GREATER LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMUNITY STRENGTHS AND NEEDS ASSESSMENT

A WATER PERSPECTIVE

WATERTALKS

Integrated Regional Water Management
Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES · STATE OF CALIFORNIA ·

Greater Los Angeles County
Integrated Regional Water Management
Leadership Committee

WATER talks

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

WaterTalks is funded through the California Department of Water Resources. In 2014, voters approved "The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act" – Proposition 1 – to meet the State's long-term water needs. Locally, WaterTalks is managed by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District, with fiscal management by West Basin Municipal Water District.

Oversight of the WaterTalks program is conducted by the Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program Task Force, representing three distinct Regions:

Greater Los Angeles: Grace Kast – Co-chair
Greater Los Angeles: Ramy Gindi
Upper Santa Clara Regional Water Management Group: Heather Merenda– Co-chair
Upper Santa Clara Regional Water Management Group: Rick Vasilopulous
Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County: Lynn Rodriguez – Co-chair
Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County: Lara Shellenbarger

A consultant team was engaged to design and implement the WaterTalks Strengths and Needs Assessment and other tasks in the Greater Los Angeles County IRWM Region. Led by TreePeople, these partners include the following:

Active San Gabriel Valley
Better World Group Advisors
Communities for a Better Environment
The Council of Mexican Federations in North America
Council for Watershed Health
East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
Koreatown Youth and Community Center
Mujeres de la Tierra
PlaceWorks
Promesa Boyle Heights
Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
Social Eco Education
Social Justice Learning Institute
Stantec
Trust South LA
Ultimate Restoration Unlimited
Watts Clean Air and Energy Committee

EDITORS

Ryanna Fossum | Council for Watershed Health
Jason Casanova | Council for Watershed Health
Mike Antos, PhD, ENV SP | Stantec
Tori Klug, PE | Stantec
Peter Massey | TreePeople
Ariel Lew Ai Le Whitson | TreePeople

TRIBAL ENGAGEMENTS

Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples

Angela Mooney D'Arcy | Acjachemen | Executive Director
AnMarie Mendoza | Tongva | Former Indigenous Waters Program Director
Jessa Calderon | Tongva and Chumash | Indigenous Waters and Ocean Protectors Program Director
Gabriella Lassos | Gabrielino-Tongva | Indigenous Waters and Sacred Ecologies Program Associate
Maritza Alvarez | Xicana Indigenous | Indigenous Media and Energy Justice Program
Amelia Vigil | Mexicana, Purépechan, Picuris | Operations Director

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENTS

Listening Sessions - Leadership Group CBOs

Danielle Zamora | Active San Gabriel Valley
Laura Gracia | Communities for a Better Environment
Oscar Cisco | The Council of Mexican Federations in North America
Cindy Donis | East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice
Carolyn Kwak | Koreatown Youth and Community Center
Cristina Basurto | Koreatown Youth and Community Center
Paola Machan | Mujeres De La Tierra
Francisco Romero | Promesa Boyle Heights
Itzel Castillo Wang Flores | Promesa Boyle Heights
Sarah Chang | Social Justice Learning Institute
Martha Camacho-Rodriguez | Social Eco Education
Jaime Del Rio | TreePeople
Bryan Medina | TreePeople
Annakaren Ramirez | TreePeople
Ariel Whitson | TreePeople
Gabriela Nunez | Trust South LA
Teresa McDonald | Ultimate Restoration Unlimited / Blight Patrol LLC
Jacquelyn Badejo | Watts Clean Air and Energy Committee

Online Survey Analysis

Ryanna Fossum | Council for Watershed Health
Jason Casanova | Council for Watershed Health

INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENTS

Municipalities, Water & Land Agencies, Offices of Elected Officials

Connie Adera, PE, ENV SP | Stantec
Mike Antos, PhD, ENV SP | Stantec
Khandriale Clark | Stantec
Tori Klug, PE | Stantec
Megan Murray, ENV SP | Stantec
Marisa Perez-Reyes | Stantec

School Institutions / Service Providers for People Living with Homelessness

Carlos Moran | Council for Watershed Health
Manny Gonez | TreePeople
Bryan Medina | TreePeople
Annakaren Ramirez | TreePeople
Graeme Waring-Crane | TreePeople
Ariel Whitson | TreePeople
Blake Whittington | TreePeople

LAND AND WATER ACKNOWLEDGMENT

THE IMPORTANCE OF PAARA' (WATER):

Water has always played, and continues to play, multiple roles in Tovaangar. The ocean, rivers and stream ways were often used as a means of travel. The Tongva and neighboring Nations used tule and plank canoes to paddle up and down freshwater and saltwater ways. Ceremonies of significance were also held in both salt and freshwater. Gathering of fish, clams, shells and other life, including basket weaving materials, was done by the water. Daily cleansing practices were also held near or in the water. Baskets were and are made near water by the material gathered near the water, and play the role of water jugs.

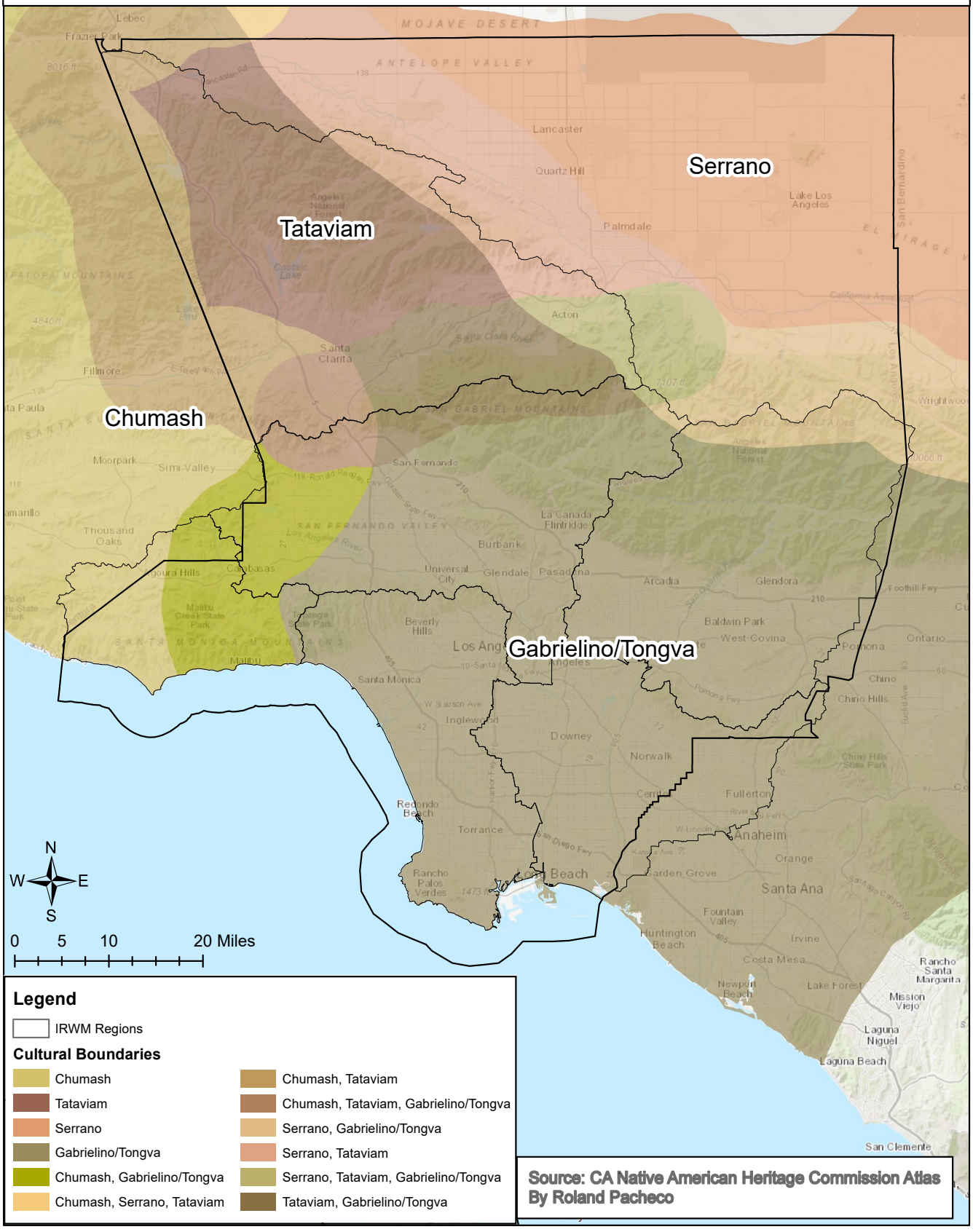
"The lifeforce of water and the value of human relationship to water was taught at the stage of infancy and became a lifelong practice for Tongva peoples and neighboring Nations."

Although Native peoples' access to water has been severely restricted by settler colonialism, many of these teachings, understandings and practices are still carried today. It is recognized that the water has become polluted and contaminated by the industrialization that colonization has brought onto Native sacred spaces.

"It is important to Native peoples to heal and reconcile their relationship with all bodies of water on ancestral homelands. The limited access to bodies of water has not limited efforts to reconcile these relationships. Many Natives still practice reciprocity with their waters despite the challenges they face in the 21st Century."

The authors of this Report acknowledge that the geographic area represented in this document (the Greater LA County Integrated Regional Water Management area) is the unceded ancestral lands and waters of the Tongva, Chumash, and Tataviam people, the original stewards of this land. We recognize that these Tribes are still present in the areas reflected in this Report. We honor their elders both past and present and the descendants who are citizens of these tribes for their exemplary respect for water; we honor their continued connection to and protection of one of the most beautiful and diverse landscapes in the world.

The Fluid Connection of Tribal Communities and Water



The authors also express, however, that acknowledgement of ancestral homelands alone is not enough. Through the data collection and findings we now present, we seek to lift up the stories, culture, and community of these California Native American Tribes, and all indigenous people living in this Report's geographic coverage area.

The Disadvantage Community and Tribal Engagement Program is funded by the California Department of Water Resources, and the authors recognize DWR's Tribal Engagement Policy, which is included in the Appendices.

About the map:
TreePeople developed the Tribal Cultural Boundaries Map as a support tool for carrying out the WaterTalks Program, to be a visual guide of how the original caretakers of the land viewed the pre-colonized land of what is now Los Angeles County and nearby areas.

TreePeople shares this map with the understanding that it is intended for educational and display purposes only. The geographical information displayed is not for use in determining locations of cultures, boundaries or people for recognition, consultation or any other legal or policy purpose.

Creation of the core map used source data from the California Native American Heritage Commission Digital Atlas of California Native Americans, as it is our understanding that local tribes had input in the creation of the commission's data. We recognize that data from the digital atlas may be updated periodically and recommend turning to that source, which can be found at *https://nahc.ca.gov/cp/*

Map development:
Roland Pacheco, Tribal Engagement Coordinator, TreePeople
Jason MacCannell, Special Assistant to the Director of California State Parks

WHY "WATERTALKS?"

The Proposition 1 - funded program that made this Strengths and Needs Assessment Report possible is the Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program administered by the CA Department of Water Resources. The authors have devoted notable time to the consideration of these three words: "disadvantaged community involvement."

- Disadvantaged: The term "Disadvantaged community" has become standard terminology used for several years in the public sector. Its definition is written into the California Public Resource Code (Section 75005) and used by multiple agencies to determine how public funds are distributed as a means to promote equity and justice. The term is embedded in policy and funding at the state and local level.
- Involvement: The Disadvantaged Community Involvement Program is designed to ensure the involvement of disadvantaged communities in IRWM planning efforts. In the Greater LA County area, a significant portion of resources have been allocated to "involvement" in the forms of outreach, authentic engagement, education, coalition building, and capacity building.
- Community: However, in the field of Community Organizing, it is common knowledge that the term "disadvantaged" is unliked by people in areas that meet the official definition. Many find it demeaning or offensive. Consolidating the word to an acronym (DAC) -- even if just for the purpose of expedient communications -- can take the offensiveness even deeper.

The result? There is an inherent problem with a community involvement program whose very name creates a barrier to authentic engagement and communication.

As a consequence, early on in the program, leadership and consultants for the LA Ventura Funding Area determined it was important to find another way to name and describe the program. As is shared in the Methodology Section, outreach facilitators have focused questions on what residents like about their community, what they want to see change, and then delve into how water is involved. There is often education about water in the community, such as who the water local providers are and where the water comes from.

In short, the program engages the community in talks about water, and is therefore called "WaterTalks."

Throughout this document use of the term "disadvantaged community" will likely be limited to its more public administration use, such as the funding programs, state laws, regulations, and the like.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Local residents are experts in their own communities, and their expertise must be recognized in balance with that of the water managers."

WaterTalks is a public program designed to generate and increase community involvement in planning a sustainable water future for California. Its goal is to explore the strengths and opportunities of 104 communities in the Greater Los Angeles area facing ongoing economic and environmental distress, and gather input to prioritize and recommend water-related projects based on issues of greatest concern. Included are members of California Native American Tribes and Indigenous Peoples living in the region.

In 2014, voters approved "The Water Quality, Supply, and Infrastructure Improvement Act" – Proposition 1 – to meet the State's long-term water needs. Proposition 1 funds an array of sustainable water-related projects, including drinking water protection, public water system improvements, water recycling, wastewater treatment, drought relief, emergency water supply management, and watershed protection.

The California Department of Water Resources was then charged with creating a program to ensure the involvement of disadvantaged, underrepresented and Tribal communities in water project planning, design and implementation through the Integrated Regional Water Management program (IRWM) which has been active throughout the state for many years.

Statewide this program is called the "Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program," and locally is called "WaterTalks." Their creation was driven by conclusions made throughout the state in earlier stakeholder engagement and water integration efforts, including in Los Angeles County. Of the conclusions reached, the most prominent was the idea that local residents are experts in their own communities, and their expertise

must be recognized in balance with that of the water managers. Water managers can develop projects and programs that meet community needs and gain community support by listening to and engaging the voices present in their communities with intent, understanding, and compassion.

GREATER LA COUNTY OVERVIEW

Integrated regional water management in the Greater Los Angeles County region is carried out by some of the largest water agencies in the United States, some of the smallest in California, and many others in between. There are complex regulatory systems that seek to ensure clean water for personal use and in the environment. The GLAC region boasts the watersheds of the LA River, the San Gabriel River, and those that drain to the Santa Monica Bay including, prominently, the Malibu and Ballona Creek watersheds. These water bodies and lands are significant for California Native American Tribes, including the Tongva, Chumash, and Tataviam peoples; the land and water is their unceded ancestral homeland. The WaterTalks program assessed the needs, as well as the strengths, of 104 self-identified communities and Tribal needs region-wide. The Strength and Needs Assessment used a variety of tools to engage with multiple audiences:

- members of Tribal communities
- people in communities through partnerships with community-based organizations
- school district educators and facilities managers
- institutions that provide water and social services to communities.

The Strengths and Needs Assessment sought to:

- Inform and engage WaterTalks communities in a conversation about their water management-related needs, preliminary needs assessment results, and a plan for continued community engagement and active involvement in decision making.
- Gain a better understanding of water management-related community needs to help direct resources and funding.
- Build initial capacity within communities to develop project concepts and engage technical support for design and project development.
- Increase participation of members of the public, non-governmental organizations (NGO), community-based organizations (CBO), and public and private institutions in IRWM planning and project development activities.

APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

This Assessment builds off two efforts: A) the 2013 Disadvantaged Community Outreach Evaluation Study: An Analysis of Technical Assistance and Outreach Methods (Outreach Study). The DWR-sponsored Outreach Study for the Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) Region generated community boundaries that express the lived experience of people and resulted in a list of 104 cities or neighborhoods *(FIGURE ES-1)*. B) Working with NGOs and academia as consultants, the Los Angeles-Ventura IRWM Funding Area created the WaterTalks Program to engage and inform each community about IRWM through a variety of efforts.

Community

For community input, 13 CBOs were brought together, forming a coalition that resulted in the WaterTalks Leadership Group of CBOs, which conducted surveys and virtual

Council of Mexican Federations (COFEM) staff canvassed local parks to collects survey data for the needs assessment.

listening sessions. These 13 organizations represent 75-80% of the 104 areas identified for the GLAC IRWM Region, are rooted in their respective communities, and have experience conducting surveys, hosting workshops and collecting data.

Originally, data collection for Tribal and community perspectives was designed to take place during workshops where the Leadership Group of CBOs would host gatherings, "meeting the community where they are." COVID-19 exacerbated the already deep inequities and challenges in these communities, and further impeded the team's ability to engage and survey residents on water-related issues. An intended approach using in-person meetings and events changed to reliance on a digital Community Survey tool. Several months were added to the process *(FIGURE ES-2)*, which allowed the Leadership Group of CBOs to complete more than 3,591 online surveys that asked open-ended fundamental questions:

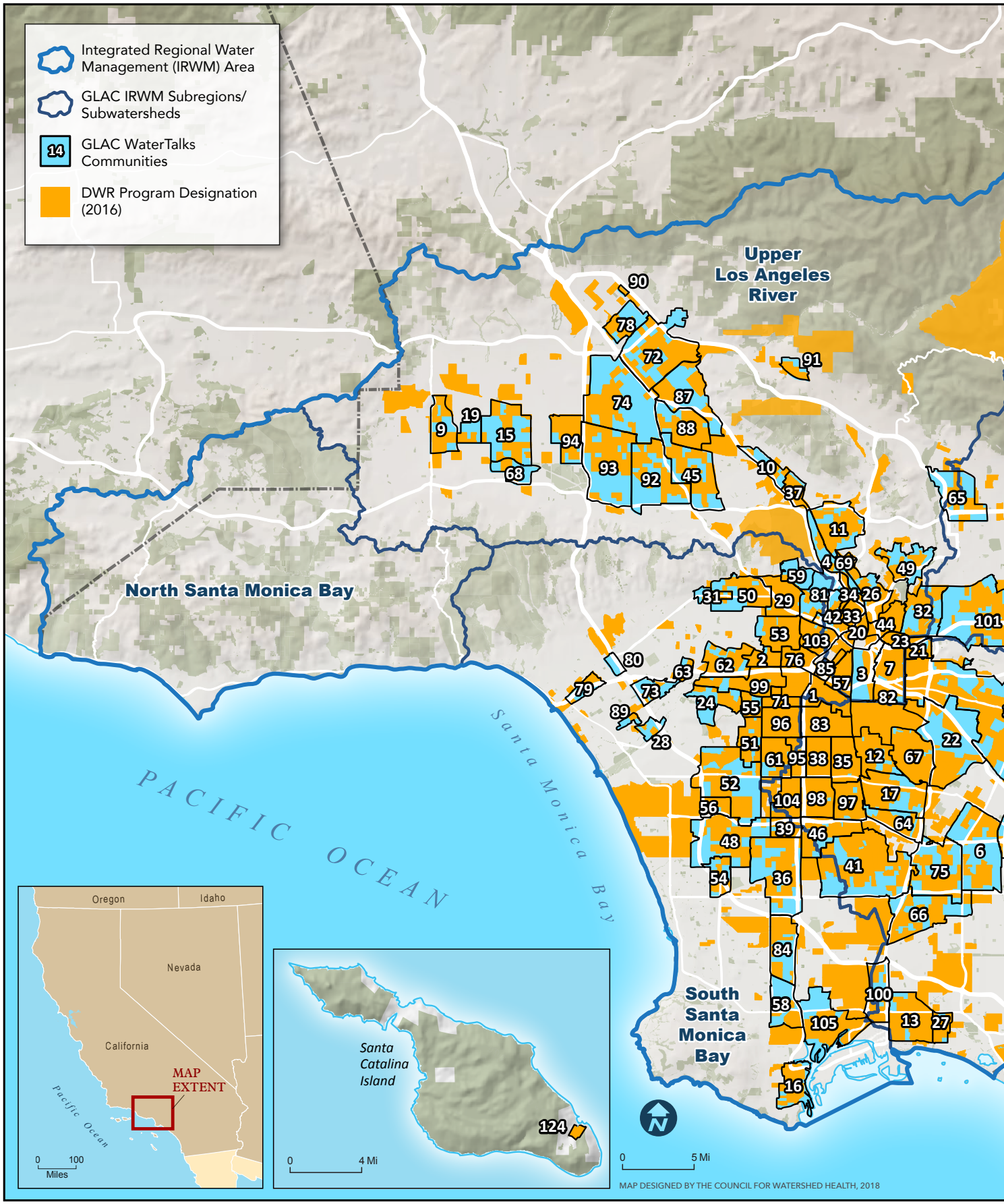
- What do you like best about your community?
- What does it need most?
- How is water a part of your community?

