

8. Next Steps and Recommendations



Photo: Karl Nielsen

Next Steps

The needs assessment is one step in understanding, collating, and elevating water-related issues from the perspective of the Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes who experience them. Important next steps identified by Outreach Partners include activities in service of each Disadvantaged Community's and Tribes' development or continuation of visions and projects to address identified issues, such as:

- Holding further conversations and gathering data where necessary to better understand Disadvantaged Community and Tribal perspectives on specific issues and preferred solutions
- Collecting environmental, technical and spatial information related to these issues to inform the best solutions
- Completing feasibility studies and engineering plans for priority projects
- Developing funding proposals to address identified needs

The planned next steps to follow up on the specific issues each group identified are included in the Disadvantaged Community and Tribal sections of this report. These next steps are moving forward quickly as Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes work to develop projects for IRWM Implementation and other funding sources to address identified needs.

Alongside project development work, further capacity building and technical assistance are important to ensure Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes can participate in water-related decision-making and planning processes. Getting from identified needs to shovel ready projects is no small task, particularly for groups without the capacity and budget of a large agency.

The DACTI Program Team assessed capacity building needs from each Disadvantaged Community and Tribe. The top needs identified were mainly centered on potential project applications, particularly assistance with understanding proposal guidelines and grantee expectations. Many partners expressed needs for engineering and design support to develop project concepts into competitive proposals. Partners also asked for administrative support or training as the reporting burden for state contracts is very high and time-consuming. A full ranked list of the needs identified is included in the Appendix (page 320).

The DACTI Program Team also developed the DACTI Program Collaborative Space as a response to the identified need for a resource sharing platform. The Collaborative Space is a Google Drive folder that houses a contact list, events page, collaborative forum, project concept sharing sheet, notes from webinars and conferences, and a number of other resources to aid community partners in collaboration. The Collaborative Space also includes a continuously updated matrix of federal, state, local, and private funding opportunities related to issues raised in the needs assessment process. The current version of this matrix can be found in the Appendix (page 326).

The DACTI Program Team is providing grant writing and other capacity building support throughout the duration of the DACTI Program grant and is exploring avenues for continuing this support after the DACTI Program ends.

Programmatic Next Steps

Tap Water Quality Testing Program

One concern that was expressed by every Disadvantaged Community and many Tribes who participated in the DACTI Program was a mistrust in tap water, based in either observed aesthetic issues with tap water, or general distrust in infrastructure or public agencies to provide safe drinking water. In the post Flint, Michigan era, general mistrust of tap water has increased, even if there aren't readily observable issues with tap water. Additionally, many of the more serious contaminants, like lead, are not detectable by those using and consuming affected tap water. High levels of mistrust have economic and health impacts on Bay Area communities that will persist until public sectors actively engage to address the issue.

The DACTI Program is working with Disadvantaged Community and Tribal outreach partners to launch a grant funded tap water quality testing effort throughout the Bay Area. Each participating Disadvantaged Community is developing and implementing their tap water quality testing initiatives with programmatic and funding support from the DACTI Program. Disadvantaged Community members, Tribal members, and Tribal organizations will be able to test their water, and will collect detailed feedback on water quality experiences and perceptions to provide comparative information for future educational and advocacy efforts. Through this process, local stakeholders will be engaged to inform and support the Disadvantaged Community and Tribal-led effort, and to partner with the program and their communities to build and strengthen relationships.

In addition to supporting Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes in the development and implementation of their tap water quality testing programs, the DACTI Program is developing educational information for Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes regarding tap water quality, water sources, and in-home filtration options to address unsafe or flawed tap water. The program will also work to assess long term solutions to address premise plumbing that may be affecting water delivered by the utility. Where no tap water issues are found through testing, the DACTI Program will support Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes with educational campaigns to increase trust in tap water.

Implement Best Practices For Equitable and Accessible Grant Programs Elevated by Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Partners

In addition to supporting Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes in addressing identified issues, the DACTI Program Team will support the implementation of Best Practices for Equitable and Accessible Grant Programs (Chapter 8, page 307) that have been highlighted again and again by Disadvantaged Community and Tribal partners. “The Best Practices” chapter lays out issues Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes have experienced with grant programs and planning processes and best practices for making these processes more equitable, inclusive, and accessible to these groups. The Bay Area DACTI Program and the Disadvantaged Community and Tribal outreach partners ask that DWR respond to these best practices with a plan for implementation, and recommend that other agencies review and work to implement these into their grant programs and planning processes.

Continued Support after DACTI Program Funding Ends

Through the DACTI Program, Disadvantaged Community and Tribal partners identified projects and project concepts that would address their top needs. Alongside the DACTI Program, the Bay Area IRWM Coordinating Committee governance structure has been updated to include Tribal and Disadvantaged Community members. Additionally, the region-specific evaluation criteria for Round 2 of IRWM Proposition 1 Implementation funding are being updated in partnership with Disadvantaged Community and Tribal members to elevate projects that address issues identified through the needs assessment process, as well as those that have a letter of support submitted by Disadvantaged Community and Tribal leaders, members, or organizations. Representation in decision-making bodies and evaluation criteria is very important in determining who is most likely to receive funding. Ensuring that Disadvantaged Community and Tribal members are actively participating in the process of determining priorities for funding opportunities is vital so that communities can access said funding for identified projects. These advances in the Bay Area IRWM will only be able to continue, however, if there is additional funding through IRWM. The Bay Area IRWM is advocating for continuation and funding to support the development of these important relationships and program advances.

The DACTI Program Team will continue to develop the relationships that have been built and will support Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes past the funding program in some way, with or without IRWM funding. The San Francisco Estuary Partnership (SFEP) will continue its support of Disadvantaged Community and Tribal partners by integrating them and their needs into their planning processes, such as the Estuary Blueprint and will work to integrate the best practices that have been put forward by Disadvantaged Community and Tribal partners in the “Best Practices for Equitable and Accessible Grant Programs” chapter of this report. SFEP will also encourage other agencies to integrate these practices so they can better serve and include Disadvantaged Community and Tribal groups and address their specific needs.

Many of the agencies and utilities that participate in the Bay Area and other IRWM regions run their own grant funding programs, and the DACTI Program Team highly encourages those agencies and utilities to undergo a similar process with the Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes that they serve.

The relevant agencies should work directly with Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes to support the development of project concepts into competitive proposals. It is important that when these proposals are developed, the Disadvantaged Community or Tribe is included, as well as properly credited and acknowledged for its contributions.



Photo courtesy of Friends of Sausal Creek

Recommendations

1. The State should prioritize funding for the continuation of the DACTI Program, including the implementation of priority projects;
2. The relevant agencies should follow up with Community and Tribal partners in their area to support community-led solutions to identified needs;
3. Federal, state, regional, and local agencies and other grant administrators should implement the best practices as stated in the “Best Practices for Equitable and Accessible Grant Programs” chapter of this report.

Most importantly, grant and planning processes should engage and acknowledge the leadership of Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes from the very beginning, and allocate more funding, resources, and time to building long-term, sustained relationships with Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes, and addressing structural inequities.