, GRASSROOTS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ORGANIZATION

“ There is also a need for more sustained programmatic funding. That is the problem with adaptation work, it is very grant based and one-off.”

- CITY OFFICIAL

to inform, guide, and design key actions. Among respondents from our stakeholder engagement survey, the most frequently indicated challenge (37% of respondents) is that the grant management processes are burdensome, overcomplicated, and time consuming. We also heard from respondents in the stakeholder engagement survey that reimburseable grants (as opposed to those paid upfront) pose particular hurdles, and that potential funding offered was insufficient to cover the true scope of the project. Under the category

of other comments, notable responses included that payments from the grant were sometimes delayed, and that funding of infrastructure was easier to obtain than funding of operations. Learning from a different survey, the 2020 Annual Planning Survey (APS), we know that 80% of jurisdictions are interested in more technical assistance for grant applications and writing.

Results this high indicate a large appetite throughout regions for state assistance on these topics.

Overhauling existing grant processes and structures responds directly to the aforementioned findings revealing barriers to awareness of grants and requirements for a successful grant application, as well as access to grant writing support (i.e., technical assistance and staff capacity). Each key action, listed below, is intended to learn from existing grant programs and stakeholders' experiences on the ground, and to dismantle existing barriers to generate opportunities for applicants and their work.

 There is very little compiled information on funding, and even if it exists the communities don't know about it."

- **POLICY ADVOCATE,**  
Southern California CBO

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## KEY ACTIONS:

- Provide dedicated resources such as planning grants and technical assistance to qualifying organizations looking to develop grant proposals for planning and project development.
- Revisit standard definitions for “disadvantaged and vulnerable communities” so that they are inclusive of the many diverse needs of California communities. Consider “historically excluded” communities who have been left out of grant opportunities in the past.
- Develop a central applicant portal containing information that would be universal to all climate and resilience grant programs across the state. Build processes across state grant programs to harvest fundable projects proactively leveraging data collected through this new portal, inviting communities to apply.
- Rethink application processes to be more user-centric by looking at structural changes around phasing and timing for grants (i.e., rolling grant applications); staging of resources (including match requirements); partnership structures; and incorporation of multiple stages, including a light first stage, to allow for new types of partnerships.
- Wherever possible, move away from “reimbursement” funding mechanisms, which are burdensome for governments and organizations who have to front the resources and wait for repayment. In instances of federalized funding that requires reimbursement, explore innovative financial mechanisms and private sector and philanthropic partnerships to provide capital up front to grantees and contractors.

## PACOIMA BEAUTIFUL'S TRANSFORMATIVE CLIMATE COMMUNITIES GRANT STORY

Founded in 1996, Pacoima Beautiful is an environmental justice (EJ) organization led by women tackling community resilience in the San Fernando Valley. Decades of success providing education, policy influence and cultivating a more sustainable San Fernando Valley situated Pacoima Beautiful as an ideal candidate for California's Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Transformative Climate Communities (TCC) grant program.

SGC's TCC grants provide local, grassroots, organizations with funding to chart their own strategies to sustainability and combat pollution, a mission perfectly aligned with Pacoima Beautiful's existing work. On the day grantees arrived in the San Fernando Valley to celebrate Pacoima Beautiful's award, community members, volunteers and staff lined the street clapping in recognition of and appreciation for funds that would directly impact their community.

In the years leading up to Pacoima Beautiful's successful grant application and subsequent award, countless hours, dedicated staff and consultants had tirelessly worked on TCC's

application requirements. In fact, Pacoima Beautiful applied twice, hiring a grant writer the second time around to strengthen their application. The team often contemplated expanding their capacity to meet the demands of the grant application, knowing a winning proposal would enable them to do more meaningful work, expand capacity into the community and drive their mission.

The devastation from failing to be awarded funds on their first application highlighted an all too common constraint—the very grants that are meant to build transformation require grassroots organizations to decide between their community efforts and administrative tasks, because capacity within these organizations is already limited. What we heard in speaking with Pacoima Beautiful was the support of programs like TCC to transform communities and also the need for grant programs to carefully examine what they are asking of potential grantees whose time, money and staff capacity is already limited, reinforcing the need to generate more accessible grant programs.