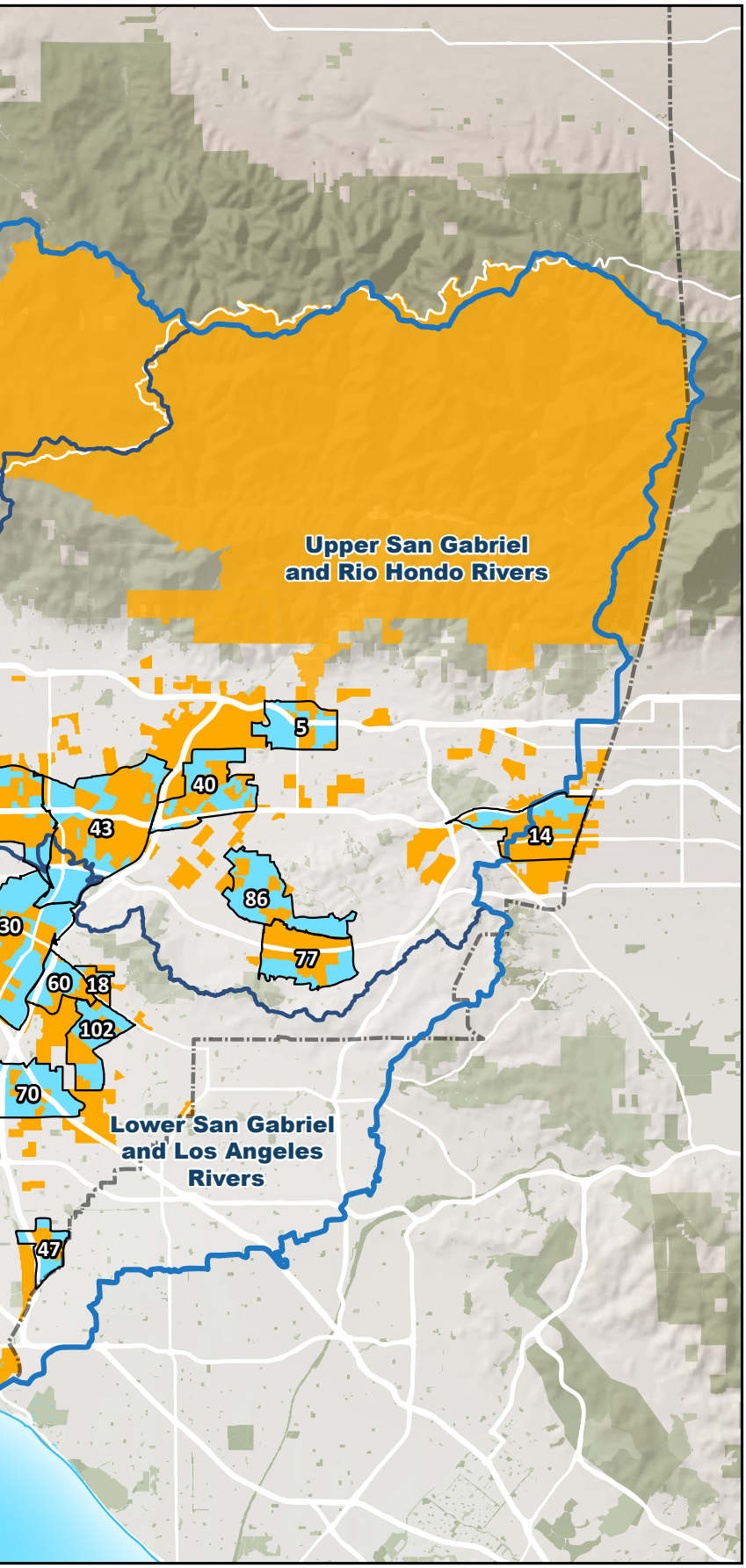
They also held 29 virtual community listening sessions; used social media to raise awareness and garner feedback through the promotion of the digital Watertalks survey; and reached 300,000 people via phone banking, texting and newsletter e-blasts. Geographic data from the WaterTalks surveys was combined with demographic and place-based data from local and State sources to identify survey respondents living in 104 disadvantaged communities across the GLAC region. A Geographic Information System (GIS) was used to map the location of each WaterTalks survey respondent, assign that respondent to a community name, and spatially assess strengths and needs data. Insights from this mapping exercise were used to analyze survey responses across multiple scales of characteristics and geographies *(FIGURE ES-3)*.

Tribes

A Tribal Survey was created to expand on the Community Survey to express the unique needs of tribal communities, designed by local tribal water scholars. Originally, four data collection workshops were to be held in order to reach a representative population of Indigenous Peoples in the GLAC region. The severe impacts of COVID-19, especially on Tribal communities, instead required a variety

FIGURE ES-1. WaterTalks Communities

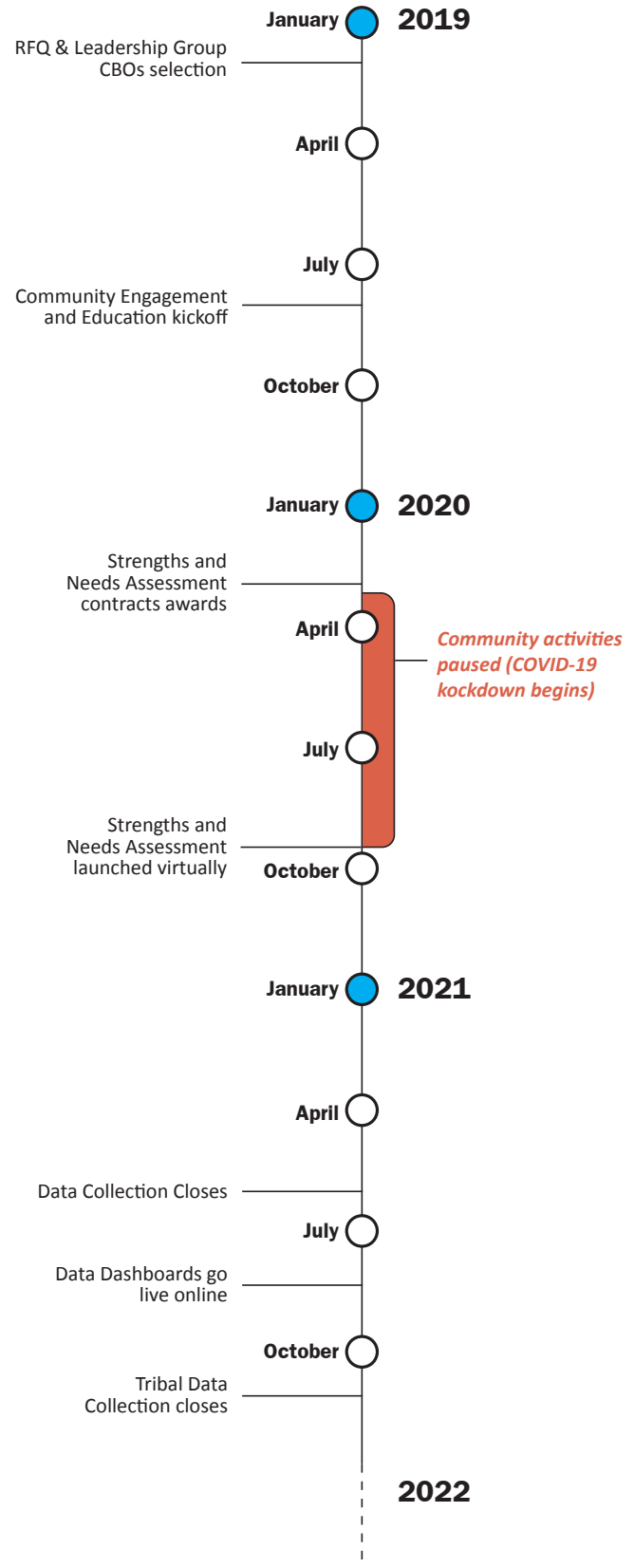




WATER TALKS COMMUNITIES WITHIN THE GREATER LOS ANGELES COUNTY IRWM AREA

1 - Adams/Central
2 - Arlington/Harvard Heights
3 - Arts District/West Boyle Heights
4 - Atwater Village
5 - Azusa/Citrus
6 - Bellflower/Southeast Downey
7 - Boyle Heights
9 - Canoga Corridor
10 - Central Burbank
11 - Central Glendale
12 - Central Huntington Park
13 - Central Long Beach
14 - Central Pomona
15 - Central Reseda/S. Northridge
16 - Central San Pedro
17 - Central South Gate
18 - Central Whittier
19 - Central Winetka
20 - Chinatown/Cornfield
21 - City Terrace
22 - Commerce/Bell Gardens
23 - County Hospital
24 - Crenshaw/Baldwin Hills
26 - Cypress/Glassell Park
27 - East Central Long Beach
28 - East Del Rey
29 - East Hollywood
30 - East LA/Montebello/Pico Rivera
31 - Eastern West Hollywood
32 - El Sereno
33 - Elysian Park
34 - Elysian Valley/Frogtown
35 - Florence Firestone
36 - Gardena/N. Harbor Gateway
37 - Glen-Bank
38 - Goodyear/Van Meter Springs
39 - Greater Athens
40 - Greater Baldwin Park
41 - Greater Compton
42 - Greater Echo Park
43 - Greater El Monte
44 - Greater Lincoln Heights
45 - Greater North Hollywood
46 - Greater Willowbrook
47 - Hawaiian Gardens
48 - Hawthorne
49 - Highland Park
50 - Hollywood
51 - Hyde/Harvard Park
52 - Inglewood
53 - Koreatown
54 - Lawndale
55 - Leimert Park
56 - Lennox
57 - Little Tokyo/Toy District/Skid Row
58 - Lomita/Southwest Carson
59 - Los Feliz
60 - Los Nietos
61 - Manchester/Harvard/Chesterfield
62 - Mid-City
63 - Mid-City West
64 - North Lynwood
65 - Northeast Pasadena
66 - North Long Beach
67 - Northern Lower LAR Cities
68 - Northern Tarzana
69 - Northwest Glassell Park
70 - Northwest Norwalk
71 - Outer Expo Park
72 - Pacoima
73 - Palms
74 - Panorama City
75 - Paramount
76 - Pico Union
77 - Rowland/Industry
78 - San Fernando
79 - Santa Monica I-10 Corridor
80 - Sawtelle
81 - Silverlake
82 - South Boyle Heights
83 - South Central
84 - S. Harbor Gateway/West Carson
85 - South Park/Fashion/Lofts District
86 - South Puente Valley
87 - Sun Valley East
88 - Sun Valley South
89 - Southwest Mar Vista
90 - Sylmar/Foothill Blvd Comm.
91 - Tujunga/Foothill Blvd
92 - Valley Glen/Valley Village
93 - Van Nuys
94 - Van Nuys Airport
95 - Vermont Knolls
96 - Vermont Square
97 - Watts Proper
98 - Watts West
99 - West Adams/Jefferson Park
100 - West Long Beach
101 - West SGV 10 Freeway
102 - Western South Whittier
103 - Westlake
104 - Westmont
105 - Wilmington
124 - Avalon

FIGURE ES-2. Strengths And Needs Assessment Timeline



of techniques including digital surveying, individual interviews, online listening sessions and outreach during events attended by Tribal and Indigneous Peoples.

Institutions and Schools

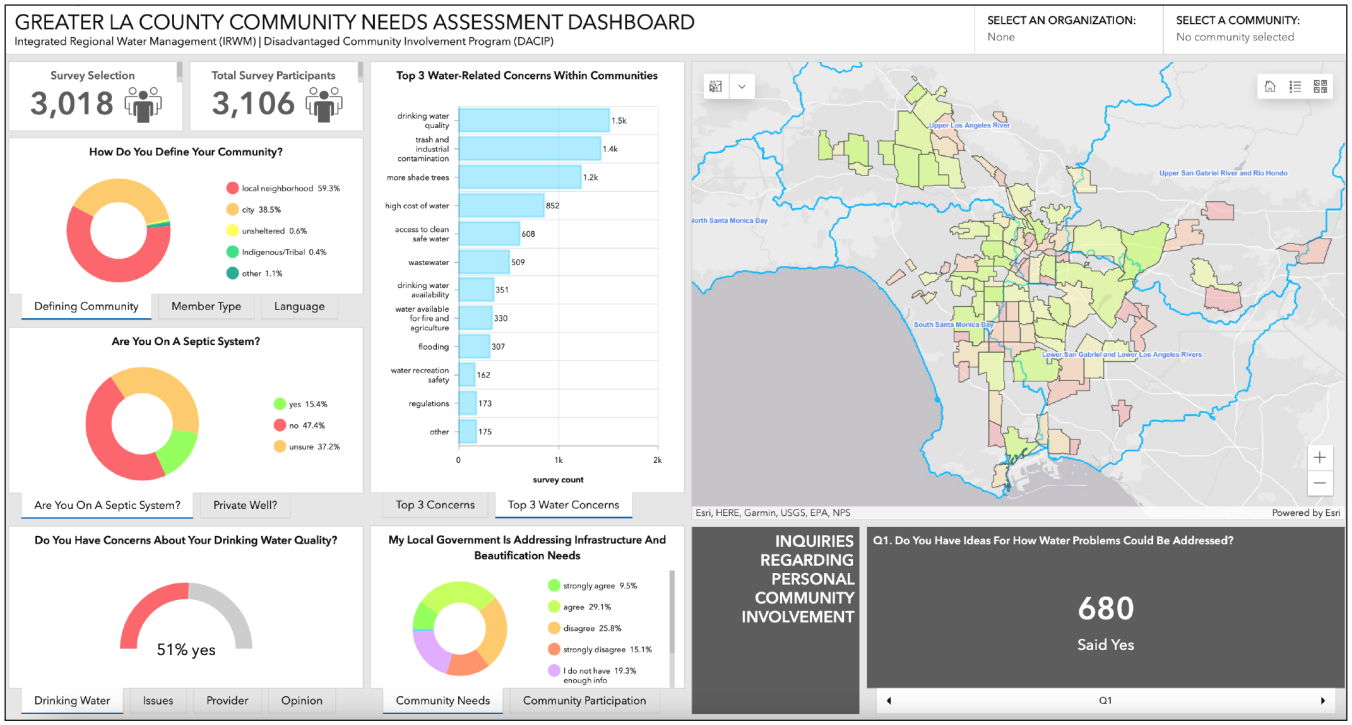
Institutional assessments occurred through a series of 25 ethnographically informed interviews to understand the perspectives of institutional staff and leaders in the communities that they are a part of and serve. A representative sample of institutional leaders from different types of water management agencies, institutions that serve many or just a few community members, as well as municipal, private and mutual water providers were interviewed. Non-water managers that provide community services with links to the multi-benefit concepts embedded in IRWM were also invited, as were several elected leaders within municipalities. The same ethnographic approach was used to interview school districts in the GLAC IRWM Region, completing six virtual listening sessions with facilities personnel, key decision makers, and educators with an understanding of school and local issues.

FINDINGS

Tribal

Overwhelmingly tribal community members prioritized their cultural and spiritual relationship to water as both a significant strength as well as a need - in terms of something needing to be protected, expanded, and even re-established. More than half of respondents indicated that access to water for ceremonial purposes or for recreation were not being met, or they did not know if these were being met for the community. It was also expressed that the community is in need of safe spaces to gather, practice their culture and educate non-native community members of their history and culture to undo the harm being done by modern ignorances.

FIGURE ES-3. Online Dashboard of Survey Results



Community

Strengths in WaterTalks areas, expressed through the Assessment, often centered around connections and relationships within the community, access to culture such as food and events, and the resilience of people, collectively.

There were several community priorities that emerged from surveys and WaterTalks meetings. Most prominent are those focused on drinking water quality and a recommendation for consistent, regular communication related to drinking water quality. Other findings reinforce surface water quality as a priority and encourage coordination with local schools and development of community-driven programs that build capacity for projects, stewardship and leadership programs.

Findings from the surveys and interviews also identified barriers that continue to prevent community involvement in water planning and management. While COVID created a more accessible forum (online - Zoom, WebEx) for CBOs to participate, there is still the difficulty of tracking when meetings occur, accessing translation when needed, and finding time and funding to allow regular attendance.

Institutions and Schools

There were several overarching themes reflected in the collected testimonies of those interviewed. These interviews revealed that large regional institutions with capacity provide formal and informal mutual aid to institutions with less or no capacity, however, this process is haphazard and uneven and there are social, political, or institutional barriers preventing the matching of capacity and need. Many school district interviewees identified maintenance and operations as being underfunded, expressing a myriad of obstacles created by years of budget cuts, with most resources going to immediate needs such as repairs for facilities. Lack of

Ultimate Restoration Unlimited (URU) staff outreaching to residents about WaterTalks at a community event.

Promesa Boyle Heights conducts phone banking for the needs assessment surveys.

maintenance funding is a barrier to water infrastructure projects including nature-based solutions. Water issues included water quality coming from drinking fountains, flooding that hampers commutes to school and can cause public health risks, and emergency preparedness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Tribal

Recommendations reiterate the deep need for healing of relationships with Tribal and Indigenous Peoples. This includes regaining access to land and water, and restoring Native and Indigenous Peoples to a place of leadership in water planning and management.

- Create permanent indigenous seats on regional water leadership committees, and funding to support individuals named to these seats.
- Create or revise current policies to open up land and water spaces for tribal community members - land that cannot currently be easily accessed.
- Create capacity building partnerships with local tribes and indigenous-led organizations to support land and water repatriation and rehabilitation.
- Increase commitment from local agency and government leaders to not only support tribal interests but to learn more about local tribal communities.
- Define resources to increase and maintain Native communities' knowledge of laws and policies related to indigenous rights and access to ceremonial land and water.

Community

Community recommendations focus primarily on drinking water concerns and the need for more green space - topics that stood out within the Strengths and Needs Assessment.

- There is a demand for a drinking water grading system to reduce confusion around multiple water quality reports, and help build trust between communities and water providers.
- Regional drinking water education programs are imperative given the high number of providers and high percentage of people who cannot identify their provider.
- Water providers and/or trusted community partners should provide at-home water testing and infiltration systems.
- Continue to build policies and funding that allow local schools to provide green park space and offsite storm-water capture.
- Access resources to increase capacity for community members to take on leadership roles in water planning efforts.

Institutions and Schools

Recommendations for institutions intend to address the drinking water challenges expressed by communities, and harness regional capacity for equitable, positive, local outcomes. Those for schools look at the lack of funding for maintenance and operations, and the need for increased green infrastructure.

- Build understanding at regional and local institutions of community needs and strengthen ties between water providers and the people they serve.
- Support struggling water systems toward greater individual capacity, or consolidation with other systems, to improve affordability and quality of service.
- Assure the State's human right to water through water services for all residents, regardless of housing status.
- Conduct open, transparent county-wide tap water quality testing, to identify solutions needed to address multiple, complex issues of drinking water in the region.
- Establish funding for under-resourced school districts to replace and update water infrastructure, including water refill stations and wastewater infrastructure.
- Employ a wide variety of means to increase green infrastructure and nature based solutions on campuses, and the long-term maintenance of these features, including cost-share partnerships and investments that take into account long-term economic benefits of water projects.
- Include school leaders in regional and local water planning and management structures.
- Increase capacity for schools to connect with and appropriately serve their Tribal and Indigenous students.

FIGURE 1. Los Angeles-Ventura Funding Area

I. PROPOSITION 1 DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) IRWM DACTIP Task Force developed four tasks to carry out the program, with one of them being the Needs Assessment. The Needs Assessment was conducted across the Los Angeles-Ventura Funding Area *(FIGURE 1)*, one of twelve areas statewide that are implementing the DACTIP. The goal is to identify and prioritize water management and infrastructure deficiencies and related community needs in ways that meet IRWM objectives to improve water supply and water quality, enhance open space, recreation, habitat, and flood management. The process includes outreach to both community residents and water related service providers who serve disadvantaged communities.

The goals of the statewide Needs Assessment are to:

- Inform and engage members of disadvantaged communities in each IRWM Region in a conversation about their water management-related needs, preliminary needs assessment results, and a plan for continued community engagement and active involvement in decision making.
- Gain a better understanding of water management-related community needs to help direct resources and funding.
- Build initial capacity within disadvantaged communities to develop project concepts and engage technical support for design and project development.
- Increase participation of members of disadvantaged communities, including the public, non-governmental organizations (NGO), community-based organizations (CBO), as well as public and private institutions, in IRWM planning and/or project development activities.

The LA-Ventura Funding Area chose to refer to the work as a Strengths and Needs Assessment, in recognition that all communities, including those designated as disadvantaged by the state, have strengths that should be reinforced and needs that should be met. This assessment includes engaging with people in communities through partnerships with community-based organizations, with members of tribal communities, with school district educators and facilities managers, and with institutions. Institutions engaged include those that provide water and community services to disadvantaged communities, including cities (officials, water departments), water agencies, agencies that manage parks or natural open spaces, water quality program managers, sanitation districts, flood management entities, and mutual water companies.

II. GREATER LA COUNTY REGIONAL OVERVIEW

A. SETTING THE STAGE AROUND WATER

The Los Angeles–Ventura Funding Area of the California Integrated Regional Water Management Program includes three independent IRWM planning regions: Greater LA County (GLAC), Upper Santa Clara River (USCR), and Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County (WCVC)[1]. The largest of the three, the GLAC IRWM Region, includes 87 cities and more than 9.8 million residents representing 26 percent of California's population. Approximately 42 percent of the GLAC population resides in census block groups where the median household income (MHI) is below 80 percent of the statewide MHI; this means that approximately 2.5 million disadvantaged community residents are within the GLAC IRWM region.

Within the GLAC IRWM region are five sub-regions, WaterTalks communities are located within four of the five sub-regions: South Bay (35 communities), Upper Los Angeles River (34 communities), and Lower San Gabriel-Lower Los Angeles River (27 communities) and Upper San Gabriel River / Rio Hondo (9). There are none in the North Santa Monica Bay sub-region.

Integrated water management within the GLAC IRWM region is carried out by some of the largest water agencies in the United States, some of the smallest in California, and many others in between.

Currently, the GLAC IRWM Leadership Committee consists of the following agencies, which includes chairpersons for sub-regional committees:

- Los Angeles County Flood Control District
- Gateway Water Management Authority
- Las Virgenes Municipal Water District
- West Basin Municipal Water District
- City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power
- Water Replenishment District
- Los Angeles County Waterworks Districts
- City of Torrance
- City of Glendale
- Raymond Basin Watermaster
- Santa Monica Bay Restoration Commission
- Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County
- City of Los Angeles, Watershed Protection Division

Different aspects of water management are performed by local, special district, county, state, and Federal governments, by mutual water companies, and by investor-owned utilities. There are complex regulatory systems that seek to ensure clean water for drinking and washing, and in the environment. Land managers, from local planning departments to the U.S. Forest Service, have responsibilities that intersect with water management in ways that are at times well acknowledged and at other times unexamined. Developed

1 Needs Assessments for each planning region can be found on the WaterTalks website (*www.watertalks.la*).

and undeveloped recreational areas and land committed to transportation also have roles in integrated water management. The coastal zone of the GLAC region holds well-known beaches that are a destination for residents and tourists alike. The GLAC region boasts the watersheds of the LA River, the San Gabriel River, and those that drain to the Santa Monica Bay including, prominently, the Malibu and Ballona Creek watersheds.

These water bodies are also places of significance for California Native American Tribes, including the Tongva, Chumash, and Tataviam peoples, whose unceded ancestral homeland encompasses the GLAC Region.

Among all the water managers in the GLAC region, often overlooked are every single household and business that manage the water they use to meet their needs. Below is detail about the WaterTalks communities, where state policy suggests the presence of disadvantage, and where the DACIP is focusing its efforts.

