

## 4. Community Outreach Partner Needs Assessments

### Overview

---

All Disadvantaged Community Outreach Partners undertook data collection for the water-related Needs Assessment as part of a coordinated overall regional strategy. The needs assessment was envisioned as a process driven and led by Disadvantaged Communities, and Outreach Partners tailored their coordinated processes to the community and the methods that worked for them. Each needs assessment was intended to be a case study, to take into account the Outreach Partner's positionality, history and relationships in the Disadvantaged Community in which they work as well as community characteristics and expressed preferences for engagement methods. This strategy was chosen to give the best picture of which water issues are most pressing and how they are manifesting from the perspective of Disadvantaged Community members, as well as how they would like to see them addressed.

For example, in some Disadvantaged Communities, outreach and needs assessment activities were most appropriately brought to community members through door-to-door outreach and surveys. In other Disadvantaged Communities where immigration status is a concern and community partners actively advise community members not to answer their door, outreach, listening sessions, and surveys were held at places where community members frequent. Some Disadvantaged Community Outreach Partners, who have been having ongoing conversations with community members for years about related issues, focused their processes on generating data to quantify these issues and on solutions. Other Outreach Partners, who have not had conversations with Disadvantaged Community members about water issues in the past or who had relationships only in parts of the community, attended existing events with trusted community groups to build trust and engage with community members in starting these conversations. In most cases, mixed methods were used and qualitative and quantitative information was collected through many conversations and surveys with Disadvantaged Community members to understand water needs and priorities. The needs assessments were overall structured to recognize, respect, and amplify Disadvantaged Community voices and self-determination.

While the needs assessment was specifically oriented toward water, water is tied to everything. All other issues, including affordable housing, jobs, and health, have a connection to water. The needs assessment process was leveraged to have conversations with Disadvantaged Community members about overall top priorities, and efforts were made to connect many of these issues—in the hopes of addressing them through IRWM or other funding—to water.

There are pitfalls in all centralized engagement efforts. Disadvantaged Communities are not monoliths, and often those able to be involved are those with time and interest, which can skew responses to prioritize certain issues. This report acknowledges the Disadvantaged Community members and perspectives that were not reached. Absence of identification of an issue in these assessments does not necessarily mean it is not a priority for some in that Disadvantaged Community.

The Needs Assessment and solution identification is an important first step. These conversations need to continue to gather more information where necessary, along with capacity building, technical assistance, and project development support. Getting from needs to shovel ready projects is no small task, particularly for low-resourced groups and Disadvantaged Communities.

In this section of this report, the process, findings, and next steps of each Disadvantaged Community Outreach Partners' needs assessment are presented. These sections were authored by each Community Outreach Partner and reflect their views.