## 2 FUND CORE CLIMATE RESILIENCE STAFF CAPACITY.

One constant throughline of the desktop research, stakeholder engagement, and survey findings was that local and regional governments, as well as their nonprofit partners, lack core funding and capacity to focus on and prioritize climate resilience. Simply put, there is not enough staff, time allocations, adequate training, and workforce pipeline to develop impactful projects, apply for funding, and implement them. Thus, despite the relative abundance in coming months and years of climate resilience funding, organizational capacity will hinder the State's goals with existing and grantmaking programs.

“The real issue we face is capacity. Local governments are being crushed with unfunded mandates to get things done. Cities need the capacity to do this work...”

- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NONPROFIT

Furthermore, the lack of staff capacity often manifests as differing priorities between entities (i.e., local governments and environmental justice groups) pursuing climate resilience work. Despite this acute need, few grant programs identify capacity building and training as eligible funding activities. Flexible, long-term, unrestricted funding for planning, programs, and projects that build collaborative structures and norms is further required to address this issue.

The need to fund staff capacity became more salient in our desktop research, reinforcing what we heard from stakeholders in both the survey and engagement. When reviewing the Governor's Office of Planning and Research (OPR) workshop findings, the lack of capacity was identified as a unique resilience challenge in every region except San Diego, and lack of coordination—potentially related to lack of capacity—was also indicated across most regions. Similarly, in the 2020 APS results, the majority of jurisdictions which responded face inadequate levels of staffing to support work on climate adaptation and resilience and environmental justice. In the total pool of respondents, 76% of jurisdictions reported no staff or very little staff, with limited funding for consultants to address climate resilience and adaptation. These very high rates of understaffing seem to reflect the

“Most times, philanthropy as well as State grants fund those who are already in the ecosystem.”

- PROGRAM OFFICER, PHILANTHROPIC FOUNDATION

theme from the literature review and stakeholder feedback that capacity at the local government level is low in many areas. The North Coast and Sierra Nevada regions appear to have the most jurisdictions with no or limited staff support for these topics, while the San Diego region appears to have the fewest jurisdictions reporting to have no or very limited staff support. Both OPR’s workshop and the 2020 APS results were reaffirmed in our survey findings—the most critical capacity need indicated by respondents was staff support. Nearly 50% of all respondents indicated this critical capacity as a need.

“ We are unable to fill all the open staff positions, and there is high staff turnover which makes it tough to plan and execute long-term holistic projects...”

- **MANAGER**, REGIONAL GOVERNMENTAL ASSOCIATION

Prioritizing funding for staff capacity has a direct impact on the ability for existing and new resilience practitioners to engage in activities to cultivate adequate responses to climate change. The key actions laid out for this recommendation are prioritized and are meant to suggest the more immediate action and long-term solutions that should be simultaneously considered to close the gap in capacity and increase the ability of a climate resilience workforce.

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## KEY ACTIONS:

- Set aside a portion of multiyear, unrestricted, and flexible funds for capacity building. This involves training funds, as well as budget allocation for staff time to manage grants. Ideally, these funds would be directed towards qualifying localities and regions through mechanisms like block grants.
- Use state grant funding to incentivize local funding into annual budgets to institutionalize this core capacity over time.
- Dedicate funds that build a workforce to (1) monitor and manage resilience work over the long-term and (2) have agency to execute on “climate” and “resilience” work. For most stakeholders engaging in climate resilience work, “climate” and “resilience” are not typically within the job descriptions or a focused career path.
- Increase allowable indirect rates of grantees and subgrantees to bolster administrative capacity of grantees and their partners.

## WESTERN RIVERSIDE COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (WRCOG) GRANT WRITING ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The grant writing assistance program implemented by the Western Riverside Council of Governments (WRCOG) helps address the pervasive capacity gaps in applying for and managing grants. Since 2017, this unique offering has helped local jurisdictions increase their grant writing capacity by leveraging pre-approved grant writing consultants on a first-come, first-served basis when existing and new opportunities become available. WRCOG has allocated funding for this assistance. In addition, WRCOG is appropriating part of the funds received from the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) through the Regional Early Action Planning (REAP) funds for this program to assist with housing-specific programs.