WaterTalks Communities: The California policies that designate communities as disadvantaged do so by assessing median household income (MHI). When the MHI of a community is below 80% of the statewide MHI, that community is considered disadvantaged. In the GLAC region, using U.S. Census data to calculate this statistic, reveals a patchwork of Census Block Groups that are either disadvantaged, or not, according to these policies.

In 2013, DWR sponsored Council for Watershed Health to carry out the Disadvantaged Community Outreach Evaluation Study: An Analysis of Technical Assistance and Outreach Methods (Outreach Study) on effective outreach strategies for disadvantaged communities within the GLAC Region. In the Outreach Study, the patchwork of Census Block Groups was analyzed to develop a more coherent understanding of what communities in the region are disadvantaged. Because there are so many contiguous cities in the region, the Outreach Study sought to develop community boundaries that express the lived experience of people and resulted in a list of 104 communities. This list is used as the geographic framework for WaterTalks. Much of the Strengths and Needs Assessment dashboard tool provides a map of these communities *(see Section III, part E)*.

The Los Angeles-Ventura Funding Area created the program called WaterTalks and contracted with consultant teams (led by TreePeople and Cal State San Bernardino) to engage each community through a variety of efforts. In the GLAC Region, a coalition was formed of locally focused organizations to access WaterTalks communities *(D., below)*. This Strengths and Needs Assessment asks the members of the WaterTalks Communities to share the things they appreciate and the things they would change about their community.

Institutional Engagements Report: To include an understanding of how water-related institutions serve WaterTalks Communities, the Strengths and Needs Assessment conducted interviews with staff and officials of water suppliers, regional water, wastewater, and stormwater agencies, municipal governments, and related institutions. Two focus group discussions were held, one with managers from mutual water companies, and one with CBOs focused on providing services to those experiencing homelessness. While CBOs are not public agencies nor regulated utilities, they are a consistent provider of safe drinking water for unhoused people in Los Angeles County.

For more information on Integrated Regional Water Management in Greater LA County, please visit *https://dpw.lacounty.gov/wmd/irwmp/About.aspx*

B. PARTNERSHIPS (LEADERSHIP GROUP OF CBOS)

In order to engage members of these 104 communities, TreePeople brought together the **WaterTalks Leadership Group of CBOs**, a coalition of 13 community-based organizations to ensure that members of WaterTalks communities and the institutions that serve them are able to participate as equals in planning for local green infrastructure and water sustainability projects. These organizations are all rooted in their respective communities and have a deep history in building capacity and providing resources for their communities to engage in social and environmental justice efforts. Every organization brought experience conducting surveys, hosting workshops, and other forms of data collections; they have met monthly since the fall of 2019 (and more frequently at times), to easily access the full range of its collective experience.

During the development of the Leadership Group, there were several factors that played into the selection process of the CBOs that would take part in the strengths and needs assessment throughout the region. To represent as many voices in the region as possible, TreePeople issued an RFQ that was heavily focused on geographic target areas. These 13 organizations represent 75-80% of the 104 communities identified for the GLAC IRWM Region. Other gap areas were addressed by working with the Leadership Group CBOs to cover areas in proximity to their assigned areas and with other existing networks who have an interest in addressing the topic but did not serve as subcontractors.

An important consideration when seeking Leadership Group members was that organizations have ready access to existing audiences that could be tapped multiple times during this process. Considering the multiple waves of engagement within the Water Talks program, having repeat audiences builds community capacity over time and allows for WaterTalks to be plugged into their existing events and programs. The recommended Leadership Group organizations were endorsed by the GLAC Disadvantaged Community Committee, which is a subset of the GLAC IRWM program.

Overview of the Organizations

- **Active San Gabriel Valley** works to support a more sustainable, equitable, and livable San Gabriel Valley through community events, open streets, transit improvements, green infrastructure, and advocacy for a more sustainable, equitable and livable San Gabriel Valley by fostering civic engagement in communities across the San Gabriel Valley to effect policy, program and environmental change.

- **Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)** was founded in 1978 and is one of the preeminent environmental justice organizations in the nation. The mission of (CBE) is to build people's power in California's communities of color and low-income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments.

- **The Council of Mexican Federations in North America (COFEM)** is aimed at creating opportunities for Latino Immigrants in North America, with a special focus in

California. The mission of COFEM is to empower immigrant communities to be full participants in the social, political, economic, and cultural life of the United States and their home country by uniting, strengthening, and expanding our member organizations to better advocate, preserve and share their cultural traditions.

- **East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice (EYCEJ)** is an environmental health and justice non-profit organization working towards a safe and healthy environment for communities that are disproportionately suffering the negative impacts of industrial pollution. Established in 2001 by residents of the Commerce/East Los Angeles area who were concerned with the increasing environmental health impacts of industrial pollution in their community, as well as several pending expansion projects adjacent to homes, schools and parks.

- **Koreatown Youth and Community Center (KYCC)** is the leading multi-service organization in Koreatown, supporting children and their families in the areas of education, health, housing, and finances. KYCC serves more than 11,000 people each year at eight locations throughout Koreatown, most of whom are first generation immigrants from Asia and Latin America and are committed to making Koreatown a safe and beautiful place to live and work.

- **Mujeres de la Tierra** has the distinction of being one of few Latina-founded and led 501(c)(3) environmental equity nonprofits that focus on the healing of La Madre Tierra (Mother Earth) in Southern California. They are dedicated to advocating and fighting to revert the effects of negative social and environmental impacts placed upon vulnerable communities, especially those that are immigrant, low-income, and/ or people of color through self-empowerment to inspire leadership.

- **Promesa Boyle Heights** is a collective of residents, youth, schools, and community organizations, led by Proyecto Pastoral, united in lifting community voices and working together to transform conditions and improve opportunities for students and families. Where community families drive decision-making, Promesa's values lie in building Boyle Heights residents' power, capacity, and confidence, born out of a social justice mindset.

- **Social Eco Education** is an emerging effort by noted community organizer, Martha Rodriguez-Camacho, who's experience includes historic efforts in Compton related to drinking water, and serving on the board of the Central West Basin Municipal Water District.

- **Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples (SPI)** is an Indigenous-led, community-based organization located in the ancestral homelands of the Tongva People in Los Angeles. SPI advocates for environmental, social and cultural justice and works locally, regionally, and globally to build the capacity of Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples to protect sacred lands, waters, and cultures.

- **Social Justice Learning Institute (SJLI)** is dedicated to improving the education, health, and well-being of youth and communities of color by empowering them to enact social change through research, training, and community mobilization.

- **T.R.U.S.T. South LA** is a community-based effort that works to stabilize the neighborhoods south of Downtown LA, where increased property values and rents have pushed out many long-term residents. Their mission is to serve as a steward for community-controlled land; to be a catalyst for values-driven, community-serving development; to build awareness and leadership in housing, transportation and recreation; and to create programs that encourage economic opportunity.

- **Ultimate Restoration Unlimited Inc (URU)** is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization founded in 2014. Their mission Is to promote positivity, community pride, and leadership skills to the youth and disadvantaged of Los Angeles by providing opportunities to participate in neighborhood clean-ups and improvement projects citywide.

- The **Watts Clean Air & Energy Committee (WCAEC)** empowers the Watts Community to achieve environmental justice by improving air quality and helping the community gain access to careers in the growing green energy industry. WCAEC has been operating since 2014, the three founders knew that the disadvantaged Watts community was in dire need to have active community education and engagement around the larger picture of global warming including air and energy, which includes water.

III. NEEDS ASSESSMENT APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

A. ONLINE SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The Community Survey - used primarily online but also in paper form - was designed to work toward identifying the emerging issues and concerns in the community rather than focusing exclusively on community deficiencies and gaps. It was designed to consider the capacities, skills, and assets of community members, agencies, and organizations. There were also interview questionnaires developed in conjunction with the survey to guide direct conversations with community members and institutional representatives.

The assessment design was conducted pursuant to requirement of the Institutional Review Board for California State University, San Bernardino. The survey instrument and data collection methods met the protocols required by the IRB for this program. Any form of survey, digital or paper, was entered into a database managed by staff at the California State University. All digital and paper surveys, and interviews, included an opening statement that introduced the interview process and assured the anonymity of the participant.

Also necessary to the process was gathering data to complete a template (spreadsheet) provided and required by the CA Dept of Water Resources (DWR). Template topics include community characteristics, drinking water, wastewater, stormwater, water rates and financing. Design of questions allowed for metrics to be included that fall outside the DWR template of Needs Assessment topics, such as community capacity.

Survey questions went through multiple draft rounds in April and May of 2020 using the following process:

- Created a list of topics and questions related to community strengths and all categories of the DWR template.
- Reviewed for other topics and filters including Tribal Community involvement, homeless population representation, community capacity and readiness, and interconnection with other multi-benefit urban planning efforts and related funding sources, and climate resilience related to water issues.
- Created a “cross-walk” matrix connecting draft survey questions to the DWR template as well as the interview tools, to be certain all elements would be included. This was done in conjunction with Cal State University/ San Bernardino (who served as lead consultants for the Upper Santa Clara River and Ventura County areas) so one survey tool could be used across the entire funding area, and the process could meet the requirements of the Institutional Review Board.
- Presented and discussed the draft Survey with GLAC Program Managers, Task Force Members and the Leadership Group NGOs in July 2020. A comment period was open for these groups and further drafts were built from comments.

"...water in Los Angeles is very complicated, and community members struggle to describe how their needs can be met through water projects or programs."

"The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of committing to support people, not merely the projects that we have come to associate with addressing climate and water justice issues."

- The team led by CSU San Bernardino developed the tool for online use, with feedback from the GLAC WaterTalks team, and then managed the online process over the course of several meetings.
- Approval and testing of the online survey tool, and proofing and printing of the paper version, was carried out in August-September, and the online survey went live at the beginning of October. The WaterTalks CBOs were trained in use of the tool in September of 2020.

The survey tool was built around two fundamental questions:

- What do you like best about your community? What does it need most?
- How is water a part of your community?

Survey questions were used to engage an audience to share what they want to talk about, rather than try to drive specific questions that might not garner real interest or an honest answer. In the case of talking directly with participants in Listening Sessions, the open questions could help the facilitator understand how to take the conversation and apply it to water issues.

Using this approach sought to overcome a long-held challenge in community engagement and water planning - that is, water in Los Angeles is very complicated, and community members struggle to describe how their needs can be met through water projects or programs. The WaterTalks approach drew from the fields of both Community Organizing and Urban Planning to find a common language to describe strengths and needs.

The team at CSU also suggested the following minimum thresholds of survey responses per WaterTalks Community:

- ***Minimum Sample Size of 10:*** If the sample size is less than 10, it becomes easier to identify people in the sample, especially if the data pertains to a vulnerable subgroup (i.e. racial and disability categories).
- ***Minimum Sample Size of 30:*** To be considered statistically significant, the sample size should be 30 or greater.

As it turned out, individual communities had 30 survey responses on average. With the onset of COVID, inability to canvas, and difficulty identifying local community support, there was a subset of communities where the Leadership Group CBOs were not able to capture a desired minimum sample size. These areas could benefit from future waves of engagement, outreach programming, and capacity building *(see recommendations section)*.

B. TRIBAL NEEDS ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

The Tribal Needs Assessment was designed and implemented by Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples (SPI).

Tribal Survey Development: The Tribal Survey was designed to mirror and expand on the Community Survey in order to more accurately capture and ultimately express the unique needs of tribal communities. It identified the emerging issues and concerns of the California Native American Tribes with ancestral homelands within the GLAC region--the Tongva Gabrielino, Chumash and Tataviam Nations, and Native American and Indigenous populations living in the region, including the needs and strengths of the Native American tribe, tribal and Indigenous communities they serve and are a part of, barriers to culturally appropriate and tribally specific access needs related to water, and barriers to equitable access to the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. Finally, the Tribal Survey set out to identify tribal governance and decision-making processes and engagement strategies and future challenges and opportunities.

Tribal Survey questions were designed by local tribal water scholars including staff with SPI and its advisory board members. Survey designers also used the tribal water surveys developed for the Santa Ana Watershed as well as a tribal water survey developed by California Indian Environmental Alliance for use in the Bay Area, occupied and unceded Ohlone homelands. SPI used this survey to inform the GLAC area survey as the Ohlone are also not federally acknowledged and thus there are some similarities between the experiences of tribal communities with ancestral homelands in both these regions.

Tribal Survey Modifications: Tactics regarding the use of the survey and survey design were modified due to feedback from tribal community members that the survey was too long and thus prohibited many community members from completing the survey. Two of the tribal community listening sessions were used to work directly with tribal participants to modify the survey design in a way that would make it more accessible to the community. The modified survey used a multiple choice format rather than the fill in the blank/short answer format that had originally been designed. This substantially decreased the amount of time required to complete the survey.

Data Collection: The original approach to the assessment called for holding a minimum of four data collection workshops in order to reach a representative population of Indigenous Peoples in the GLAC region. The planned approach was to hold these sessions in collaboration with Los Angeles based tribal nations and maximize survey completion by tabling at multiple Indigenous cultural and political events throughout the calendar year.

The impacts of COVID-19 instead required a variety of techniques to inform and engage tribal community members who live or work within the GLAC region, or consider the areas within GLAC boundaries to be ancestral homelands. The Tribal Survey was distributed digitally by SPI and Indigenous partner organizations such as Indigenous Circle of Wellness, via multiple online tribal listening sessions and at selected community events throughout 2021. It was completed by 20 individuals. Additionally, SPI hosted 4 digital tribal listening sessions, and SPI Tongva staff members conducted 2 tribal focus group meetings with 12 people, and one-on-one interviews with tribal community members throughout the process.

COVID-19 and Tribal Communities: It's important to note that, given the impacts of COVID-19 on Tribal communities, it is very remarkable that a Strengths and Needs Assessment was able to be conducted and completed. The timeline was extended

beyond that of the rest of the program to help accommodate the challenges.

Due to the loss of tribal Elders and leadership gaps within tribal governance bodies, COVID -19 has deeply impacted the spiritual, mental, and economic wellbeing of Tribal community members. It was noted during data collection that many Tribal community members were overworked and overwhelmed, and Zoom-fatigue has been very apparent during meetings. SPI remained attentive of community needs throughout the GLAC Tribal Needs Assessment process and echoed similar efforts made by WaterTalks CBOs *(described below)*.

But the challenge was actually far greater. It may be hard for many non-native people to comprehend, but COVID-19 has exacerbated long-held disparities in Tribal communities going back hundreds of years - as a result of settler colonialism, and land dispossession and state-sponsored attempted genocide. These atrocities were sanctioned first by Papal Bulls of the 1400s and later via the U.S. legal system and the associated paradigm of Manifest Destiny.

The legacy of colonization continues to manifest in health inequities experienced by Native American people, who face some of the highest health disparities in the country, including those related to infant mortality, teen suicide, diabetes, liver disease, heart disease, other chronic conditions, and lower life expectancy. Moreover, Native adults are more likely to be uninsured than all other adults in LA County, which limits access to needed care.[1]

The COVID pandemic deepened these disparities, especially given unreliable data concerning COVID infection and death rates within Native communities. On one hand, many Tribal community members do not want to report that they are American Indian/ Alaska Natives at testing sites due to historic instances of prejudice and surveillance. On the other hand, American Indians and Alaska Natives make up about 2% of the U.S. population but are often left out of national data analyses or marked as statistically insignificant[2], a sign of continued attempted erasure of Indigenous peoples.

The challenge of engaging a community carrying such governmental historic harm, in a publicly-funded program such as WaterTalks, cannot be overstated.

The pandemic has demonstrated the importance of committing to support people, not merely the projects that we have come to associate with addressing climate and water justice issues. Indeed, SPI and the WaterTalks program hold that macro scale differences can only occur if there is economic, spiritual, and mental wellbeing at the personal levels.

1 *https://lanaic.lacounty.gov/la-county-native-american-organizations-launch-psa-to-help-combat-covid-19-and-save-lives/*

2 *https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2020/09/covid-19-data-native-americans-national-disgrace-scientist-fighting-be-counted*

C. LEADERSHIP GROUP (CBO) ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES AND TECHNIQUES

"In short, the approach acknowledged the public as experts in their community, and their input could then provide water project developers with information to inspire community-based designs."

To better understand the water needs within 104 communities the WaterTalks process was built around multiple waves of engagement. The initial stage of the multi-phase approach included 39 education workshops where community members learned about how the State manages water, where their tap water comes from, and the goals of the IRWM process. This model of repeated engagement was intended to build capacity over time, and WaterTalks could then return for a second wave of engagement to carry out data collection activities. Following data collection, another wave of engagement sought to share the results and confirm what was heard during the assessment.

The complexity of the region highlighted the need to draw on the expertise that community members have about their local environment. Their input to open-ended survey questions around the strengths and needs of where they live, learn, work, and play was meant to provide data to guide technical experts in prioritizing community voices when determining what programs and projects can be developed to solve problems and reinforce strengths. By using common language to describe goals, vision, hopes, and fears and asking basic questions to engage an audience, this process brought to the surface the essential data to design projects that have community support. In short, the approach acknowledged the public as experts in their community, and their input could then provide water project developers with information to inspire community-based designs.

Original Approach: A variety of data collection methods to best reach their audiences was recommended by Leadership Group CBOs. The initial approach included 50% workshops, 30-35% interviews at community events and 15-20% neighborhood canvassing. Data collection was therefore originally designed to take place largely in the form of community workshops -- ideally with existing audiences -- led by a trusted messenger, and spark a conversation about community knowledge, strengths, needs and challenges in relation to water. A key element to this approach was to "meet the community where they are", so the approach included presenting to existing community groups such as neighborhood councils, churches, block clubs and others where the discussion gathers input from attendees. Outreach at well-attended community gatherings such as farmers markets, pow-wows, festivals and other events where large numbers of residents can be reached through canvassing, tabling and informational meetings would provide a variety of forums to reach residents in a way they feel most comfortable engaging in. Lastly, conducting door-to-door canvassing was planned as needed to reach community members who would be otherwise unable to attend public meetings.

Impact of COVID: Events were already on the calendar when, in March of 2020, the societal shut-down of COVID-19 stopped everything in its tracks; more importantly, it brought unprecedented pain and suffering to the very communities that this program sought to reach. While this Strengths and Needs Assessment is a critical step in better understanding the water needs within under-resourced communities, the devastating health, economic and social damage COVID-19 caused was all-consuming and has disproportionately impacted Black, Indigenous and People of Color. The Leadership Group CBOs had to redirect their resources to address their own communities' immediate needs, including loss of employment, housing

and food insecurity, lack of healthcare, lack of childcare and lack of access to technology, among others.

It was exceedingly difficult to engage with people during such a chaotic and distressing time. However, this process was still critical to the health of our residents, because as the rest of the state moved along its IRWM funding process, it was imperative that meaningful engagement take place in the GLAC region to ensure that the needs of these communities be met with substantial, community-led water infrastructure investment.

The LA–Ventura Funding Area Task Force, with support of the CA Department of Water Resources, revised the timeline for data collection with an additional four months to gather accurate data while adjusting to circumstances and barriers compounded by the pandemic.

Here is where the model of working with a network of CBOs found new opportunity: resilience is core to these organizations, with a history of working tirelessly to uplift marginalized community voices and that same resilience allowed the outreach coalition members to pivot their strategies to collect needs assessment data during this difficult time. For example, CBOs were able to use COVID resource programs such as surveying people in line at testing sites and food distribution centers - all the while implementing CDC guidelines to keep the community safe. Both paper and the mobile form of surveys were used. This reciprocity highlights the importance of caring for community members' immediate needs while understanding the importance to continue investing in the future that participating in this needs assessment provides. This direct form of outreach also addressed the very striking digital divide that has inhibited many groups from participating in virtual forms of outreach. Older community members, people with varying abilities, or those that do not use the internet on a regular basis due to their beliefs and culture were among many community members whose voices may not have been heard without the form of in person outreach at these service centers.

At these online meetings, community organizers would carry out the same type of dialogue that would otherwise take place at an in-person workshop. These worked off PowerPoint outlines, polling and other engagement tools that followed the community listening session format and personalized them to be relevant to a local audience.

Virtual Listening Sessions: WaterTalks held 29 virtual community listening sessions covering 43 GLAC communities, including WaterTalks organizations who transitioned their regular member meetings on a virtual platform. This format provided robust quantitative data in the form of a community forum where input was anonymous. These sessions would typically take place in the evenings or weekends and would last from 45-60 minutes. Leaders facilitated the dialogue in either English, Spanish, or both. Others on the WaterTalks team took notes from community member responses, chat documentation, and other interactive tools including mentimeter, polls, and mapping activities where participants could drop a pin on specific areas in their community with issues such as flooding or lack of tree canopy *(FIGURE 2)*.

A series of open-ended questions were presented followed by conversation probes to dig deeper into topics such as cost of water or access to recreational opportunities. The discussion outline was based on the survey tool. There was a sense of connection and rich discussions that came from these sessions. Participation would range anywhere from 5-40 community members including members of neighborhood councils, parents, school personnel, students and in some cases elected or appointed office representatives. Sessions were promoted according to their geographic area via social media, e-newsletters, and

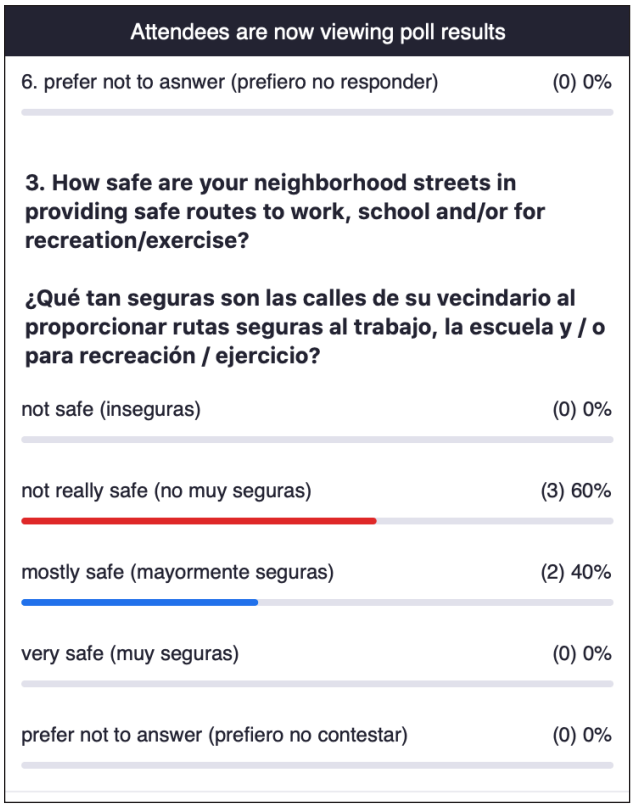


FIGURE 2. Example of Zoom-based polling used to engage residents during listening sessions.

through a network of partners, schools, and elected officials.

