

Guiding Principles for COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS (NBS)

Start Early and Be Inclusive



- Engage communities before plans are fully developed—invite input during design and planning.
- Value local knowledge as equal to technical expertise; co-create solutions.
- Ensure representation in project teams and leadership roles.

Meet People Where They Are



- Go beyond formal meetings and engage at schools, farmers markets, youth groups, and community events.
- Offer childcare, translation, and flexible scheduling to remove barriers.
- Use multiple modes. Online presence, informal gatherings, and structured workshops are good options.

Tie Engagement to Tangible Benefits



- Highlight multi-benefit outcomes such as recreation, shoreline access, mental health, and job creation.
- Use creative placemaking like murals, art installations, and cultural storytelling to connect identity to NBS.

Grow Long-Term Relationships



- Create permanent spaces and recurring touchpoints.
- Invest in workforce development. This can look like paid roles, green jobs training, and career pathways.
- Support CBOs as engagement leaders for authentic, trusted connections.

Communicate Clearly and Creatively



- Use plain language and avoid jargon (e.g., “shade trees” instead of “urban canopy management”).
- Share results back to the community to show how their input is used.
- Make engagement fun and interactive: games, art projects, oyster decorating, storytelling, and cultural activities.

Ensure Transparency and Accountability



- Be clear about project complexity and timelines. Close the feedback loop: explain decisions, especially when requests can't be funded.
- Involve communities in monitoring and advocacy for long-term ownership.

* These recommendations emerged from a Transforming Shorelines Collaborative workshop led by the San Francisco Estuary Partnership (SFEP) on October 1, 2025. Attendees included thirty individuals from a broad range of backgrounds including local community-based organizations; regional, state and federal government; local municipal agencies; and businesses. This guide was created by Natalie Rossi, a California Sea Grant State Fellow with SFEP