To ensure that the first-come first-served model does not exclude municipalities, each jurisdiction is only allowed to apply for assistance every two years for a maximum of three grants. WRCOG has a predetermined but non-exhaustive list of grants, like the Active Transportation Program and Caltrans Sustainable Transportation Planning Grant Program, but the model also allows for the addition of new grants, if and when they become available, such as housing programs. Fundamentally, WRCOG has helped close a staffing gap for these jurisdictions so they can act on opportunities, which has spurred momentum in the region.



DOWNTOWN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA. PHOTO: KEN LUND, FLICKR.

# 3

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORKS AND COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS SHOULD HAVE DEDICATED RESOURCES TO CREATE AUTHENTIC, MEANINGFUL, AND CULTURALLY COMPETENT COMMUNITY-LED RESILIENCE EFFORTS.

Community-based organizations (CBOs), environmental justice (EJ) groups, and networks grew from a need to represent frontline communities most impacted by climate change, and their existence signals a historic gap with racist roots in formal policy making, planning, and project development. However, the existence of these groups and networks in and of themselves is not an adequate and structural solution to historic injustice, but a bridge to more systemic change in how communities and their governments plan and act together. Despite leadership from these groups for decades, robust community-driven approaches in grant funded projects and programs are still the exception, not the rule, in part because grant guidance lacks clearly defined practices and dedicated resources.

From our desktop research, we came to understand that while many grant programs required a certain number of awardees to be located in or show benefit to disadvantaged communities, few specified priority for projects that showed partnership with community organizations or whose project idea originated from the community—an important specification to ensure community voices are not just represented but are driving on-the-ground implementation. The ability to effectively activate local decision makers and community voices was a demonstrated need in the 2020 APS results. Overall, the most common action was working with citizen advisory groups on planning issues (60% of jurisdictions) and second was partnering with CBOs to conduct deeper public engagement (50%). The two least common actions were hosting a planning academy for residents (8%)

“ Many people don’t take administrative justice into account. [Environmental justice networks and CBOs] are at such a huge disadvantage especially compared to white-led organizations.”

- EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
CLIMATE JUSTICE CBO

“ It’s tough to work with new communities and NGOs if there is no dedicated funding for trust and relationship building.”

- CITY OFFICIAL

“ Finding local matches for tribes and tribal governments is difficult.”

- TRIBAL LEADER

and evaluating the effectiveness of the engagement with standardized metrics (15%). Very few jurisdictions overall are increasing community residents' knowledge and mastery of planning skills or elevating community planning for grassroots solutions. These findings were reinforced in our survey results, where community engagement was in the top three priorities for each region, and was often, but not always the number one priority. This noted interest in community level involvement reflects a need for deeper continuity from a local connection.

Supporting CBOs and EJ groups enables communities to co-design and champion resilience efforts. The key actions accompanying this recommendation are meant to recognize the legitimacy and importance of CBOs and EJ groups in implementing solutions to climate change impacts and elevating cross-sectoral, intersectional opportunities to more broadly build resilience in their communities.

“ On a local level, because funding sources are limited for CBOs, there's a lot of competition between CBOs to seek different funding.”

- REGIONAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS MANAGER, NONPROFIT

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## KEY ACTIONS:

- Set aside grant funding for CBOs and EJ groups across the State to elevate and embed authentic, culturally-sensitive community involvement into climate resilience initiatives.
- Require grants to embed equitable outreach and community inclusion for frontline communities, with appropriate funding to bolster these efforts.
- Allocate a set of funds upfront to low resource organizations to enable viable partnerships.
- Establish a stipend fund to especially support CBO engagement on program, policies, and projects across California.
- Grant language should support a broader inclusion of different definitions of “disadvantaged and vulnerable communities” and “priority populations,” increasing the eligibility of groups that qualify for necessary funding.
- Elevate the role of philanthropy, funding collaboratives, and collective impact models to broaden funding streams that will drive capacity.