Digital Survey & Social Media: Social media was a powerful tool to raise awareness and garner feedback through the promotion of the digital WaterTalks survey, which became essential to garnering qualitative and quantitative feedback *(FIGURE 3)*. To increase accessibility to the survey, it was made available in five languages, based on requests from the Leadership Group CBOs: English, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Farsi.

Phone Banking and Texting: Trained staff, volunteers, interns, and promotoras spent hours on the phone calling residents from desired communities to either promote the online survey or take surveys with them directly on the phone. More than 5,000 calls were made through phone banking and a total of 300,000 people reached through geographically focused texting campaigns and e-newsletter blasts.

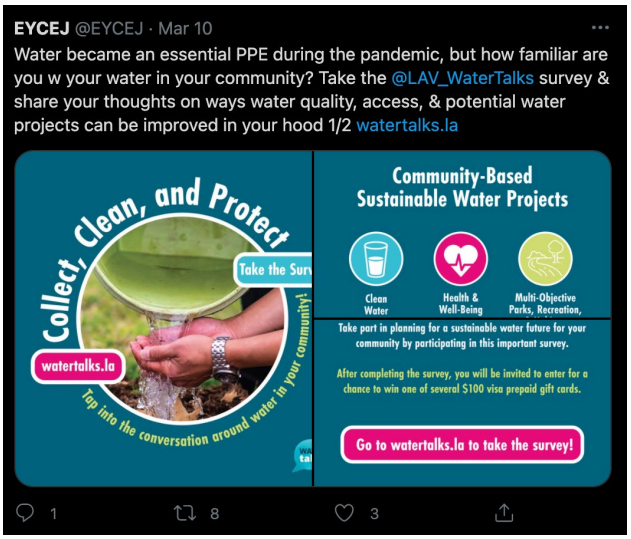


FIGURE 3. Campaigns from the CBO Leadership Group helped promote the survey on social media.

Incentives for Community Experts: A critical component to garnering meaningful c ommunity insight is to acknowledge the value of participants' time and local expertise - as would be done for any technical experts. The incentives available through funding from the WaterTalks Program were items such as rain barrels, water filters, water testing kits, life straws, and trees. Examples include:

- Trust South LA sent art kits to their member families (who needed such supplies for the suddenness of online schooling); youth were invited to draw their ideal healthy community environment, and TSLA had a virtual art showing where students could present their work while parents participated in a Listening Session *(FIGURE 4)*.
- Both TreePeople and Koreatown Youth and Community Center engaged participants with curb-side fruit and shade tree pickups, after completing surveys.

Weekly drawings for $100 VISA gift cards were tied to the online survey as well as participation in select virtual listening sessions. VISA cards were selected over other sources to give flexibility to community participants who don't have access to online

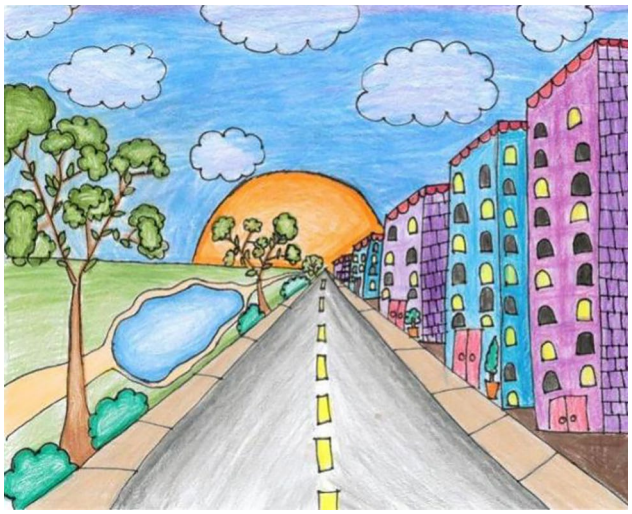


FIGURE 4. Trust South LA provided art kits to their member families (who needed such supplies for the suddenness of online schooling). Youth were invited to draw their ideal healthy community environment, and TSLA had a virtual art showing where students could present their work while parents participated in a Listening Session.

shopping or those in food deserts with no local store shopping. Funding was provided by outside parties, as incentives were ineligible for reimbursement through state funds for this program.

D. INSTITUTIONAL & SCHOOLS ENGAGEMENTS

Institutional and Schools design and engagement was led by Stantec with support from the GLAC Region consultants. Institutional and Schools Engagements were carried out using an ethnographic approach to understand the perspectives of institutional staff and leaders, and the communities they serve.

Ethnographically Informed Interviewing: Ethnography is a social science technique for gathering information through open-ended listening in everyday spaces over extended periods of time (SAWPA, 2020). Such practices can reestablish trusting relationships between the people who lead or work in public institutions and all the community members that empower those institutions. Current calls for "civic ethnography", or "citizen social science" reflect a growing awareness that long-term dialogue embedded with mutual respect is needed in public administration.

For WaterTalks, this type of interview allows the person(s) being interviewed to consider broad questions and to share answers from within their own sense of priorities. Their choices regarding what to include or not include in their answers are as meaningful as the content of the answer itself. How leaders and institutional staff prioritize topics can reflect gaps or a lack of emphasis on issues that other community members prioritize, and therefore, point to opportunities for progress.

Relationship to the California State University and its Institutional Review Board: The assessment was conducted with the oversight of the Internal Review Board for California State University, San Bernardino. Each interview was documented by the interviewer and a note taker, and the note-taker later provided a summary report of the proceedings using a combination of notes taken and a database managed by staff at the California State University. Each person interviewed was read an opening statement that introduced the interview process and the anonymity afforded to their participation.

Anonymity Clause and Its Purpose: The Internal Review Board application called for an anonymity clause for all interviews. Therefore, throughout this report the identity of those interviewed is kept anonymous by withholding names and positions. Though public agency staff, and certainly elected leaders, have very low expectations of privacy when working in that public capacity, WaterTalks assumed anonymity was important for at least some participants and committed to a consistent approach.

Interview Instrument - Institutional Community Membership: Institutions are, in fact, members of the communities they serve, a notion which is often contrary to how they are perceived both internally and externally.

The interview instrument was designed to encourage people who work for or manage institutions to consider themselves part of the communities being discussed. Community is not always geographically bounded – like for instance members of an ethnic or religious group who count all other members around the world as part of that community.

One place of fragmentation between communities and the institutions is the sense that the institution, and the people who work there, are outsiders to the community they serve. People who identify themselves as part of the community and people who work for the institutions often both hold this view, and it is a barrier to engagement and trust. Encouraging the interviewees to consider themselves as members of the community helps them think more broadly and holistically about the community during the interview.

Interview Instrument - Summary: A set of eight interview prompts were developed for the Institutional Engagements instrument and refined over the course of several remote meetings in spring 2020 with feedback from the larger WaterTalks team. This included alignment with questions in the Community Survey instrument. The Institutional Engagements Interview Instrument can be found in full as *Appendix A* and is summarized below.

The aim was to understand institutional staff and leadership's perspectives on:

- Needs and strengths of the community they serve and are a part of.
- Barriers to equitable access to the benefits provided by water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.
- Their own governance and decision-making processes and engagement strategies.
- Collaborative efforts between multiple agencies or institutions in their community.
- Future challenges (climate change, environmental degradation, etc.) and opportunities (e.g., funding sources and partnerships).

The eight interview prompts within the instrument were followed by a set of probes that were only used if the interview subject did not include an answer to the probe in their initial answer to the main prompt. The prompt and probe structure allows for interview subjects to respond to broad prompts and to prioritize the items they think are most relevant to the prompt's topic. This allows the interview designers to be surprised by a linkage drawn by the subject, and to note when items thought to be key are omitted by the people being interviewed. Following up with the probes allows for all relevant data to be collected if something thought to be key was not discussed in the initial response.

Interviews: a total of 25 phone interviews were held from August 2020 to February 2021. 54 people participated across the 25 interviews. 12 interviews were of a single participant, and 13 had more than one participant. The list of invited participants was developed by the WaterTalks consultant team and the Task Force which together focused on developing a representative sample of institutional leaders from different types of water management agencies, institutions that serve many or just a few community members, as well as municipal, private and mutual water providers. Non-water managers that provide community services with linkages to the multi-benefit concepts embedded in IRWM were also invited, as were several elected leaders within municipalities.

Notes taken during interviews were analyzed using Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software. Notes were coded for topics and themes shared by those who were interviewed. Each set of notes was evaluated to inductively develop a coding tree based on the content shared by participants. Once all the interview

notes had been coded separately, another review of the notes with the entire code tree permitted additional linkages to be drawn, and additional insights to be gained. Using the coding results, themes and topics across all interviews are visible, including things common across many, or unique or rare in only one or a few.

Schools: The Strength and Needs Assessment for School Districts in the Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) IRWM funding area used the same ethnographic approach as the institutional engagements. Interviews were held with school district facilities personnel, key decision makers, and educators with an understanding of school and local issues. The interview instrument was adapted from the institutional interview tool and designed to encourage interviewees to consider themselves part of the community bounded by the populations their school district serves.

This was an unprecedented time for school personnel as they geared up for one of the largest tasks in the state which was to determine how to keep students educated, provide basic needs, and navigate how to safely reopen schools. Due to the extenuating circumstances that COVID-19 brought upon the globe and its strain on the school system, in lieu of outreach events, WaterTalks executed six virtual listening sessions with members of various school districts in April and May of 2021. Focus groups with a sampling of school superintendents, board members, teachers, and facilities and operations personnel were conducted with a series of eight guided interview prompts, each question followed by a probe that would allow participants to elaborate on their responses.

E. DASHBOARD DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY ASSIGNMENTS

The Strengths and Needs Assessment resulted in 3,591 online community surveys, 29 community listening sessions, and Leadership Group CBO input collected within the Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) Region between the period of September 15, 2020 through June 15, 2021. For those online surveys collected in the GLAC, 3,106 were able to be assigned to one of the 104 WaterTalks communities.

Survey respondents live in the following IRWM Subregions:

- The majority of survey respondents live in the South Santa Monica Bay (SSMB) region or Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) region (71%).
- The Lower San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers (LLASGR) region and Upper San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers (USGRH) region were home to the remainder of respondents (29%).

The process used was based on a 2013 effort *(referenced above)* called the Disadvantaged Community Outreach Evaluation Study: An Analysis of Technical Assistance and Outreach Methods (Outreach Study). The WaterTalks consultants confirmed the boundaries and eligibility of 104 disadvantaged communities from the Outreach Study in 2017, and used it to define the communities the WaterTalks program would ultimately focus on.

After data collection was completed in June of 2021, geographic data from the WaterTalks surveys was combined with demographic and place-based data from local and State sources to identify the survey respondents who were actually living in or near the 104 communities. The WaterTalks program then refined DWR's Disadvantaged Community census geographies based on additional indicators, such as level of education, unemployment, parks access and more.

A Geographic Information System (GIS) was used to map the location of each WaterTalks survey respondent, assign that respondent to a community name, and spatially assess

strengths and needs of those in the GLAC region. The following data sources were used in the development of community assignments:

- WaterTalks Surveys
- Council for Watershed Health: DAC communities – GLAC Region
- California OEHHA: Draft CalEnviroScreen 4.0
- California DWR: DAC Boundaries (Block Group, 2018)
- California DWR: Proposition 1 Funding Areas
- Los Angeles County Enterprise GIS: IRWM Region and Sub Regional Boundaries
- Los Angeles County Enterprise GIS: zip codes

Surveys were assigned a WaterTalks community name based on zip code and cross-street information provided. Those surveys that specified both a zip code and valid cross street were then assigned a location confidence level of "high;" surveys which provided a zip code and only one street name (no cross-street) were set to a confidence level of "medium;" and surveys which provided only a zip code were set to a confidence level of "low."

The resulting map contained all survey points that intersected with DAC Community boundaries (2,373 surveys). However, since the existing DAC Community boundaries may not represent a complete and comprehensive selection of all respondents likely living in and or adjacent to under-resourced communities, the project team chose to expand the criteria for surveys with DAC data from two additional sources.

1. Areas that are recognized as having an overall percentile of 80 and above from CalEnviroScreen (CES) 4.0 were incorporated into the development of the GIS mapping tool. Surveys that did not intersect with Disadvantaged Community boundaries were spatially joined with the CES shapefile. If the resulting points were within half a mile of a Disadvantaged Community boundary, they were assigned the name of the closest community.
2. Areas recognized as Disadvantaged Communities from DWR's most recent map tool version (2018) were also incorporated in the development of the GIS mapping tool. Surveys that did not intersect with Disadvantaged Community boundaries or with areas above the CES 80 percentile indicator were spatially joined with DWR data. Again, if the resulting points were within half a mile of a Disadvantaged Community boundary, they were assigned the name of the closest community.

The remaining survey points that did not intersect with any of the DAC criteria listed above underwent one additional check to assign those surveys that were geographically "adjacent" (within a defined perimeter of a community) to an existing DAC community boundary. Those unassigned points set to a geocode confidence level of "high" were spatially joined with the closest DAC Community in a half mile radius; unassigned points set to a geocode confidence level of "medium" or "low" where there was much more variability in their exact location were spatially joined with the closest DAC Community in a one-mile radius. This entire sequence of operations enabled an additional 733 records geocoded outside DAC Community boundaries to be assigned to a community name. Insights from this mapping exercise were then used to analyze survey responses and make it available for use across multiple scales of characteristics and geographies through online dashboards *(FIGURE 5)* which can be viewed at *www.redesign.la/dacip*.

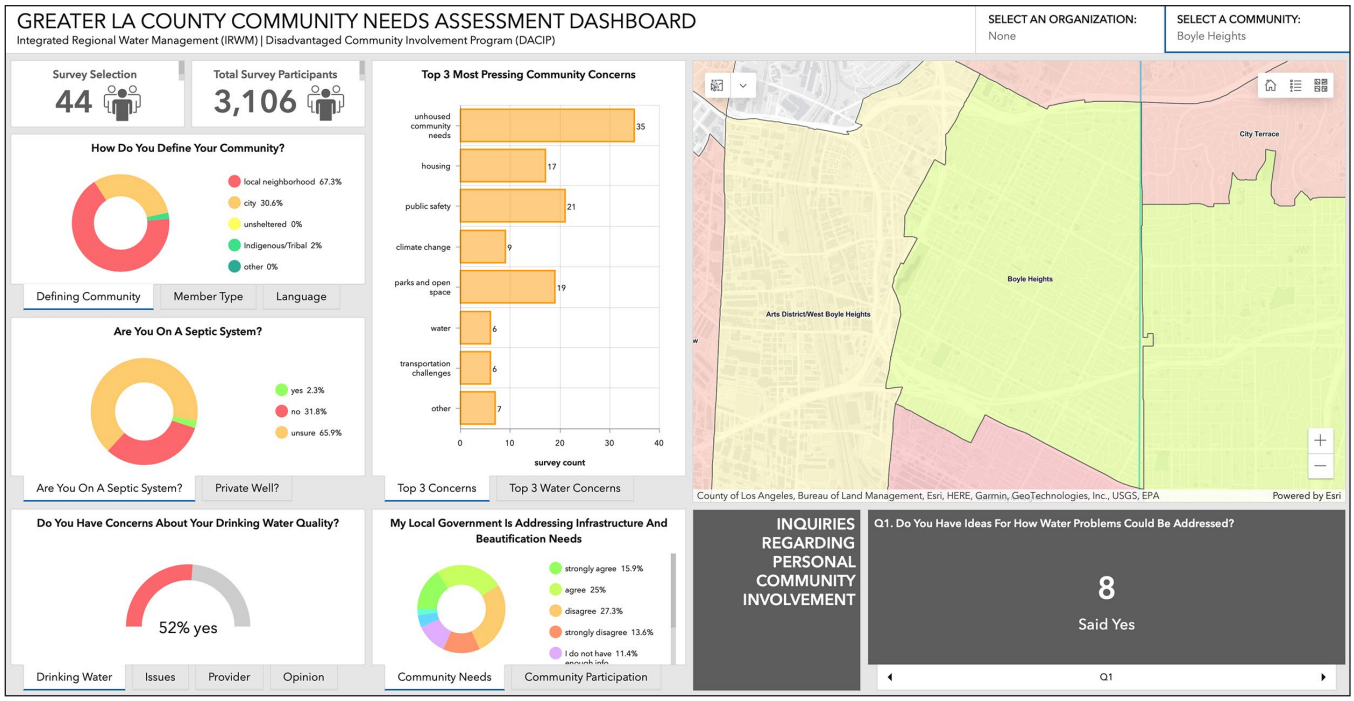


FIGURE 5a. Online dashboards were developed to highlight the Strengths and Needs Assessment survey results.

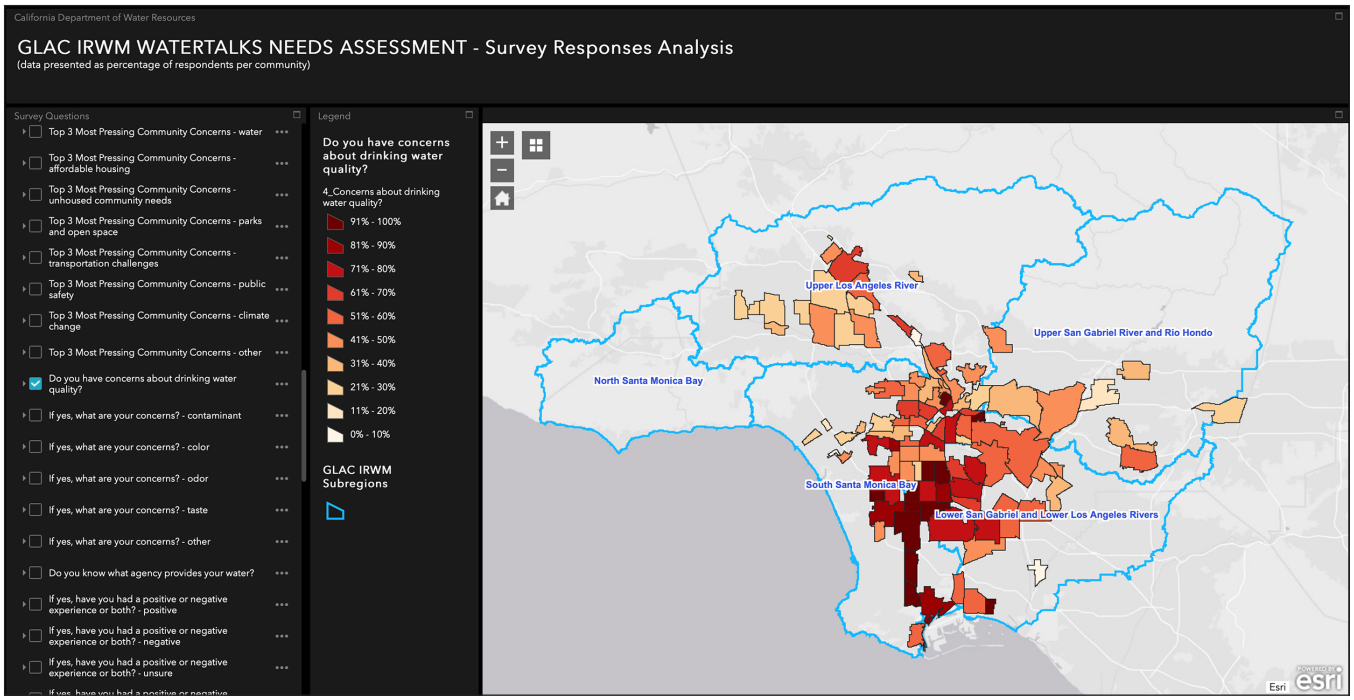


FIGURE 5b. Survey responses were also embedded in an interactive map tool to highlight any spatial patterns (e.g. hot spots) in the data question by question.

IV. FINDINGS

A. FINDINGS - TRIBAL PERSPECTIVES

Defining Tribal Communities and Indigenous Populations

The Greater LA County IRWM Region in its entirety sits on Tongva territory, and portions sit on territory of the Chumash people as well. It's important to note that before colonization all Tongva and Chumash families identified by the village names which their families were born into, and family structures remain as a means of identification today. The Tataviam (traditionally from what is today NW LA County) married into the Tongva and Chumash villages in the San Fernando Valley and near the San Fernando Mission; here they all endured hardship together in the painful time of California's Mission Era.

Prior to becoming Los Angeles county these Native nations did a phenomenal job at keeping their homelands pristine and livable. There was no such thing as Disadvantaged Communities.

A majority of the respondents to the Strengths and Needs Assessment noted that they identified as Native or Indigenous with a few others sharing that they identified with Mexican roots and one other sharing that they did not identify as Native or Indigenous. Respondents were from a plethora of Native and Indigenous backgrounds including Tongva, Gabrielino-Shoshone, Gabrielino, Chumash, Acjachemen, Huichol, Maya, Inca, and Ramuri. Of those who responded, roughly half identified as speaking on behalf of, or representing their communities, in some leadership capacity. Respondents included tribal council members, tribal chairpersons, tribal language preservationists, and heads of local tribal organizations.

Many individuals completed the survey on behalf of their tribe, tribal community, family as a head of household, or as an individual tribal member. Others chose not to classify themselves, and one identified themselves as participating as a water activist. The majority of survey respondents identified as tribal Elders. About half of the survey respondents identified as traditional cultural practitioners. Just over 50% of survey respondents stated that they continued to live on their ancestral homelands.

Tribal Community Priorities - Strengths & Needs

When asked what the Tribal community is most proud of, community responses were: having a connection to community, spirit, self, the land and water, being water protectors, resilience of culture and tradition, and developing relationships with government agencies, organizations, universities and colleges to access land and water for cultural use. Also important to note is that one respondent mentioned not knowing how to reply because they feel disconnected to their culture and people due to the previous and current destruction of their homelands.

Overwhelmingly tribal community members prioritized their cultural and spiritual relationship to water as both a significant strength and need in terms of something needing to be protected, expanded, and even re-established in some instances.

- Some community members noted that their relationship to water consists of gathering aquatic plants, gathering aquatic animals, holding ceremony with water,
- making sure to leave offerings to the water, participating in Tribal community gatherings around water, participating in the launching of the traditional tule boat,
- recognizing the water as a living relative that has stories tied to the Tongva people,
- understanding that we are connected to the water and that it has become scarce so we must do our best to protect water,
- acknowledging that people have become disconnected from water and are reclaiming their connection,
- having daily practices to conserve water,
- recognizing the need for education around water and
- taking water out of ownership of major manufactures and companies.

Community members agree that water contains energy which sustains life and plays/ed a role in the creation of life on earth. They understand the water ways can and do provide a means of transportation. Community members recognize that water assists in providing meals. They also use water in daily cleansing rituals. Some community members recognized that water shapes the land around us and acknowledged that water supports their community and culture.

In terms of additional strengths identified by project participants seen through the virtual surveys, community members shared successes and good examples of what is possible for their tribal communities: Working with organizations and universities to access land and water for cultural usage, supporting the protection of the Ballona Wetlands and ecosystem from imminent destruction from development as well as current involvement in maintaining and restoration of our Ancestral waterways and ecosystems, practicing water conservation, and starting a land trust. These were all examples shared about times the community has come together in support of water and being able to engage in ceremony in sacred places.

Only 35% of respondents indicated that safe, affordable water for drinking, washing, and cooking is accessible to all members of the community. Additional tribal community needs identified by the survey responses and via the listening session and focus groups include the need for financial assistance, affordable filtration systems and clean water, funding for language classes, healthcare, reforestation and legal representation. It was also expressed that the community is in need of a safe space to gather and would like to have classes where they educate Non-native community members of their history and culture to undo the harm done from modern ignorances. Some community members shared that they are affected by storm water quality issues and flooding. Others shared concerns about fires and climate change impacting their community in a negative way.

25% of respondents indicated that other water access needs such as for ceremonial purposes or for recreation were not being met. An additional 40% of respondents indicated that they did not know if these needs were being met. These findings are in alignment with statements made by the institutions interviewed as part of this project. See Section IV.C. Findings, Institutional Perspectives which reports:

"Most participants did not have a substantive response to this question [around water access for ceremonial purposes] One participant shared that their community is 'fairly built out', highlighting limited community access to open spaces adjacent to rivers. A few participants shared that there is wide disparity in access to water for recreational or ceremonial purposes within their institutions' service areas, and that recreational and ceremonial access to water should not be limited to beach access. One participant mentioned a motion by Supervisor Solis to examine barriers to tribal cultural practices, sharing that the effort identified access to water as a barrier. A few participants shared about water quality concerns related to ceremonial and recreational needs, including progress in managing beach water quality and the challenges of watershed protection in their area, especially to address the long-term impacts of fires."

Barriers to Tribal Involvement

Barriers to engaging tribal communities include a lack of support, lack of time and resources, lack of communication within tribal groups as well as between community members and the government, a disinterest in the subject overall, a lack of water appreciation and difficulties in getting people educated about and involved in these types of planning efforts.

When asked about what the community knew about GLAC IRWM and what relationships were upheld, 70% of the Native community admitted to have no knowledge of the GLAC IRWM nor have they had engagement in the IRWM planning process. Because of this, many are unaware of the resources like grants and other forms of financial support that are offered to the community. When it comes to participation in public meetings many of the community members lack access to transportation, electronic devices or both. Some said that virtual meetings have been a better option to attend and requested they be held in the evenings when most people are out of work or school.

Institutions tend to have a substantial knowledge gap when it comes to understanding tribal histories and contemporary water issues important to tribes, creating another kind of barrier. As indicated in Institutional sections of this report, except for the water suppliers that rely on surface water imports from tribal lands and are therefore legally required to engage with tribes, few agency respondents discussed engagement with Indigenous communities and tribes. Aside from a single mention of Native American Heritage Month as an opportunity to "consider indigenous water and land management," and one reference to the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Master Plan[1] as an example of effective engagement with indigenous communities and the inclusion of tribal perspectives in local watershed management planning, agency officials did not raise the issue of tribal engagement.

Factors Limiting Cultural Access

In regards to the question "what factors limit access to culture in your tribal community" there were 13 virtual surveys each giving multiple responses:

- 6 chose access to our ancestral land that is now privatized including fenced and barbed wired,
- 5 people agree that governmental agencies play a role in limiting access,
- 6 people shared that gaps in knowledge limited their access to culture,
- 4 people shared that lack of money limited their access to culture,

1 *https://upperlariver.konveio.com/*

- 7 people said extraction, mining and other means of corporate greed limit access,
- 5 people described channelization and damming of waterways limiting access,
- 1 respondent expressed the laws prevent them from practicing some of their cultural ways.

Some community members identified lack of federal recognition as standing in their way to have the respect of government to government involvement and inclusion to addressing and dealing with environmental concerns. Environmental concerns included air pollution, contaminated land and water, water damming and infrastructure, fire issues, lack of caring for and tending to the land, sea level rise, plastic pollution, oil, gas and other extractions.

Opportunities shared by our respondents to overcome these barriers include engaging community members in these issues, coming together and standing up for the earth, protecting the sacred, people giving up their seats for Native leaders or willing to share space and paid positions, educating non North American Native people, and implementing further surveys. Requests to do better with the houseless community and food security have also been asked by the Native community.

When asked who needs to be involved in the effort to overcome these barriers, answers included:

- Tribal and Non-Tribal Community members, and
- representatives from Tribes ancestrally tied to the area.

FIGURE 6. Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) IRWM Subregions

B. FINDINGS - COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

1. Defining Community

Geography
Survey respondents live in the following IRWM Subregions *(FIGURE 6)*, and looking at these regions can be useful in understanding the Community Findings. They help envision the LA basin as four major sections:

- Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) - northwest
- Upper San Gabriel and Rio Hondo Rivers (USGRH) - northeast
- Lower San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers (LLASGR) -southeast
- South Santa Monica Bay (SSMB) - southwest

How communities identified themselves
A majority of respondents defined their community as either a local neighborhood or city, but respondents in the ULAR region were most likely to identify with the term "local neighborhood" while respondents in the USGRH region were most likely to identify with the term "city." Across the combined region, roughly half of respondents identified as renters and one third as homeowners. However, the USGRH region has the greatest percentage of renters while the ULAR region has a larger percentage of homeowners.
A majority of respondents cited English as the primary language spoken at home and Spanish was included about half as often.

2. Community Strengths

Communities share that their strengths lie in their people, in the built environment or both.

ULAR: When respondents listed favorite things about their community, answers ranged from diversity and good food to proximity to nature. Top strengths mentioned in the ULAR region, for example, included:

- Good neighbors, a sense of community, access to parks, safe and quiet neighborhoods, and central location/ proximity to freeways and public transportation.
- In some areas of ULAR, such as West Boyle Heights/ Arts District, some highlighted the opportunities for community involvement and inclusivity as well as Cities' responsiveness to issues like broken power lines and potholes.
- Some also mentioned ample City, school, and CBO assistance/resources for community members, and strong community events like Dia De Los Muertos and Art Walk.
- Some respondents highlighted elements of the water system like Lake Balboa, the LA River, recycled water at Valley Glen Park, and stormwater capture in Victory Boulevard's meridians.

USGRH: Community members in the USGRH region often highlighted:

- Environmental strengths, such as proximity to parks, hiking trails, hills and landscape. More specific callouts included El Monte and "Emerald Necklace."
- Others in the region described having a friendly community and liked the family-oriented, quiet, and small-town feel of their community.
- Other frequently used strengths cited in USGR were diversity, a strong Latinx community, good dining options, and a sense of safety.

LLASGR: In the LLASGR region, a large focus was on:

- The strengths of people, whether through community resources, diversity, culture, people of color, family-owned and Black-owned businesses, street vendors, and "resilience of the people."
- Many people listed the schools and City Council as a plus.
- Others included public transportation and freeway access as a strength.
- Parks, community organizations, and community centers were also highlighted, along with local landmarks like Watts Tower and Hawkins Burger.

SSMB: Similar to members throughout GLAC, respondents in the SSMB highlighted strengths across areas of both people and the built environment:

- Some focused on the sense of community, small businesses, friendly neighbors, and social services.
- Others highlighted their community's walkability and recreational opportunities ("early morning run" was used frequently).
- Other highlights were plentiful restaurants and grocery stores, and proximity to parks (Griffith Park was called out frequently along with neighborhood parks like Centinela Park, Darby Park, and Kenneth Hahn State Recreation Area for Inglewood residents).
- The word "trees" was used more in this region than others in the GLAC area.

3. Community Priorities - Overview

The most frequently noted community concerns across the GLAC region are homelessness, housing, and public safety. Water as a general subject-matter was not identified as a top community concern - except when it came to drinking water in specific communities *(FIGURE 7) (discussed below)*.

"Communities no longer have a relationship with water and therefore it is difficult to engage with people about water because of this lost connection and related feeling of helplessness."

Members of the Leadership Group CBOs, in summarizing the conversations they experienced during the Assessment, expressed that communities no longer have a relationship with water and therefore it is difficult to engage with people about water because of this lost connection and related feeling of helplessness. Jessa Calderon at Sacred Places Institute stated it most concisely in that systems we have in place need to be reconstructed with acknowledgement that the original way was not to have pipes in the home; connecting to a water source helps you "earn" water and not waste it. "We don't stop to think where water is stolen from and brought into our households." Laura Gracia at Communities for a Better Environment added that there is an immediate need to focus on the larger structural racism issues and politics tied to stolen water, history of redlining, and purposefully placing Black, indigenous, and people of color in industrial areas.

ULAR: Phrases such as "homeless problem," "homeless issue," "shelters," "homeless help," and more were used when describing community needs. This was also a frequent topic reoccurring in most community listening sessions, but there was little discussion around actual solutions. Other topics frequently mentioned include:

FIGURE 7. Word cloud highlighting most common repeating phrases when asked "What are your community's top concerns?

- Street repairs, cleanliness, and access to healthy and affordable food.
- In parts of the ULAR region, members focused on water issues in the Valley through increasing the number of green streets, green alleys, and drought-tolerant lawns.
- Some in the foothill communities cited fire danger as a concern.
- Others included poor air quality due to heavy transportation as an area of concern.
- In some communities like West Boyle Heights/Arts District, a high priority was the need for agencies to build trust around water quality and improve communication about water issues (including conservation, infrastructure maintenance, and privatization).
- A gas plant in Sun Valley, operated by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, was frequently mentioned as a source of concern for gas leaks and air quality.

USGRH: Many community members focused on housing concerns and used phrases such as "affordable housing," "low-income housing," "rent control," and "rental assistance."

- Additional public space and grocery store options were also mentioned.
- Others in the region listed security and law enforcement as a top need, and the word "kids" was used to describe needs in this region at a higher rate.

- Many also felt that there was a need for streetscape improvements, including better lighting, bike lanes, sidewalks, pedestrian safety, and increased tree canopy.
- Community members in various listening sessions pointed out the City's recent increase in cutting down trees in El Monte and Baldwin Park as particularly troubling. They shared that increasing the canopy would cool down the community, improve air quality, and provide space for children to play.
- Finally, cleaner water and more trust and engagement around tap water were frequently listed in respondents' answers.

LLASGR: Community members focused on a large variety of needs, including better water and air quality, addressing trash, green space improvements (i.e. more pocket parks, more park monitoring), homelessness, mental health, healthier food, job training, and public safety.

- Water was cited particularly heavily in this region with phrases such as "clean water," "water quality," and "brown water" appearing often. Lower water bills and increased accountability for water agencies were also listed as needs, particularly in South LA/ South Central.
- In these neighborhoods, broken hydrants, broken sprinklers, and runoff were common concerns.
- Also prevalent was the need to address the added costs for poor water quality, either incurred through paying for expensive bottled water or water filtration or by traveling out of the way to "waterias" or to a laundromat that wouldn't stain clothing.
- Some members described a need to address structural racism and environmental injustices in which communities of color are disproportionately burdened with environmental hazards and industrial contamination.
- Mentioned in these conversations was a desire to not only hold polluters accountable, but to hold agencies which allow poor water quality to enter communities of color accountable.

SSMB: Top needs in the SSMB region had a lot to do with housing, homelessness and street improvements like additional bike lanes. Compared to other regions, housing and climate change captured a larger percentage of concern (with some communities reaching 90% and 75%, respectively). Also -

- *Trash*, *cleanliness*, and *street cleaning* were dominant words used to describe needs in this region, as were *parking* and *traffic*.
- Similar to LLASGR, many community members listed cleaner or better water and air quality as a top priority.
- There was a shared sentiment that the community does not get notified of contamination in a timely manner, further leading to mistrust of agencies.

4. Community Involvement in Local Planning

Across the region, most community members responded that they personally do not participate in general planning efforts. This was particularly relevant in South LA where 70% of respondents did not know how or have time to participate. When asked if respondents' communities participated in community planning efforts, a majority of people answered that they do not have enough information to know; a smaller majority answered yes ('yes' answers were concentrated in the SSMB area). Moreover, the vast majority of people across

the GLAC region do not think that community voices or groups are being heard by the government or the public at large.

As to water-related planning specifically , an overwhelming majority of respondents have never participated, nor have they ever heard of the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) program. However, a higher percentage of community members in the LLASGR region and southern ULAR region have participated in water planning than in other areas. A majority of respondents did not know which drinking water agency provides their water. However, for those that did, many had a positive experience or did not know whether their experience was positive or negative. More negative experiences were cited in the LLASGR region. Across GLAC, over 90% of survey respondents are not aware of educational opportunities around water issues locally.

Listening session participants throughout the GLAC area felt that community planning meetings draw a select group of community members, and are often not accessible to them because of short notice, inconvenient times, or not being aware that an event is taking place.

Respondents varied in their belief that their local government is addressing infrastructure and beautification needs (streets, sidewalks, parks, etc.), however many felt they did not have enough information to answer the question. In general, there was a stronger sentiment that beautification needs were being addressed in the USGRH region than the ULAR region. When it comes to unaddressed infrastructure and beautification needs, many pointed to a lack of trees, an excess of concrete, graffiti and trash in their communities. Some listening participants shared that when their city does address an issue, such as street resurfacing, it can take years.

A concern over unequal investments within GLAC cities was also present at many listening sessions. For example, one participant at a listening session in San Fernando shared that, while some streets get repaved, those that need it most do not. Some participants felt that larger cities with more resources overshadowed the beautification needs of smaller or less-resourced communities.

When asked about which governing entities and/or elected officials folks sought their information from, most people cited City Council or School Districts.

In the ULAR and USGRH regions in particular, a large percentage of respondents cited School Districts as their primary source of information.

- Community members who answered “none,” were more concentrated in the SSMB region.
- At a listening session in Winnetka, Van Nuys and Tarzana, a community member shared that one barrier for receiving information from elected officials was the feeling that leaders changed all the time, making it difficult to know where to go for help and volunteering opportunities.
- Community members that were familiar with neighborhood councils felt a higher degree of involvement in local planning issues and believed neighborhood councils were good sources of information and connectors to elected officials.

On the whole, most people prefer to be contacted by community organizations and governing bodies via email over text, mail, or phone. The largest CBO recruiters of the survey were TreePeople, KYCC, and Watts Clean Air and Energy Committee, with 22% of respondents citing ‘other’ as the source of hearing about the survey.

"Growing up in South Central, it was culture shock to see people trust local tap water in other places."

5. Tap Water Quality

The top water-related concerns for the GLAC region are:

- Drinking water quality
- Trash, industrial contamination
- Pollution in streets and waterways
- A need for more shade, trees, and landscape

While these concerns were similar across all regions, issues about drinking water quality were most pronounced in the LLASGR and SSMB regions. The high cost of water was more pronounced in the ULAR region.

Roughly half of all respondents have concerns about drinking water quality in their home, neighborhood, or community they serve. In 13 different communities within the GLAC region, over 90% of respondents answered that they had concerns about drinking water. Problems raised were predominantly taste and contaminants, followed by color and odor. While contaminant and odor problems were fairly spread throughout the region, color concerns were particularly cited in communities on the Western edge of the LLASGR region while taste concerns occurred mainly in the SSMB region.

In listening sessions, residents and the CBOs working in these communities shared strong concerns over many aspects of tap water quality. In a listening session in South and Southeast LA, one resident said their water tasted like nickel, sharing, "if it was the only source of water it would eventually cause long term health effects." Some community members shared experiences with cloudy water or called their water "disgusting." Others echoed this sentiment, saying that the tap water is unsafe and has to be boiled before drinking (some reported a thick white layer accumulating after boiling). One listening session participant shared that, "growing up in South Central, it was culture shock to see people trust local tap water in other places." In response, many community members prefer bottled water, reserving tap water for cooking purposes only. Many at the listening session also asked for more information about water quality and long-term health effects of exposure to their water for both drinking and bathing. Some asked about alternative options, inquiring whether household water capture was possible, whether water quality studies existed, or if it would be possible for agencies to be more transparent about the state of aging pipes.

These concerns were not unique to the LLASGR region. Community members in El Monte shared that the water "tastes really bad and people are spending a lot of money on bottled water." A community member at a Pacoima listening session observed that when their tap water is left standing, algae grows. In a Sun Valley listening session, participants shared their concerns about the impact of landfills on water safety and the quality of groundwater— worrying that water quality was even worse at schools. Some thought the water tasted or smelled too chlorinated and purchased filters to help. Boyle Heights and Pacoima community members observed that water comes out brown in various areas and they need to leave the water running to fix the issue. In multiple listening sessions throughout the ULAR area, many people felt uncertain about whether the water was safe to drink and wanted to find more information. In contrast, other participants within ULAR communities shared that they felt confident about the tap water and were comfortable drinking directly from the faucet or drinking tap water once filtered.

In Inglewood, some listening session participants shared their concerns about the water quality at their school and home. One community member said, "I don't rinse with the water that comes out of the faucet, my son's hair started falling out, and mine doesn't grow." Some shared that they've purchased a water filter or have bought water bottles because they are unsure of the quality.

Within many listening sessions, a common observation was the connection between poor water quality and residential plumbing issues. At a South/ Southeast LA listening session, someone shared that, "the plumbing in the apartment is very old and needs to be updated, the water comes out of the pipe dirty even if it is of good quality; we should have regulation that makes owners update water pipes." This sentiment was echoed in Inglewood, where community members added that not only should residential pipes be routinely assessed and updated, but the risk of increasing water service outages due to poor maintenance should be addressed more seriously.

6. Other water concerns

While only a small fraction of respondents have a home or business on a septic system, a larger percentage exists in the LLASGR region and SSMB region. In contrast, less than 2% of survey respondents said they had a private well. This data is impacted by the response of more than a third of all participants who did not know if they used a private well or septic system.

Even though flooding was not ranked as a top water-related issue for the region overall, flooding issues were present for multiple communities, most of which in the ULAR area.

Pollutants from trash entering the water system as runoff was a worry in many listening sessions, as was potential contamination from industry. Some residents noticed

"In general, there is a strong interest in water education on a variety of topics throughout the region."

smells emanating from wastewater plants or observed that water draining into the LA River had a smell, particularly in the summer. A few listening session participants shared concerns over point-source pollution including hazardous releases onto streets (e.g., car repair shops in Sun Valley) or groundwater and soil contamination (e.g., aerospace industry in Winnetka).

Direct access to water was a concern for some, particularly in the LLASGR and SSMB region. At a Compton listening session, one participant shared they don't have direct access to safe drinking water other than donations folks offer them like from the Compton Tenants Union or the water they access directly from water hydrants. The latter option, however, further criminalizes and makes them targets when they just really need water. There was also a concern in some listening sessions over ensuring elderly and disabled residents had access to clean water, especially for those unwilling to drink from the tap.

When listening session participants were asked if there are other water access needs in their community, such as water for ceremonial purposes or for recreation, many said yes. Ideas included more splash pads for kids to play in, swimming pools, access to natural water for ceremonial purposes including baptisms, and more public drinking fountains.

Finally, a common concern shared throughout listening sessions was community members' foundational disconnect from the water system. They shared that a lack of information about water has prohibited people from forming a deep connection to water resources, which, in turn, has led to wastefulness and a sense of disempowerment when it comes to resolving water issues. This concern about

wastefulness was also present in discussions over conservation.

7. Mistrust of Water Quality and Agency Accountability

Many respondents throughout the region shared a mutual mistrust of drinking water quality (taste, contamination, odor and color) as well as a desire for increased agency accountability in addressing water quality concerns. One community member at an Inglewood listening session shared that their mistrust of tap water is influenced by the 2014 public health crisis in Flint, Michigan. Another person shared they lacked trust in drinking water despite reading reports confirming that the water is clean. Participants at the West Boyle Heights/ Arts District listening session shared that, "there is a lack of community trust for CBOs and agencies who promise community improvements that never materialize." A listening session participant in Greater North Hollywood agreed, believing that agencies don't listen or help that much. Instead, they "just pick the phrases and words to say while doing what they have always done."

This feeling was present in a Watts listening session as well, where participants shared that agencies were not responsive in reporting water challenges, describing one experience in which water was contaminated for three months before residents were notified by LADWP. During this time, people reported black water coming out of taps. The agency reported the cause was aging pipes and acted by flushing out the system. And, while meetings were held to reassure the community that the water was safe, community members shared that there "was no further accountability" after that point.

At the same listening session in Watts, community members discussed the difficulty of getting information to the community, noting that there is a sense of fatigue and barriers due to "only a handful of people [having] the capacity to hold agencies accountable." Indeed, water testing and a higher degree of information-sharing around water quality were frequently listed as a top need throughout the GLAC region. Many respondents highlighted a need for better communication around water quality and contamination through readily available (and translated) water quality reports, or an easy-to-understand grading system for water quality, similar to a grading system for restaurant health inspections. Even as information is shared about the water quality of agencies' supply itself, barriers exist in knowing the safety of water that may have been contaminated within community members' homes. As members at a Greater San Gabriel Valley listening session shared, "water quality tests are done at the source of the water, but people don't know about the quality of their plumbing."