## THE JUST RESILIENCE FUND

Though the Bay Area EJ community is abundant in terms of hundreds of CBOs, NGOs, and related efforts, there is insufficient capacity for unified or coalition engagement, advocacy and participation in regional scale efforts, and neighborhood-scale projects. Stakeholders across sectors have uniformly proposed the need for financial and staff-supported EJ consortia to aggregate their voice and capacity for engagement and influence through a simpler and more streamlined grants process.

One solution that has emerged is the establishment of regional intermediary funds (i.e., the Just Resilience Fund) which pools resources from both the public and private sectors to redistribute them through an equitable and democratic collaborative funding process. The Just Resilience Fund would prioritize funding place-based projects (i.e., resilience hubs and neighborhoods), stipends for community participation with local government partners and other initiatives rooted in community-preparedness for frontline communities. In listening to the voices of EJ groups, and inspired by the work of the New England Grassroots Environment

Fund and other intermediary funds across the country, the Just Resilience Fund grant application would be simple and accessible, with the process led by a Community Council (primarily composed of community members). Funding models include a quarterly open application for community groups, as well as a training session model which allocates funds following the completion of a capacity building resilience workshop.

The Just Resilience Fund vision was created by EJ Notable pilot projects, in collaboration with the NorCal Resilience Network, and as such, stands out for empowering EJ-focused CBO engagement. It includes \$50,000 from the City of Oakland to distribute to Oakland-based sites from their Resilience Hubs Leadership Training Cohort. This model could also synergize with the establishment of regional collaboratives, focusing on projects and initiatives on a smaller scale developed by the collaboratives, from place-based projects to community participation in resilience-based organizing with government partners.



PHOTO CREDIT: BAY CLIMATE ADAPTATION NETWORK, EQUITY WORKING GROUP

# 4

## CLIMATE RESILIENCE SUPPORT SHOULD DEFER TO REGIONAL SELF-ORGANIZATION APPROACHES TO ENSURE ACTIVITIES REFLECT LOCAL GOALS, RESOURCES, AND CONSTITUENTS.

California's regions have a broad variety of needs and capabilities, as well as distinctive institutions that are in various stages of readiness to lead, act, and build climate resilience. In some localities, the conversation around climate resilience is more established, and planning activities have been underway for a decade or more. In other places, activity is still in an early phase of development between localities, counties, regional agencies, and other actors such as regional climate collaboratives. A flexible policy supporting a variety of entities to serve as regional lead is necessary to equitably elevate the effectiveness for State programs across all regions.

“Funding comes for particular types of projects that may not be what has been prioritized through existing local processes and plans. We need more general pots of money.”

- COUNTY PROJECT MANAGER

“Regional collaboratives know the voices on the ground, have the established trust, and understand the politics to get this done. We have the infrastructure to do all of these things: regional assessor, translator, amplify messages of need, gather funding, redistribute resources, and more.”

- DIRECTOR, CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE

The findings across our literature review and stakeholder interviews demonstrate a low level of planning alignment and a lack of coordination on resilience efforts. While the State grants reviewed recommended projects to consider, align, and coordinate with regional needs and priorities, the degrees of emphasis remains broad, nebulous, and in some cases, limited. While four programs reviewed (e.g., TCC, AHSC, LEAP, and Caltrans' Clean California Program) stood out for their explicit and robust partnership and collaboration goals, others were very limited in their definitions and degrees of collaboration. The 2020 APS findings further echo a low alignment between

jurisdictions and regional efforts, with only 19% of jurisdictions reporting alignment on climate resilience and 8% in alignment on environmental justice. From our survey, we gleaned that respondents tend to frequently partner with multiple organizations

on climate resilience activities, with 60% of respondents more commonly partnering with local organizations (i.e., CBOs, nonprofits, and municipal governments) than regional collaboratives or other broader entities (i.e., State and Federal governments, private sector, tribal organizations, philanthropy).

“ We need to work with tribal partners to apply this work into their ancestral homelands to create next-gen leadership who have understanding of cultural knowledge and what is presently happening.”

- FOUNDER, REGIONAL ALLIANCE

## KEY ACTIONS:

- While State offices and agencies should provide funding and administrative guidance (including models and examples of best practices) and functional requirements for regional climate resilience activities, regions should define and formalize existing structures, as well as develop new structures as needed between agencies and organizations, to manage regional climate resilience challenges as needed.
- Grant programs should allow for flexibility for California’s regions to propose an administrative lead and constellation of partners appropriate to their needs and readiness.
- Task state administrators in each region to help develop regional capacity for climate resilience efforts. These administrators can also serve as “pinch-hitters,” adding capacity through secondments to organizations as needed, while also creating more accessibility by being more transparent owners of specific grant programs.



PHOTO: CICLAVIA LOS ANGELES.

### EASTERN SIERRA SUSTAINABLE RECREATION PARTNERSHIP (ESSRP)

The Eastern Sierra Sustainable Recreation Partnership (ESSRP) gathers monthly, organized on volunteer hours by a local city council member, and is one of the more unique regional gatherings in the State of California. These monthly meetings almost always have representation from local, State, city, and Federal entities. In the Eastern Sierras climate impacts, like forest fires, extend beyond municipal boundaries from city to Federal public land to tribal nations, at rapid, destructive paces. Out of necessity and an interest in coalition building through coordination, ESSRP manages to foster dialogue between members representing the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service and state parks, as well as local decision makers. The potential for deeper collaboration and shared camaraderie stemming from the tens of thousands of acres each are attempting to protect, creates a space for shared learning, project partnership, and community resilience. Funding local organizations, including those groups that are generously managed by external partners, requires funding and support to maintain a pulse on local needs and voices to potentially scale this knowledge



beyond their jurisdictional boundaries. What ESSRP demonstrates is a gap in support for the self-organized, highly informed, and local groups that are cultivating creative partnerships and ways to manage, adapt, and attain resilience in their region. This example further highlights how regions themselves are best equipped to activate in the ways that suit their needs and capacities.

### SONOMA COUNTY REGIONAL CLIMATE PROTECTION AUTHORITY (RCPA)

The Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority, known colloquially as the RCPA, was formed in 2009 through locally-sponsored State legislation to coordinate countywide climate resilience efforts among Sonoma County's nine cities and multiple agencies, including the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors. The RCPA fosters collaboration, helps to set goals, pools resources, formalizes partnerships, and works across government siloes to advance climate action. It operates through coordinating activities of local jurisdictions to complement State, Federal, and

private sector actions, and provides pathways for local elected officials to foster dialogue on countywide issues. Currently, the RCPA is focused on obtaining grant funding for emissions-reducing initiatives and spearheading countywide climate planning efforts, all of which emphasize data collection, public information, and educational campaigns. In recognition of the RCPA and the local governments of Sonoma County's coordinated climate action leadership, this cohort won the title of Climate Action Champions in 2014 by the White House.

## 5 EXISTING STATE POLICY LEVERS SHOULD BE UTILIZED TO AUGMENT EXISTING LOCAL CAPACITIES, RESOURCES, AND MOMENTUM.

Beyond individual organizational capacity gaps, challenges with coordination and alignment across regions are hampering progress on climate resilience initiatives. In order to accelerate uptake and adoption of local and state policies and mandates, the State should play a larger role in seeding climate resilience assistance into existing structures and help match funding qualifications and structures.

Our literature review and stakeholder engagement point to the great opportunity for embedding climate resilience initiatives into grant programs to accelerate impacts, especially across lower capacity regions. The State grants reviewed indicate how programs overall could improve their connection to climate resilience and adaptation elements, provide guidance on allowable and prioritized projects, and amplify resources to connect project proposals with climate resources. Though some grants (e.g., Caltrans' Clean California Program) support connecting program goals to broader resilience aspects (i.e., improved public space) and climate goals (i.e., urban heat island effect), this remains an outlier versus the norm. Further, developing existing mandates and resilience strategies are more skewed to higher capacity regions. As the 2020 APS indicated, the most common adaptation action in every region was developing a Local Hazard Mitigation Plan, but lower capacity regions like the San Joaquin Valley and the Inland Deserts had the lowest rates of development across jurisdictions (36% and 39%, respectively). Integrating "climate risk into decision-making, budgeting, and operational processes" received a wide variety of answers ranging from 0% of jurisdictions in Inland Deserts to 27% and 28% in the North Coast and San Francisco Bay Area regions.