In general, there is a strong interest in water education on a variety of topics throughout the region. Across GLAC, many pointed to the connection of increasing education and increasing trust in tap water. Participants at a listening session for the Greater San Gabriel Valley, for example, shared that a water education program would help address the costs associated with purchasing bottled water and creating a secondary issue with excess plastic waste. Relatedly, there were multiple expressions of wanting more information about water privatization, and how bottled water is related. Community members present at listening sessions in the ULAR region also wanted a better understanding of imported water and diminished flows to the GLAC region and additional resources about water conservation.

Many community members throughout the GLAC region felt that renters, low-income and fixed-income homeowners, and foreign-born community members should be directly engaged in educational efforts, as they are

too often left out. Others wanted to prioritize water improvements at schools, either through protecting students from poor water quality or targeting schools for educational opportunities.

8. Affordability of Water

The high cost of water was the 4th-ranked water concern out of 8 options. Affordability concerns were particularly referenced during listening sessions in the Southern part of ULAR and Northern areas of SSMB, such as Boyle Heights and Koreatown. Concerns were both about high water bills as well as the added cost of purchasing bottled water on top of a tap water bill, or the indirect costs associated with traveling to more trusted water sources.

Sentiments around water affordability varied throughout listening sessions. While some participants in the ULAR area felt their water was inexpensive, others in the GLAC region thought their water bills were too high, especially given the poor quality and the efforts made to reduce household water use. Others pointed out that the high cost of water resulted in a reduction of vegetation because of the costs associated with watering trees and lawns.

9. Supporting the Development of Multi-Benefit Projects

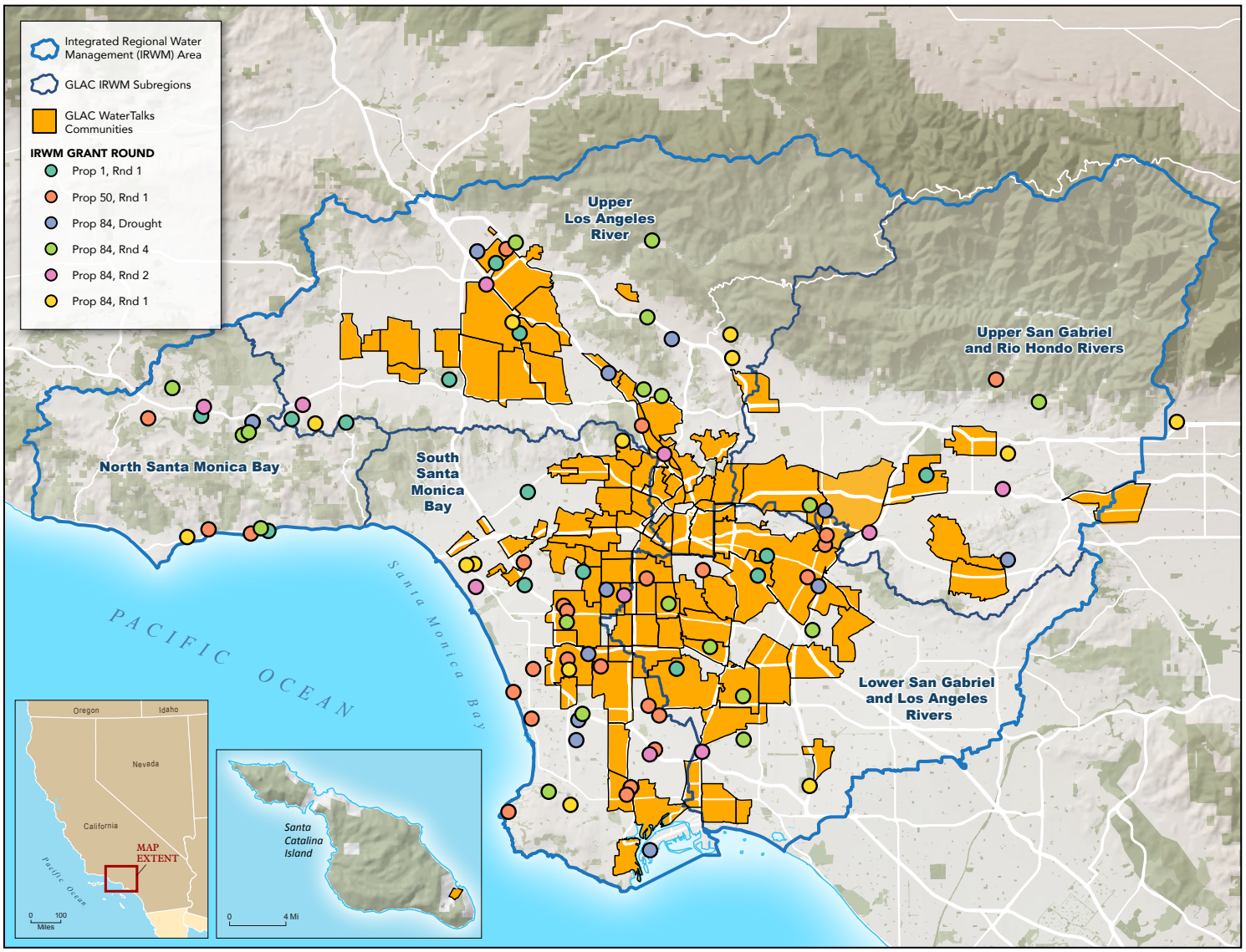
A highly mentioned need was increased access to nature, additional trees, and general beautification needs with the acknowledgement that park projects can lead to multiple benefits, including water benefits. There were many calls for more parks, including pocket parks, dog parks and community gardens, as well as more trees, particularly at schools. Community members present at listening sessions in the ULAR region, for example, expressed the connection that water is needed for street trees and newly planted trees, regardless of hot weather and lawn dormancy. Participants at listening sessions in South and Southeast LA mentioned the desire for comprehensive solutions that reduce pollution, enhance water capture, and include workforce development programs for good, local jobs. Access to jobs for unhoused and people with criminal records was important for many community members, including participants at a Watts listening session. Many also shared the desire to connect projects to the food justice movement by increasing the ability for community members to grow their own food.

There were also calls to consider the impact of projects on people experiencing homelessness. For example, a Compton community member shared, “something important to consider for any projects that are meant to beautify community areas, it is important to be in conversation with houseless community members and ensure they aren’t further pushed out and criminalized by the project but instead included and provided with resources.”

10. Investments

Locational data for projects awarded from past Greater Los Angeles County (GLAC) IRWM funding rounds (2007-2020) were mapped to analyze equity in geographic distribution and dollars received *(FIGURES 8 & 9)*. This can help identify those underresourced communities that may have not yet received IRWM funding and uplift those areas for future rounds. Of the 87 projects funded through the IRWM Prop 50, Prop 84, and Prop 1 allocations, only 1/3 of the projects are located within a designated WaterTalks Community. The proportion of actual dollars distributed to WaterTalks Communities versus the total ($143.4 million) is approximately 40% (58.6 million). In addition, a majority of the past projects awarded were submitted by larger and/or well-resourced municipalities/agencies; only three NGOs have applied for and received funding over GLAC IRWM’s history.

FIGURE 8. Past Greater Los Angeles County IRWM Funding Awards (2006-2020) by grant type.



Grant award amounts in each IRWM subregion are highlighted in *FIGURE 10*. North Santa Monica Bay, the IRWM subregion with the smallest population, received 14 grants. All of the grants in that region were for less than one million dollars. The Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR) subregion received 20 grants. ULAR saw less investment compared to other highly populated IRWM subregions. Downtown Los Angeles and San Fernando Valley neighborhoods adjacent to the Los Angeles River as well as neighborhoods in East Los Angeles did not receive grants, highlighting WaterTalks communities that did not see IRWM investments. The South Santa Monica Bay region has received the largest number of investments per subregion, with 25 grants in total. A majority of the grants in South Santa Monica Bay fall outside of WaterTalks communities. The Upper San Gabriel and Rio Hondo (USGRH) subregion received 13 grants. While less awards were given to USGRH compared to other regions, a majority of the investments granted were for high dollar amounts. The Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers (LLASGR) subregion

FIGURE 9. Past Greater Los Angeles County IRWM Funding Awards (2006-2020) by grant award.

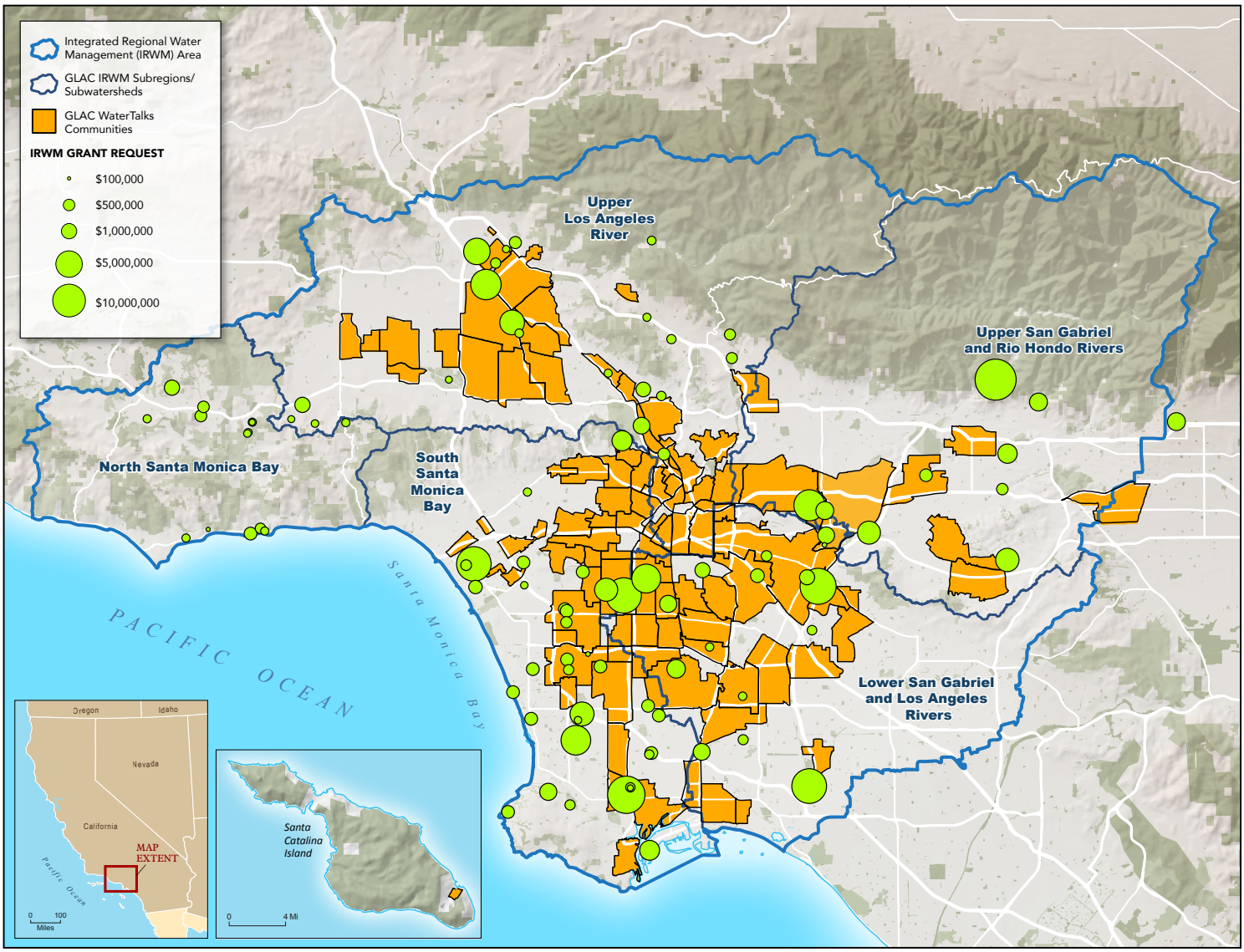


FIGURE 10. Past GLAC IRWM funding allocations per subregion.

Subregion	Within a DAC	Total Projects	Total award Request
North Bay	8	20	$27,917,257
Upper Los Angeles River	0	14	$11,065,648
Upper San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo	7	25	$46,383,797
Lower Los Angeles and San Gabriel Rivers	5	13	$30,006,301
South Bay	9	15	$28,049,,839
TOTAL	29	87	$143,422,842

received 15 grants in total. Of those grants, a majority of them are in the northwestern section of the region, with a concentration of funding in South Los Angeles. A number of WaterTalks communities, such as Long Beach and Norwalk have not received any past IRWM investments. In addition, from a regional perspective, the West side of the county sees more investment than the East side of the county. There are a larger proportion of projects located in the Los Angeles River Watershed compared to the San Gabriel River Watershed.

C. FINDINGS - INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

Summary

Talking with staff and managers at water providers and agencies focused on flooding and sanitation, along with elected leaders, was the focus of 25 institutional engagement interviews. Using a needs assessment data template supplied by the Department of Water Resources as the basis, an ethnographically informed interview with eight questions was developed. Detailed results corresponding to each question are found in *Appendix A*.

When asked to express concerns and opportunities, some uniform answers were provided. First, these interviews were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the hardships felt by the community and the institutions both were front of mind for those interviewed. More customary concerns like regulatory uncertainty, and the opportunities available from multi-benefit infrastructure, were also shared. The questions surrounding how to provide access to safe water for drinking and washing for those experiencing homelessness was also prominent in many of the interviews when challenges were discussed. Also notable were the number of examples of regional collaboration between institutions.

Those interviewed had very different experiences with the level of engagement between their work and the communities served by their institutions. Common across the interviews were discussions of local organizations who help focus or direct community attention, and the effect of cultural and language differences on engagement opportunities and challenges.

Below is a discussion of several overarching themes which appeared as answers to multiple questions, and from institutions with differing management responsibilities, making them especially notable. These themes include:

- Gaps in the Regional System Leave Some Vulnerable
- Belonging
- Finding and Defining Community
- Climate Change Mitigation
- Addressing Tap Water Quality Issues and Concerns
- Affordability and Quality of Service Challenges of Small Drinking Water Systems
- Provision of Drinking Water for LA County's Unhoused Population
- Supporting the Development of Multi-Benefit Projects
- Regulatory Uncertainty

Gaps in the Regional System Leave Some Vulnerable

Participants described regional collaboration to create infrastructure that can provide reliable water and wastewater service. This

"Several of those interviewed who work for public agencies expressed that the institution has no connection to the community, rather, it is connected via other institutions."

"Knowledge is accumulating about which systems in LA County need support to achieve sustainable water service, and now collaborative efforts should focus on filling those needs with regional capacity."

represents a significant shift in the past twenty years, with increased understanding of how institutions intersect and impact one another. A decades-long effort has developed these broad region-wide capacities, and ongoing investment seeks to improve them and maintain their ability to serve the region. There are many examples of shared planning, mutual aid agreements, and implementation of multi-party projects.

However, what was missing from interviews was an emphasis on equitably reaching all people in LA County. There has not been adequate attention and financial support for making sure that those communities who are disconnected from regional collaboration efforts are acknowledged, and to focus such that all people have equitable access to the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. Where there is not a water supplier with adequate technical, managerial, financial, social, and political capacity, community members may lack access to safe, affordable drinking water. This, despite being within the service area of a well-resourced regional agency with large capital projects to make drinking water available. Additionally, there is a clear gap in service provision to people who are unhoused, even when they fall within the service area of a well-resourced water supplier.

Several participants shared that there is a gap in knowledge about smaller water systems in LA County, and are struggling or likely to fail as a result. Such knowledge, however, does seem to be available:

- With the completion of the statewide Needs Assessment conducted through the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) Program, there is more statewide information than ever on which water systems are failing or at risk of failing.
- The Water Replenishment District of Southern California has also received state funding for a needs assessment within its service area; the University of California at Los Angeles released a report in January 2021 entitled "The Human Right To Water In Poor Communities Of Color: Urban Disadvantaged Community Water Systems In Southern Los Angeles County."

At the same time, institutions focused on water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure tend to adopt a system-level focus, not thinking of smaller units of analysis (household or individual) where people interact with their infrastructure. Shifting the focus of service delivery to the individual could also be useful in equitably benefiting communities with water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.

Belonging

The idea that institutions are part of the community they serve, and therefore, the people who work at the institution belong to that community, was rarely shared by those interviewed. Though the first interview question encourages considering an institution as well as its staff and leaders as members of the community, almost everyone who was interviewed revealed an "outsiders" perspective on the communities served, chiefly seen in how they structured the language of their answers. Several who are in elective office were much more likely to suggest they are members of the community they serve than

"Participants' perspectives made it clear that there is a need to disentangle characteristics related to tap water quality, including health-related, aesthetic, and preconceptions that keep people from trusting and safely consuming their tap water."

those who hold jobs in institutions. Several of those interviewed who work for public agencies expressed that the institution has no connection to the community, rather, it is connected via other institutions. In one case this sentiment was shared by staff of an agency that has a directly elected board, reflecting a lack of awareness of representation and accountability that flows from community through to the institution. Developing ways to overcome this institutionalized sense of outsider-ness is likely a productive next step.

There is a growing number of stories where public agencies adopt an "anchor institution" role for the community or communities they serve. The concept of anchor institutions comes from the non-profit and philanthropic sector, where organizations can be developed to play a key motivational and supportive role towards a much broader set of community goals or a transformation. One example of anchor institutions is Camden Collaborative Initiative in Camden County, New Jersey. This "solutions-oriented partnership between governmental, non-profit, private, and community-based agencies" was created to achieve stronger outcomes for environmental justice and quality of life across Camden (*camdencollaborative.com*).

Finding and Defining Community

A diversity of perspectives was shared about how to define community, both geographically and in relationship to the institutional mission. Almost everyone interviewed described communities as being defined by the legal/political boundary of city, county, or service area. Almost everyone interviewed from a regional institution described the cities and unincorporated areas as separable communities within their service area. It would likely be productive for more CBO and elected representatives to engage directly with the agencies that serve them, particularly when those agencies themselves have elected leaders.

As is shared in the Camden example above, there are agencies that have oriented their mission delivery to achieve broader social benefit. The City of Los Angeles Department of Public Works Bureau of Street Services had undertaken a reconsideration of how its mission can be delivered, resulting in efforts to use cool pavement for resurfacing projects, and installing and servicing hygiene stations on sidewalks to provide drinking fountains, bottle fillers, and sinks with soap for handwashing. Both examples are of an agency fulfilling its mission with an eye towards easily managed multiple benefits, filling unmet needs with small adjustments.

In both examples, Camden and Los Angeles, a public institution broadened the idea of how mission delivery can align with other efforts, overcome adjacent challenges, or more broadly benefit the community. Decisions can be made to follow this lead, and to re-think what is permitted and appropriate within existing authorities to be an anchor institution, a prominent member and significant contributor to community well-being and prosperity.

Climate Change Mitigation

Participants shared concerns about the extensive current and impending impacts of climate change in their communities, including water supply reliability, flooding, excessive heat, and more. Participants were concerned with the impacts of climate change on hydrology, and how larger storms and reduced surface

water imports would impact their ability to serve their communities. Implicit in many discussions about increasing water and wastewater rates was the need for greater ability to recycle water due to water supply reliability challenges. Participants also shared concerns beyond water. One example is the impacts of excessive heat for vulnerable community members, such as older adults and people experiencing homelessness, as well as those who take public transit. To address these and other climate change impacts, participants recognized that they need to make plans today for future conditions. Large infrastructure projects often require 15 to 20 years for planning, design, and construction, which poses a challenge for small and large institutions alike in addressing current and impending impacts of climate change.

Addressing Tap Water Quality Issues and Concerns

Participants' perspectives made it clear that there is a need to disentangle characteristics related to tap water quality, including health-related, aesthetic, and preconceptions that keep people from trusting and safely consuming their tap water. Water quality issues related to older premise plumbing, or "infrastructure behind the meter" that is owned by a building owner, were identified by some participants. A few participants shared about premise plumbing as a challenge for drinking water quality in older buildings, schools, and apartment complexes, where pipes, pipe fittings, and solder containing lead may still be in place. One participant shared that their office is working to identify funding sources to address premise plumbing issues in older buildings, but that restrictions due to Proposition 218 and Proposition 26 prevent use of ratepayer money for premise plumbing projects. Their office is trying to identify "private financing models" or "private ratepayer funds" to support replacement of premise plumbing that poses a risk to drinking water quality at the tap. Another participant shared their perspective that premise plumbing issues should be addressed with incentives and rebates. Despite safe drinking water reaching a property boundary, metal mobilization in premise plumbing including lead fittings or solder can negatively impact water quality at the tap, especially in older apartment buildings.

One participant from a water supplier shared that they do not have premise plumbing issues and cited recently completed Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) testing that did not show any exceedances at taps sampled. However, this participant did share that they receive complaints about taste and odor related to premise plumbing. Aesthetic water quality changes are often noticed by community members and discourage tap water consumption, regardless of whether their tap water quality is unsafe to drink. An emphasis on uncovering and addressing health-related tap water quality issues where they persist would both help to provide safe water on tap and help to address community concerns about tap water quality and encourage tap water consumption.

One participant from a water wholesaler referred to disadvantaged community members' distrust of tap water as "inequity by choice", indicating that the community members were opting for the cost burden of purchasing bottled water instead of drinking tap water. Institutional participants did not offer thoughts on the connection between tap water quality distrust and the persistence of unsafe or aesthetically unpleasant tap water due to older premise plumbing.

Affordability and Quality of Service Challenges of Small Drinking Water Systems

Providing a reliable, safe water supply in southern California, amidst drought from climate change, groundwater contamination, regulatory changes, along with additional challenges is no easy feat. Larger water systems in LA County are able to meet the needs of their community by harnessing the

"There is a gap in water service provision for people experiencing homelessness in LA County, and people who are unhoused struggle to access safe drinking water."

experience and knowledge of their extensive staff, engaging in water-related policy and legislative development, and devoting resources to collaborative efforts.