“Addressing climate change requires working with the land owners and there are currently little to no can the State offers that isn't already being offered (e.g., Healthy Soils program, Water Conservation program). We need solutions that take into account 'how' those types of funding can be enhanced in the face of climate change. New generation of farmers is really looking to improve their land in the face of climate change.”

- **MANAGER**, REGIONAL GOVERNMENT AGENCY

“Funding is not given to capacity building — it is given to projects only. We need pathways to create sustained community outreach. Building relationships takes a long time and aren't built into the grant cycle.”

- **FOUNDER**, REGIONAL ALLIANCE

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## KEY ACTIONS:

- Explore how funds could be used to support localities in complying with existing mandates and efforts, like hazard mitigation plans and existing resilience strategies.
- Simplify funding for comprehensive multibenefit projects that advance existing State policies and priorities. These projects often fit across multiple disciplines, State offices, and permitting requirements. Make it easier to broaden the scope limited to existing funding streams for multi-benefit projects. Lower barriers to braiding and blending funding resources.
- Identify under-spent Federal dollars (e.g., HUD CDBG-DR) and explore active redirection and leverage of complementary climate resilience funding programs.
- Leverage existing and/or create new multi-agency activities to align and synchronize State grant programs.



## SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY WATER COLLABORATIVE ACTION PROGRAM (SJVWCAP)

Continuous drought and water management issues have plagued the San Joaquin Valley for years, with rising temperatures, population growth, extractive economies, and degradation of the Valley's natural ecosystems adding more pressure on existing natural water resources and infrastructural systems. Longstanding challenges in advancing inter-agency collaboration, lack of trust among cross-sectoral stakeholders, and competing priorities have hindered development of regional scale solutions necessary to combat and adapt to the impact of climate change on diminishing water resources. A prime example of such a solution is the San Joaquin Valley Water Collaborative Action Program (SJVWCAP), which includes members from local City and County governments, environmental NGOs, farmers and agricultural industries, water agencies, and advocates from disadvantaged communities (DAC). Its mission is to develop initiatives to achieve safe and reliable drinking water, environmental restoration, water supply sustainability, floodplain management, and other water and land use solutions for a more resilient region.

Since its launch in 2020, the collaborative has expanded to over 60 organizations in the region and has developed an innovative governance model to enable greater engagement of a broad range of stakeholders and accelerate impactful work. The collaborative consists of approximately 10 environmental NGOs and water agencies each, over 6 representatives from various government agencies at the City and County level, 5 representatives of safe drinking water and disadvantaged community advocacy groups, 19 representatives from the agricultural sector, and over 20 representatives from academia, State, and Federal agencies. The governance structure of the collaborative provides itself the capacity to develop shared goals and vision for the region and allow transparent and effective prioritization of funds in accordance with the needs of the communities. Acknowledging lack of trust as a major obstacle to equitable growth, tackling this issue through a broad-based consensus of such a large group showcases the willingness of many non-State and State actors to undertake transformational change through participatory planning.



CALIFORNIA AQUEDUCT SOUTH SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY. PHOTO: CHRIS 'MAVEN' AUSTIN.

# 6

## FUNDING INFORMATION AND OUTCOMES SHOULD BE MORE CONSISTENT, TRANSPARENT, AND ACCESSIBLE TO ENSURE MORE EQUITABLE ALLOCATION.

Pervasive gaps in data tracking and accessibility approaches for grant programs (i.e., participation, activities, and outcomes) inhibit learning and growth from a support perspective, which impedes equity of access and scale of impact over time. Standardizing funding structures and processes and ensuring documentation of lessons learned and application of best practices will enable the State to better leverage diverse investments, track overall outcomes, and continue to accelerate greater impact.

“ There are some steep expectations from the State with liabilities, and we cannot collaborate with CBOs easily. The contract makes it really tough as it asks us to provide incentives to communities but the fine print mentions that food and child care are not included. This is an obvious contradiction.”

- SENIOR REGIONAL PLANNER,  
COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENT

“ Grants are competitive and onerous. Larger communities elbow their way to the top.”

- REGIONAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS  
MANAGER, NONPROFIT

While some State grants stand out for fostering consistency, transparency, and accessibility, most findings point to an unclear application process and funding history. The research also indicated that less than half of reviewed programs publicly posted information about webinars or workshops for potential

applicants, further rendering inequities in gathering new applicants. Furthermore, few grant programs researched had publicly visible feedback structures, indicating an overall lack of transparency. The CNRA/OPR Workshops demonstrated how every region also stated needing more data—either financial and economic data, impact projection and mapping data, or sector-specific data for future grants. Our own survey also demonstrated a low agreement around the State’s current grant programs alignment with dependability, accessibility, and addressing feedback, demonstrating room for improvement within programs to align with the characteristics.

“ Existing funding doesn't allow us to address the basics—what is climate change?”

- DIRECTOR, CBO

Regardless, some programs reviewed set the precedent for other State programs to follow suit. The Sustainable Transportation Grant and Caltrans' Clean California program, for example, identified goals, eligibility, and previous awardees in a digestible format. Others, like the TCC

planning and implementation project guidelines, outline the criteria and point system for each piece that will be evaluated, providing a higher level of transparency in their methodology for selecting projects. Further, the TCC Mapping tool shows disadvantaged census tracts based on data from CalEnviroScreen 4.0 and 3.0 and low-income Census Tracts defined by AB1550, with a video tutorial and story map to explain the mapping tool. Overall, these specifications and tools influence the equity outcomes of the program through increased clarity, accessibility, partnership and impact. Compared with other programs reviewed, the Strategic Growth Council posted more materials related to grant program workshops (e.g., TCC and AHSC) and has an annual process for improving the guidelines through feedback solicitation from public, state, local, nonprofit, and applicant groups over several months. By posting summaries of how the guidelines have changed between years in response to stakeholder feedback, this process ensures AHSC projects continue to advance sustainable development best practices across California's communities, demonstrating how the funding source has incorporated previous learnings to improve their processes, and improves accessibility for returning applicants.

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## KEY ACTIONS:

- Create a centralized, easily accessible help desk for support on project development and grant applications and serve as an accessible resource and hub for multiple state programs. This approach could build upon existing similar models.
- Create an advisory group of climate and community practitioners to support implementation of Assembly Bill 2252 (2017) to ensure Statewide grant tracking and reporting systems are optimally designed for transparency, accessibility, analysis, and ultimately equitable community benefit.
- Use common terms across grant programs to foster broader accessibility and inclusivity to reach a broader audience, increasing access for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) communities, tribal governments, and organizations. Simplify language and use common terms and definitions across grant programs.
- Apply a common community- and impact-centric (e.g., “characteristics”) approach in design, deployment, review, and evaluation to improve alignment of goals and program design.
- Connect grant opportunities to existing vulnerable communities mapping databases to better identify needs and scale impact.

## CALRECYCLE'S FOOD WASTE PREVENTION AND RESCUE GRANT PROGRAM

CalRecycle's Food Waste Prevention and Rescue Grant Program stands out for its consistent application process and its emphasis on communications and education to develop more informed applicants. Currently, its program materials allow for up to 50% of the applicant's requested grant amount for public education and outreach, and identify potential eligible public education and outreach examples, which helps inform applicants of what types of programs could be funded. Furthermore, this program allows for existing grantees to apply for additional

funding, with an emphasis in the proposal on how the applicant will not double count the progress towards their goals, and how projects are distinct from previous awards. This component also improves accessibility in providing organizations the option for additional funding through the same program. Posting materials from previous grant rounds to the website also enables new grantees to understand how programs have changed over time, as well as which projects are fundable, which enables new applicants to develop proposals that will win.



PHOTO: CAVAN IMAGES.

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For more information on our research process and methods, including the findings from our desktop analysis and stakeholder engagement, please see CRP's corresponding [Research Report](#) ↗

The background of the entire page is a vibrant yellow color with a complex, organic pattern of white, wavy, and curved lines that resemble stylized waves or a topographical map. These lines flow across the page, creating a sense of movement and depth. In the lower center, there is a white rectangular box with a thin yellow border. Inside this box, the text "CALIFORNIA" is written in a large, bold, white, sans-serif font. Below it, the words "RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP" are written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font.

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RESILIENCE PARTNERSHIP