However, the challenge to prioritize what system challenges to address is felt more by small systems. Smaller systems have fewer staff, fewer resources, less redundant infrastructure, less political influence, and a smaller ratepayer base.

Larger environmental, economic, and societal crises are felt more acutely by small water systems. The COVID 19 pandemic has highlighted the staffing and revenue vulnerability of small systems. Drought often has a larger impact on smaller systems and their communities, especially when a system is dependent on a single water source.

Small systems are unable to spread the cost of regular service and capital projects over a large rate base and additionally can have greater impacts if a small number of community members lose their jobs or otherwise fall into financial hardship during economic downturns. Some participants from smaller water suppliers said they were unable to apply for grants either due to eligibility requirements and/or technical capacity. These participants said they are often unable to compete for grants because of lack of both in-house capacities to develop a grant application and lack of funds to hire consultants to complete the application for them.

Small systems lacking capacity to apply for grants and loans are thus more dependent on revenue from water rates than their larger counterparts, which either results in higher water rates or lower quality of service, or both. When water systems are unable to raise their rates or collect rates (e.g., with the COVID 19 pandemic water shutoff moratorium), water system finances can reach a crisis point and need support. One participant described how people pay more for lower quality water from small water systems and stated that the solution is to consolidate water systems but "no one is investing in drinking water in LA County" and "nothing is happening."

Even when system-level finances are sustainable, affordability of water and sewer rates at a household level can still be a challenge. Many participants from public agencies mentioned how Proposition 218 limits their ability to provide low-income assistance.

Provision of Drinking Water for LA County's Unhoused Population

There is a gap in water service provision for people experiencing homelessness in LA County, and people who are unhoused struggle to access safe drinking water. Except for one participant from a wastewater agency, participants from water suppliers, wastewater agencies, city governments, and other entities did not discuss homeless or unhoused communities when asked about barriers to accessing the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure. However, they later shared about deficiencies in access when asked how their work engages with homelessness.

In a group interview that included CBOs focused on providing services to unhoused people (in the absence of adequate public services), these organizations shared how accessing clean drinking water is particularly challenging for unhoused populations.

From these interviews, it seems that water suppliers largely do not think of unhoused people as members of their community

and those they are meant to serve. Some participants pointed to a desire to discourage unhoused people congregating in the community as the reason for the lack of public water fixtures for drinking, bathing, cooking, and sanitation. The State of California statutorily recognizes that "every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes." Even if the state and region were to aggressively direct resources toward affordable housing and services for unhoused people, homelessness in LA County would not end overnight; it is clear that resources also need to be devoted to, and institutions need to be charged with, providing safe drinking water to people while they are unhoused.

"A lack of resources and funding to support facilities operation and maintenance emerged as the greatest need among schools."

"The accessibility and reliability of safe, clean water from drinking fountains is a colossal need. "

"Most underground systems are outdated, and these old sewer pipes frequently backup."

Supporting the Development of Multi-Benefit Projects

Participants acknowledged deficiencies of existing stormwater infrastructure and expressed urgency regarding addressing these deficiencies to mitigate flooding, poor stormwater quality impacts on human and ecological health, and the cost of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) compliance. Participants also expressed a desire to harness the possibilities of multi-benefit projects, including reducing heat islands and increasing green space. One participant whose agency serves the City of LA shared that there are challenges to collaboration on multi-benefit projects—for example, for green streets, the Department of Transportation does not understand green streets, and others do not understand transportation.

Participants had many different perspectives on the purpose of the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP) and multi-benefit stormwater projects in general, and some of these differences seem to have posed a challenge to collaboration. Municipalities are spread thin trying to reach Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) compliance alongside numerous other challenges, which seems to hinder more expansive perspectives about the benefits that can be accrued from their projects. Unequal valuing of different types of expertise, with multi-benefit project design being seen as solely the realm of engineers, further reinforces a focus on regulatory requirements. Watershed Coordinators in the SCWP could be a potential bridge, helping identify multi-benefit projects, guiding design engineers to incorporate better community benefits into projects, and helping municipalities meet their regulatory goals while thinking more expansively about projects' community benefits.

Regulatory Uncertainty

New and upcoming regulations can significantly impact the financial health of an institution. Participants frequently shared concern about PFAS regulations, water efficiency standards, and MS4 permits. For example, a change in PFAS regulations may require costly wellhead treatment or even take a well permanently offline. Institutions are often challenged to balance regulatory compliance with financial health and public safety. Planning for the increased costs associated with new regulation, in concert with

concerns about the broader economy and the legal and political challenges associated with raising rates, was central to many who were interviewed.

D. FINDINGS - SCHOOL DISTRICT PERSPECTIVES

The Strength and Needs Assessment for School Districts was informed by interviews with school districts spread across the GLAC IRWM Region:

- Bassett Unified School District
- Glendale Unified School District
- Los Angeles Unified School District
- Lynwood Unified School District
- Norwalk–La Mirada Unified School District
- Pomona Unified School District

Bassett Unified School District is based in La Puente Valley of the eastern region of the San Gabriel Valley. Glendale Unified School District serves the city of Glendale, portions of the city of La Cañada Flintridge and the unincorporated communities of Montrose and La Crescenta. Los Angeles Unified School District is the largest public school system in California and serves students throughout various areas of the county. Lynwood Unified School District is headquartered in the City of Lynwood. Norwalk–La Mirada Unified School District serves most of Norwalk, La Mirada, and Santa Fe Springs. Pomona Unified School District has schools in Pomona and Diamond Bar, is the third-largest school district in Los Angeles County and is located 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles.

There were six interview/focus groups in this assessment and participants included school superintendents, board members, architects and engineers, facilities and operations personnel and teachers. The assessment was conducted with a series of eight guided interview prompts, each question followed by a probe that would encourage participants to elaborate on some responses.

The interviews started off by discussing each school community's respective strengths and needs. Responses varied widely, however the themes that emerged ranged between physical, social, and programmatic features that some schools have and others need. The following were either one school's strength or another school's need:

- Community involvement
- Access to outdoor space
- Resources for facilities operation and maintenance

Community Involvement
While some schools described high community involvement in decisions made about the school as a strength, others noted involvement and investment from the community as a need. Barriers to having a school staff and administration that seeks to serve the student body included:

- Lack of involvement among parents
- High turnover rate among staff
- Inconsistent leadership
- Language barriers among parents and caregivers
- Limited capacity tied to socioeconomic conditions

Outdoor Space
The next overarching theme that came up as both a strength and a need was access to outdoor space within and or near campuses. One school considered themselves lucky to have an established outdoor space and access to local recreation opportunities. However, many schools shared that their campuses had too much asphalt and were in need of green space and shade.

Resources for Facilities Operation and Maintenance

A lack of resources and funding to support facilities operation and maintenance emerged as the greatest need among schools. It was shared that hundreds of buildings are over 100 years old, and many facilities are on average 50-60 years. Additional funding is needed beyond roof and electrical repairs to allow schools the opportunity to provide additional community resources, especially for schools in lower socio-economic census tracts within the various districts.

While many school sites have greatly benefitted by various collaborations and pilot projects that range from reclaimed water irrigation, water fountain filters, and the implementation of storage tanks and catchment basins, it was clear that funding was also needed for the long-term maintenance of these initiatives and the ongoing training of staff to maintain them.

Benefits of and Barriers to Accessing Drinking Water, Wastewater, or Stormwater Infrastructure

To address concerns regarding drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, it was necessary to understand the benefits and barriers that many school communities experience. The common barriers amongst several schools included access to:

- Clean water coming from drinking fountains
- Safe school commuting and school services including recreational activities due to frequent flooding
- Efficiency programs including the use of native planting instead of high water use lawns, etc. due to lack of knowledge, funding and support
- Knowledge and clear communication to the public about water infrastructure
- Improved public health due to poor wastewater infrastructure

The accessibility and reliability of safe, clean water from drinking fountains is a colossal need. A teacher in one district said that the water coming from school drinking fountains is calcified, with a thick white film and lots of bubbles. Some students have expressed that the water from other fountains is yellow and brown. Lack of access to information about the water quality from drinking fountains also leads to concerns about the plumbing to provide clean water. The mistrust of the school's water quality causes the students and teachers to purchase bottled water, increase single-use plastic waste, or not drink any water at all.

One school district was able to report that the water quality coming out of drinking fountains is substantially improving. The previous standard for drinking water had a maximum lead content of 15 ppb. Currently, thousands of drinking fountains with a lead content greater than 5 ppb are being removed or replaced with a filtration system. This particular school district was proud to pioneer this new water quality standard and start a campaign to encourage students to use the improved drinking fountains.

Increased funding to cover costs for wastewater infrastructure and management came up in all of the interviews, with representatives stating that most underground systems are outdated, and these old sewer pipes frequently backup. These frequent backups have led campuses to shut down and perform extensive bacteria testing in which students cannot enter school until lab analysis results are reported.

Nonexistent or outdated gutter systems have led to localized flooding and pooling as issues of concern for many school districts, especially those located in a valley. Most schools expressed not having enough infrastructure to

"Schools can serve as trusted messengers of information that could expand across the community.'

divert the stormwater channels after wildfires and subsequent mudslides from localized flooding sites.

One school district noted that public health issues that arose after frequent flooding on campus led to a tiger mosquito outbreak and exposed the school community to their vector-borne diseases. After a brief school closure to control the pests, the chemicals used in the process seeped into the field that students played in, causing exposure to other toxic substances. School personnel pointed to this as potential development with more funding and resources by using nature-based solutions to capture stormwater and infiltrate onsite, reduce vector-borne diseases, pollution, flooding, and costs for utilities.

The Financial Health of the Water Systems in the School Community

Across the board, school district representatives expressed a general lack of funding for facilities operations and maintenance. They shared that they would benefit from more access to grants and resources as more pressing maintenance concerns take priority in spending district funds. This would allow schools to use more resources for infrastructure improvements, staff training, and outdoor learning opportunities on and off campus. Staff training was highlighted as a need for continued investment to sustain projects onsite over the long term. Representatives noted that having staff training on greywater systems for example at the beginning of a project is not always effective because most issues arise years after installation. Staff turnover and the advancement of technologies also calls for a need to invest in continued training on maintenance of greywater and other infrastructure on campus for school staff.

School Community Involvement in Decisions about Water

When asked about community involvement around decisions based on water, some districts reported a high level of engagement where residents were a part of the design and maintenance of local projects such as using drought-tolerant plants and rain gardens. Some engagement strategies to increase involvement were sending out emails, e-flyers, public service announcements, and banners. Other forms of engagement also included school-hosted events such as immigration workshops and presentations.

Many noted that community members and parents were eager for more green spaces and other beneficial projects. However, most districts' concerns regarding community involvement was providing further education and guidance on environmental projects for those who are engaged. Furthermore, school districts interviewed had little to no engagement experience or knowledge about their local tribes and indigenous communities.

Key challenges to community involvement that were illuminated during interviews included:

- Language barriers
- Lack of resources to follow through with ideas that surface amongst parents and community members
- Seemingly closed systems that make it harder to accept outside participation in projects if it doesn't go through rounds of bidding.
- Lack of district wide research on tribal enrollment on campuses, as no schools interviewed had any statistics on district demographics of tribal representation.

Collaborative Efforts Between Multiple Agencies or Institutions

Participants highlighted key partnerships and resources between organizations, county and city agencies that allowed them to advance in their work around water. The programs mentioned include:

- OneWaterLA, a city and county collaboration, where GPS technology is used to locate local aquifers for schools to capture stormwater to replenish groundwater.
- SEEDS, a garden-readiness program.
- Kaiser's Health Academy.
- US Green Building Council's training for custodial staff.
- Parks and Recreation Departments joint use of school and community fields.
- WaterWise, solar boat competitions, and creek restoration initiatives are district sponsored education and conservation programs that provide students hands-on opportunity to learn about nature.
- Consistent meetings with water providers to find opportunities to reduce use and set goals to find efficiencies in water, electricity, and gas.

Initiatives like these are models for effective collaboration with schools and can offer schools the opportunity to overcome specific barriers to the long-term success and sustainability of projects. The barriers that were expressed for projects was that they are typically too small to go through a local agency. Another one mentioned is the rigidity of the commercial rate structure that schools are under. There was also a case where a school district straddles county lines, and for that reason projects can't take place on either side of the county line. Lastly, knowledge about new opportunities and resources was considered a barrier in schools taking on different collaborative programs.

Concerns and Opportunities Now and into the Future

The concerns that the school community shared were:

- Support in the face of an emergency or natural disaster
- Hot water for gymnasium showers
- Earthquake retrofitting projects
- Smoke and heat preparedness
- Funding for infrastructure improvements

The overarching opportunities many school district representatives would like to see moving forward include:

- The integration of more nature-based features in and around their campuses. Urban gardens, bioswales, and native landscapes stood out from the conversations for their benefits to cut utility costs, reduce flooding, capture stormwater, comply with permits, improve public health, and educate the school community about their uses. One example of a successful project mentioned was a vacant lot converted with drought-tolerant native landscaping and a walkway.
- Supporting lifestyle changes throughout the school community, from water bottle refill stations, using reclaimed water for irrigation, and training staff and students on tree care to increase survival rates.
- Integrating the benefits of school greening and beautification projects into the curriculum to educate

students, staff, teachers, and parents. This can happen by expanding science-based curriculum for middle and high schools, or early education programs like Nature Explore. It can also extend to conservation workshops for families, professional development for staff, and more opportunities for those in the school community to contribute to and maintain beautification projects such as trees and open space.

Finally, schools can serve as trusted messengers of information that could expand across the community while also benefiting the individual school - but districts need resources and proper support to do so. The COVID-19 pandemic has been a testament to the critical role schools play in their respective communities by keeping families fed and well informed while meeting the responsibilities of keeping thousands of children educated, healthy, and safe.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

A. RECOMMENDATIONS - TRIBAL PERSPECTIVES

The following tribal-forward recommendations are based on feedback stated in Section IV. A, Findings - Tribal Perspectives. This feedback seeks to focus energy around two major themes:

- Supporting access to land and water for cultural expression and practice
- The critical need for involvement of Tribal voices and expertise in water management and planning

It's always important to remember that Tribal nations are sovereign governments in California, with whom settler colonial state and local institutions must regard as such via government-to-government consultation. Additionally, Tribal members are experts in their own cultures and communities, and their expertise must be recognized and elevated to be equal to that of water managers. Water managers can develop projects and programs that meet tribal community needs and gain tribal community support by learning about the history of California Native American tribes, especially with respect to water and forced removal in Los Angeles County, and listening to and engaging the voices present in these communities with respect, intent, understanding, and compassion.

Supporting Cultural Access

The deep connection between Native communities and local land and water bodies cannot be overstated; without access to land and water, the very culture of Native and Indegenous People in the GLAC Region is effectively shut down and in many cases erased. There needs to be a concerted effort to work on policy related to opening up spaces for tribal community members that currently cannot be accessed.

There is also a large opportunity for land and water stewardship supported by Native communities; a recommendation is to create capacity building partnerships with local tribes and Indigenous-led organizations to support land and water rematriation and rehabilitation.

"There needs to be a concerted effort to work on policy related to opening up spaces for tribal community members that currently cannot be accessed."

"Tribal members are experts in their own cultures and communities, and their expertise must be recognized and elevated to be equal to that of water managers."

"Currently, there are no direct funding streams dedicated to help support indigenous nations participate in water-planning efforts within the GLAC region."

As indicated in the Institutional Findings section of this report, most interviewees did not have a substantive response to the question regarding access for ceremonial purposes:

> *"One participant shared that their community is 'fairly built out,' highlighting limited community access to open spaces adjacent to rivers. A few participants shared that there is wide disparity in access to water for recreational or ceremonial purposes within their institutions' service areas, and that recreational and ceremonial access to water should not be limited to beach access."*

Due to lack of access to privatized and county/state owned lands added with the need to work to attempt to survive, Native communities have not been able to continue cultural maintenance such as maintenance burning and other traditional ways of working with the land. Due to this inability to uphold relationships with the homelands and provide stewardship practices that maintained local lands and waters for thousands of years, serious problems have emerged, including fire which is now a major concern for Native and non-Native people alike.

Native communities deserve to regain their relations with the land, including restoration and care - but need funding to do so. Native community members have living expenses like everyone else; they need access to grants and other means to pay for their contribution to maintain the land.

Respondents shared some of the ways and means that cultural access projects can be supported, including:

- Through open, respectful and ongoing communication and sharing of ideas between present day land and water managers and the original caretakers of the land;
- Support for local tribes and Indigenous groups via financial and other resource assistance including financial or land donations to the land conservancies created and led by representatives from the Native Nations on whose ancestral lands the GLAC region is located;
- More support from local agencies and government leaders, including stronger commitments from these entities to learn more about local tribal communities;
- Designation of Cultural Corridors which would allow for safe places to practice stewardship;
- Supporting tribal community members in their efforts to understand and keep up to date about local, state, federal, and international laws, policies, and protocols related to Indigenous religious rights and their access to cultural practices and ceremonial land.

<u>Tribal Governance in Watershed Management and Planning</u>

Currently, there are no direct funding streams dedicated to help support indigenous nations participate in water-planning efforts within the GLAC region. There are multiple ways to address this barrier that creates a significant gap in leadership and coordination:

- IRWM, Safe Clean Water Program and other capacity building dollars could

support local tribes and Indigenous-led CBOs to develop tribal and Indigenous community-led programs around water issues important to these communities.

- Financial and other resources could also be directed toward supporting tribal leadership development so that tribal community members can more effectively bring their expertise to water management - taking place within the very boundaries of their ancestral homelands and waters.
- Allocation of funds from the next phase of WaterTalks *(Task 4 Project Development)* to support tribal-inspired projects and programs, and tribal nations' direct involvement in development, decision-making and capacity-building and time spent engaging in future IRWM decision-making.

Finally, The Los Angeles-Ventura IRWM funding area leaders, including the Task Force members, are strongly encouraged to help create permanent indigenous leader seats on regional Leadership Committees, the DAC Task Force, Safe CLean Water Program Watershed Area Steering Committees and other significant water-related decision making bodies.

B. RECOMMENDATIONS - COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

The following community-forward recommendations are based on feedback stated in Section IV and recommendations from the WaterTalks Leadership Group of CBOs:

- There is a demand for a drinking water grading system that will help reduce confusion around annual water quality reports, provide consistent "apples-to-apples" water quality standards across communities in the region, and will ultimately build trust and accountability between the community and their service provider(s). This grading system would be public facing and a prominent tool that communities would not have to look for, but is shared with them on a regular basis, especially for those renters or communities where language is a barrier.
- Results showed that only 42% of respondents knew their water provider. Building off of the grading system, develop a regional drinking water education program that would help address multiple challenges at once - i.e., build trust around tap water and reduce the amount of money people spend on bottled water. Similar to the existing LADWP program, funding is needed so other agencies can offer at-home water testing and filtration systems as a way to build trust around tap water. Considering the lack of trust in agency-led water monitoring among many Needs Assessment participants, it is recommended that an impartial academic institution or lab could be the entity to analyze samples and provide results back to the community.

"There is a demand for a drinking water grading system."

"...build trust around tap water and reduce the amount of money people spend on bottled water."

"...work with schools on a range of water issues as well as shared space."

- Many listening session participants spoke about opportunities to work with schools on a range of water issues as well as shared space. With many GLAC communities being highly urbanized and park poor, there needs to be a concerted effort to work on policy related to opening up green spaces on school grounds that currently cannot be accessed by the general public. This includes better coordination between the school district and city to open green space up to the public after school hours as well as ultimately allowing stormwater capture to occur from offsite sources.

- Regarding stewardship, consider creating capacity building school partnerships with local CBOs to support community gardens that are truly accessible to the community. Related to this idea is a need to centralize resources and extracurriculars within and between schools in order to reach a broader community. One community example highlighted that a recent fundraiser for hydration stations at a school increased students' desire to drink the water, adding to the belief that schools have a wide influence on a community's trust in water.

- Nonprofits and grassroots organizations are vital liaisons between larger resources (e.g. food banks, social services, health care) and the people who really need them. IRWM and Safe Clean Water capacity building dollars could help local CBOs develop a program that replicates the Promesa Boyle Heights' "Promotora" model and/or Nature For All's Leadership Academy. These community-driven programs not only provide a foundation around local water issues, but it helps community members build capacity to take on leadership roles in water planning efforts, supporting them in making decisions for the community.

- IRWM has an important opportunity to invest in WaterTalks communities and on projects proposed by small, less-resourced agencies, cities, and NGOs. The data on past investments highlights certain inequities in geographical disbursement of funds between subregions and within subregions. WaterTalks communities were only funded more than other communities in one of the five subregions. Additionally, the disbursement amongst regions prioritizes LA River communities to San Gabriel River communities. Projects funded in South Santa Monica Bay should be more proportional to projects in other subregions.

- Funding multi-benefit projects (as opposed to single purpose infrastructure investments) in WaterTalks communities will address this existing inequity of project type and strengthen the impact of IRWM investments in the long term. The IRWM program has an opportunity to focus funding in both smaller cities and those under-resourced communities in larger municipalities. Downtown Los Angeles, communities in East Los Angeles, Long Beach, and Norwalk are examples of WaterTalks communities that have not yet seen IRWM funding. A more concerted effort to provide application assistance to NGO and NGO/city/agency partnerships will provide pathways for IRWM funding to more intentionally impact WaterTalks communities.

C. RECOMMENDATIONS - INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES

In the Greater LA County Region, powerful regional capacities are not being fully deployed to meet key water needs because of policy, relationship, funding, legal, and perception barriers. The following recommendations aim to better harness regional capacity for equitable, positive, localized outcomes:

- GLAC IRWM Technical Assistance efforts could first develop and then provide training for staff at regional institutions to develop a better understanding of communities that are within their jurisdiction and benefitting (or not) from their mission. This is one aspect of a broader effort to help community members and institutional staff become familiar with one another, and develop a sense of community between them.
- The State Water Board SAFER team could hold listening sessions with potential receiving water systems and smaller, struggling water systems in LA County to understand their concerns about potential consolidations; then align state and regional support to address these concerns, with the goal of supporting consolidation to improve affordability and quality of service.
- Where consolidation is impractical or untenable, GLAC IRWM Technical Assistance efforts could help regional and local agencies work together to identify technical, managerial, financial, social, and political (TMFSP) support for smaller water suppliers, either from a regional agency or as mutual aid between smaller water suppliers, with a focus on addressing current challenges and preparing for future challenges, including larger impacts of climate change. This TMFSP support could come in the form of physical interconnections between water systems, shared long-term planning efforts, support for design of new infrastructure projects, circuit rider programs to support operations and maintenance, shared administrative capacity, and more.
- Related to the two above recommendations, the State Water Board SAFER Team, Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCo) for the County of Los Angeles, and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)

"Help community members and institutional staff become familiar with one another."

"A county-wide tap water quality testing program needs to be carried out in a transparent, participatory way."

"Develop a premise plumbing rebate program targeting older buildings."

"Most school districts expressed an overarching need and desire for more water bottle refill stations throughout campus."

"Ensure that on-site staff are well-versed in the monitoring, maintenance, and operations of green infrastructure technologies."

"Lessons learned from effective collaboration with schools deserve to go beyond the pilot phase."

Luskin Center for Innovation could collaborate with small water systems to consider regionalization strategies for LA County.

- A legal structure of goals, requirements, and protections is needed to ensure that water suppliers or relevant municipal or county agencies are responsible for securing the human right to water for all people within their service area regardless of housing status.
- A county-wide tap water quality testing program needs to be carried out in a transparent, participatory way, to disentangle health-related water quality characteristics, aesthetic water quality characteristics, and preconceptions that keep people from safely consuming and trusting their tap water. This effort can also help improve understanding about where water system and premise plumbing issues are separately or collectively responsible for insufficient tap water quality or trust.
- A regional water agency could develop a premise plumbing rebate program targeting older buildings with lead pipes, and build in anti-gentrification, especially for rental units. Support for training of union plumbers and workforce development programs could augment the workers available to complete these premise plumbing replacements.
- Regional water districts should expand residential incentive programs that specifically focus on home water conservation solutions (ex: rain gardens, tree plantings, and other stormwater collection features).
- It remains vital to focus on identifying and leveraging funding to help municipalities see multi-benefit projects as opportunities rather than burdens. To start, Watershed Coordinators in the Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP) can strive to educate project proponents focused on single benefits (stormwater quality or water supply) about other benefits that can be accrued for their communities through expansive thinking about multi-benefit projects.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS - SCHOOL PERSPECTIVES

Underfunded school districts expressed a myriad of obstacles after years of budget cuts and funds going to immediate needs/repairs. The following are some recommendations for partner organizations and/or agencies to consider when looking for opportunities to partner with schools to better serve the needs of the overall school community.

- Install Water Refill Stations to support hydration and education: Several schools noted a reliance on plastic disposable water bottles due to mistrust in water from fountains and lack of access to fountains, including those that were removed after exceeding levels of contaminants. Most school districts expressed an overarching need and desire for more water bottle refill stations throughout campus. Many expressed advocacy

efforts to shift to a culture that embraces reusable water bottles. Water refill stations ensure the dispensing of quality water, are waste-free and sustainable, and also support eco-healthy behaviors through the use of reusable water bottles over single use plastic.

- Use "Green" Infrastructure to reduce flooding: Flooding on school campuses, especially at San Fernando and San Gabriel Valley schools, is an issue that creates localized pooling around campus, as well as street flooding preventing students from getting to schools. Transforming school campuses using "green infrastructure" to capture, divert, and infiltrate storm-water would slow runoff to prevent flooding, clean the water and increase local water supplies.

- Build resources for Long-term Maintenance and Support: With new green infrastructure comes the need for professional development opportunities and ongoing training for school personnel, including maintenance and custodial staff. Identifying funding is needed to ensure that on-site staff are well-versed in the monitoring, maintenance, and operations of green infrastructure technologies, for both above-ground greening and underground infrastructure to ensure long-term sustainability and success.

- Increase Nature-based Solutions to Enhance School Experience and Learning: The need for more outdoor green space was greatly expressed, especially when there is a lack of proximity to open space and recreational opportunities. Investment in the reduction of asphalt and impermeable surfaces, and the installation of more trees, native, butterfly and edible gardens, healthy soil through the use of mulch, water infiltration through bioswales, and other nature-based solutions provide innumerous benefits. This includes protection from extreme heat, increased student concentration and creativity, stress reduction, and enhanced learning opportunities. School greening contributes to the overall health of school communities and neighborhoods.

"As was shared more than once in this report, local residents and Tribal members are experts in their own communities, and their expertise must be recognized in balance with that of the water managers."

- Funding and Wastewater infrastructure: Across the board, school representatives mentioned having outdated wastewater systems that have caused sanitation issues on campus and have led to campus shutdowns. Support and funding is needed for schools to address aging infrastructure.

- Outreach and Education on Programs, Funding Opportunities and More: The lessons learned from effective collaboration with schools deserve to go beyond the pilot phase and be implemented throughout districts to spread their benefits equitably among schools. This can look like the creation and district-wide implementation of best practices focused specifically on supporting schools - by identifying programs, funding, cost-share partners, and navigating the stricter guidelines schools are under. Schools need funding that is geared towards long term investments such as identifying alternatives to a school bearing the upfront costs of a project when energy,

power, and financial savings will be felt over the long term. Additionally, factoring in funding for continued education for school personnel on the project to account for staff turnover and the ongoing maintenance along with the necessary staff training for infrastructure projects will ensure that the school community will reap the benefits of projects.

- There is also an opportunity to include school personnel in the IRWM and other regional water management processes, as only one interviewee shared that they were familiar with the IRWM program. Lastly, there lies opportunities to include local indigenous tribes in school-based project development, as all but one school district interviewee had experience collaborating with local tribes or even looking into the indigenous student population in the district.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS - BARRIERS TO INVOLVEMENT IN IRWM

A variety of barriers to participation of disadvantaged communities in IRWM and similar programs were noted through the Strengths and Needs Assessment process. Challenges center around meeting logistics, membership structure, paid participation and the confusion around parallel funding programs.

- Meeting notices. It can be very difficult finding out when meetings occur and who to contact; if or where there is a central website with contacts, calendars, or avenues to hear about upcoming events. LA County Public Works provides means to sign up for multiple meeting mailing lists, but could use stronger promotion. Parallel to the outreach and regular publicity that Measure W receives, IRWM could follow-suit or even pair up, given that the same County agency supports both programs. (ex: shared up-to-date calendars and events, regular announcements, direct sub-regional contacts).

- Meeting times and venues: While COVID actually drove society to more accessible online forums for CBOs to make meetings, there is still difficulty tracking when meetings occur. If and when meetings return to in-person, the challenges will only increase for small CBOs with strapped capacity issues.

- Lack of direct funding for CBOs and tribal nations to participate. Currently there are very few if any small CBOs serving under-resourced communities that participate in the GLAC Disadvantaged Community Committee or SCWP Watershed Area Steering Committees. These CBOs can provide direct access and a channel to community feedback, making them extremely valuable. Committees and participants at different levels within GLAC IRWM primarily consist of agency staff only or paid consultants - which makes sense as it is part of their work day and they don't have to find funding to cover their time in meetings. Within the funding for IRWM activities, identified groups - including tribes - could be given annual or multi-year contracts for paid participation to cover their time and costs. This is likely to be a small investment given the potential return.

- Committee Makeup: There is a complete absence of tribal nations in IRWM Leadership or subregion steering committees. Building on the previous point, CBOs and tribal nations should hold seats on committees so that there is a consistent mechanism for meaningful community input. Examples like Measure A's Citizen Oversight Advisory Board can be used as a model for IRWM.

- Water Providers: Similarly, there is a lack of community and tribal seats on commissions and boards related to water utilities and districts that lead to accountability, oversight, and ultimately public trust. Indigenous nations in particular should be recognized and have paid appointments on the commissions that service those territories the tribal nations stewarded pre-colonization.

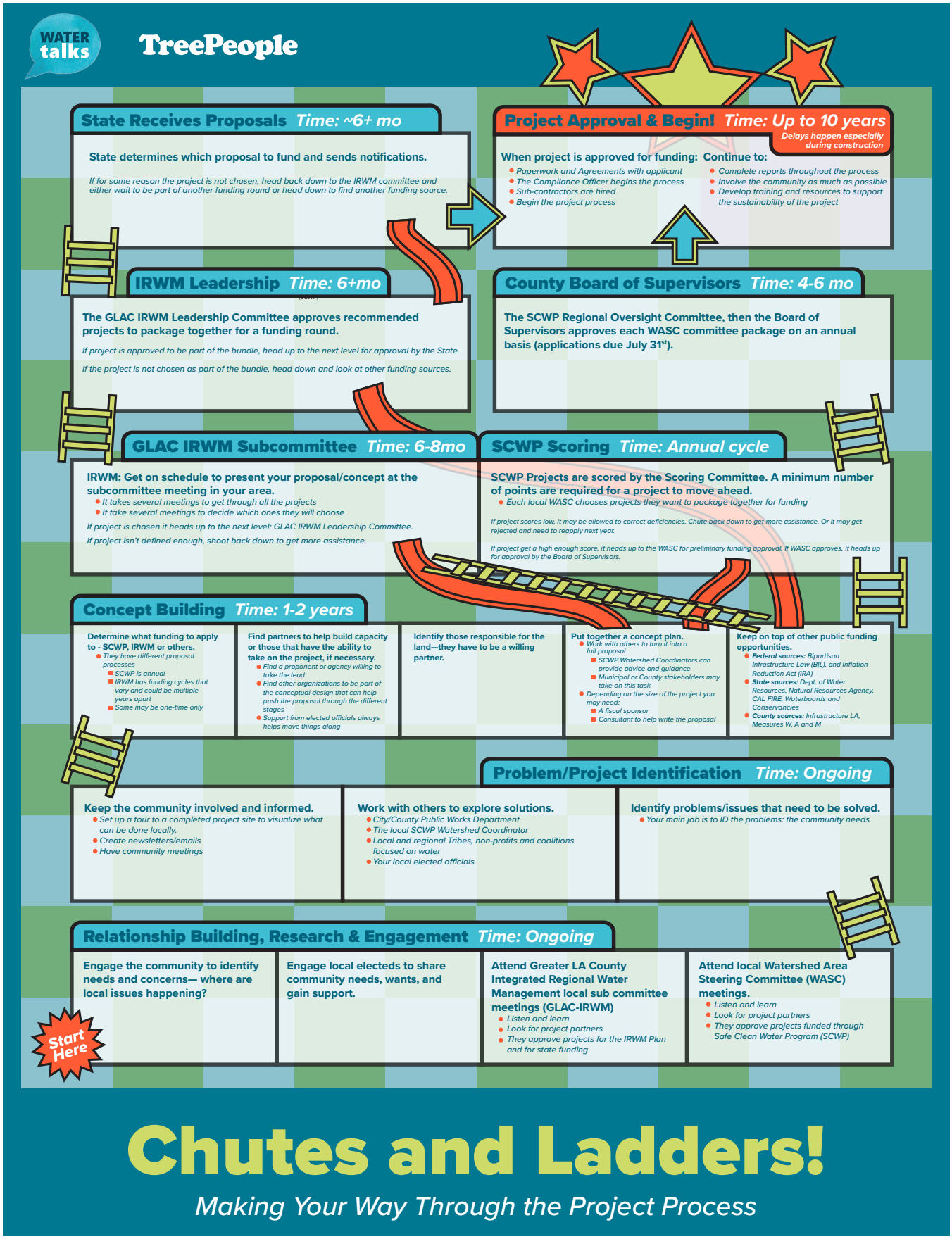
Finally, there is understandable confusion among those outside the water management community around several parallel efforts, including IRWM, Measures WHAM, Safe Clean Water Program, Upper and Lower LA River Revitalization, LA River Master Plan, and others. This confusion creates an invisible barrier that can currently only be overcome by total immersion in the LA water space - something small CBOs and residents don't have time or resources for.

Meetings, project opportunities, and planning currently run on independent schedules and there is a need for more coordination, especially between funding programs. Increased frequency of interagency dialogues is needed to grow awareness around progress of these parallel funding programs. The intent is to maintain consistent messaging and piggyback between events of a similar nature to gain better community involvement. As mentioned in the infrastructure recommendations, IRWM Steering Committees could include the Safe Clean Water Program (Measure W) Watershed Coordinators in planning and funding decisions so that dollars and engagement can be leveraged.

IN CLOSING

As was shared more than once in this report, local residents and Tribal members are experts in their own communities, and their expertise must be recognized in balance with that of the water managers if we are to build a sustainable and resilient water future for the region. While the Findings and Recommendations presented in this WaterTalks Strengths and Needs Assessment may seem overwhelming and insurmountable, there are always next steps to explore. One example is the simple and (and low-cost) creation of education tools to help communities understand complex issues, such as the WaterTalks "Chutes and Ladders" infographic *(FIGURE 11)*. It proved very helpful to WaterTalks participants, and lays out the differences between IRWM and the Safe, Clean Water Program funding streams.

FIGURE 11. WaterTalks "Chutes and Ladders" infographic developed to help navigate the complexities between IRWM and the Safe, Clean Water Program funding streams.



VI. APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVES DETAILED RESULTS

Findings from 25 institutional interviews are discussed below. The results are organized by each main prompt from the interview instrument. The results are described in terms of the frequency of comments or ideas shared by the interested parties who were interviewed and are described as from "everyone", "almost everyone", "several", "one", or "none" of those interviewed. This system is used to help understand if there is consensus among the interview subjects on certain ideas, or if an idea was voiced by only one or a few interview subjects. Some direct quotes are provided when the note-taker recorded specific words used by interview subjects.

INSTITUTIONAL VIEWS ON COMMUNITY

Question 1: Today, we'd like to focus on the community you serve through your role at the [institution name], but we are also aware you may have insight from other experiences in your career. We'd like to start out by asking you to describe some aspects of your community in general. Will you please tell us about your community's strengths, and what it needs?

This question sponsored expansive answers for some and very narrow answers for others. Though this question encourages considering an institution as well as its staff and leaders as members of the community, almost everyone who was interviewed revealed an "outsider's" perspective on the communities served, chiefly seen in how they structured the language of their answers. None of those interviewed used possessive pronouns about the community they serve (mine, my, our), nor did they place themselves in a broader community of people (we, us). Throughout the interviews these words were deployed to describe their institution or the other people that work there, not the community or communities they serve. Several who are in elective office were much more likely to suggest they are members of the community they serve than those interviewed who hold jobs in institutions. Several of those interviewed who work for public agencies (with directly elected or appointed leaders) expressed that the institution has no connection to the community, rather, it is connected via other institutions. In one case this sentiment was shared by staff of an agency that has a directly elected board, reflecting a lack of awareness of representation and accountability that flows from community through to the institution.

Another distinction that became clear was that some of those interviewed perceived their service area to include one, or many communities. Several of those interviewed, particularly at smaller institutions, suggested that their role served a single community. Institutions that serve a larger population were more likely to describe their institution as serving many communities. Several participants switched between the idea of serving a single community at the scale of their legal service area, and also multiple communities within that same geography. This trading between understandings of communities was more likely to be shared by those in or close to political offices, and less likely but not unheard of from those in public agency jobs.

The final distinction that is valuable to highlight is how those interviewed defined what makes a community and how to distinguish one from the next. Almost everyone interviewed

described communities as being defined by the legal/political boundary of city, council district, county, or service area. Almost everyone interviewed from a regional institution described the cities and unincorporated areas as separable communities within their service area. Several of those interviewed did express communities as defined by another characteristic, including both needs and cultures. Several interviewed described communities of need that are not always geographically bounded, like those experiencing homelessness, or those which speak a language other than English.

BARRIERS TO ACCESSING THE BENEFITS OF WATER, WASTEWATER, STORMWATER INFRASTRUCTURE

Question 2: What do you see as barriers to access the benefits of drinking water, wastewater, or stormwater infrastructure in your community?

Access to Safe, Affordable Drinking Water

Participants from water suppliers consistently shared that safe drinking water is provided to their service area, despite challenges like aging infrastructure, limited water supply, specific hydrogeologic characteristics (e.g., limited infiltration to groundwater), and groundwater contamination. One participant described the water they serve as "high quality", and the pride underlying this comment seemed to be shared by many staff of water suppliers. Some participants from water suppliers discussed how they have historically been successful in providing safe, affordable water but are concerned about how to tackle and prioritize growing challenges, including groundwater contamination, climate change, and drought.

Additional discussion revealed some caveats to the current provision of safe drinking water at the tap. Water quality issues related to older premise plumbing, or "infrastructure behind the meter" that is owned by a building owner, were identified by some participants. A few participants shared about premise plumbing as a challenge for drinking water quality in older buildings, schools, and apartment complexes, where pipes, pipe fittings, and solder containing lead may still be in place. One participant shared that their office is working to identify funding sources to address premise plumbing issues in older buildings, but that restrictions due to Proposition 218 and Proposition 26 prevent use of ratepayer money for premise plumbing projects. Their office is trying to identify "private financing models" or "private ratepayer funds" to support replacement of premise plumbing that poses a risk to drinking water quality at the tap. Another participant shared their perspective that premise plumbing issues should be addressed with incentives and rebates.

While some participants were concerned about substandard premise plumbing impacting water quality at the tap, one participant from a water supplier shared that they do not have premise plumbing issues and cited recently completed Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) testing that did not show any exceedances at taps sampled. However, this participant did share that they receive complaints about taste and odor related to premise plumbing. One participant from a water wholesaler referred to disadvantaged community members' distrust of tap water as "inequity by choice", indicating that the community members were opting for the cost burden of purchasing bottled water instead of drinking tap water. Participants did not offer thoughts on the connection between tap water quality distrust and the persistence of unsafe tap water due to older premise plumbing.

Some participants shared anecdotes about metal mobilization issues in their or their neighbors' distribution systems after changing chemical treatment or water source. These anecdotes only included constituents with secondary maximum contaminant levels (MCL), which are non-mandatory water quality standards set based on aesthetic considerations, such as taste, color, and odor. Drinking water provided was still considered safe from a regulatory standpoint, but the community was concerned about the poor appearance and taste of their water. In one anecdote, the transition to an alternative water source was prompted by a short compliance period for a new California drinking water MCL, and the participant expressed frustration about the short compliance period.

Several participants voiced concerns about their ability to meet rising costs to treat and deliver drinking water, collect and treat wastewater, and construct stormwater infrastructure without making rates unaffordable for their communities. One participant shared that unexpected regulatory issues can create rate uncertainty and increases. Some smaller water suppliers as well as wholesalers and regional water agencies voiced concern about small agencies' ability to deliver safe, affordable water with increasing challenges of water contamination, drought, and aging infrastructure. Some participants shared that small agencies struggle to retain qualified staff that often move to a larger agency for a salary increase. Another participant described how people pay more for lower quality water from small water systems and stated that the solution is to consolidate water systems but "no one is investing in drinking water in LA County" and "nothing is happening." One participant from a water wholesaler shared about a recent water system consolidation prompted because an older system's wells were too shallow to access groundwater during the drought.

Except for one participant from a wastewater agency, participants from water suppliers, wastewater agencies, city governments, and other entities did not discuss homeless or unhoused communities when asked about barriers to accessing the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, but did later share about deficiencies in access when asked how their work engages with homelessness. CBOs focused on providing services to unhoused people in the absence of adequate formal services shared how accessing clean drinking water is particularly challenging. One participant shared that in Skid Row, there are only eight drinking water fountains for over 5,000 unhoused people, and that those fountains are not adequately cleaned or maintained.

Provision of bottled water is typically implemented by both agencies and CBOs as a way to address immediate drinking water access for the unhoused. Participants from both agencies and CBOs also discussed efforts to work with water suppliers to establish permanent water fixtures that provide drinking water for unhoused people. Participants from water suppliers and from offices of elected officials shared that the choice not to install water fountains, sinks, and bathrooms is to discourage unhoused people from staying near water fixtures. One participant referenced California's legislative recognition of the human right to water, sharing that unhoused people are denied that right every day.

Wastewater/Sanitation Infrastructure or Regulation Issues

Overall, participants shared a story of successful regional collaboration to meet the wastewater and recycled water needs of LA County. Several participants shared about the regional impact of the Sanitation Districts of LA County in providing wastewater treatment, recycled water, and larger regional conveyance for the majority of the county's population and area outside

of the City of LA. While individual municipalities are largely responsible for their local sewer infrastructure, a few participants shared about a consolidated sewer maintenance district for operations and maintenance, for those that do not have the resources to maintain their sewer system.

One participant shared that a combination of efforts, including investments in City of LA sewer systems before the turn of the millennium, a maintenance and replacement program, and an inspection program, are seen to have addressed sanitary sewer overflow issues, but the City still has "80 sewer spills per year."

While perspectives on regional collaboration for recycled water were generally positive, some participants shared that advanced treatment of wastewater is cost and energy-intensive, and that the cost of recycling water could cause rates to creep up and create affordability concerns. These participants shared that there is a disconnect between public desire for recycled water and knowledge of what is required to recycle water, in terms of infrastructure investments and impacts to bills for wastewater and water services. One participant from a wastewater agency shared that they were unable to subsidize rates for particular groups, further contributing to affordability issues. Still, these participants shared that they are able to spread out the cost of capital projects over their large service area as well as get grants and loans to "fit what we know the community can handle."

Some participants discussed less populated areas of LA County, where residents are on septic systems, resisting a transition to sewers because they worry sewer service will prompt growth of their neighborhood. A few participants shared that septic systems were more common in more affluent communities in LA County, implying that differences in septic and sewer service were not representative of wastewater infrastructure inequities.

Stormwater Quality or Flooding Issues or Flooding

Participants acknowledged deficiencies of existing stormwater infrastructure and expressed urgency regarding the addressing of these deficiencies in order to mitigate flooding, poor stormwater quality impacts on human and ecological health, and the cost of Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) compliance. Participants also expressed a desire to harness the possibilities of multi-benefit projects, including reducing heat islands and increasing green space.

While enhancing water supply is a goal of many stormwater infrastructure projects and of the LA County Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP), enhancing water supply was rarely mentioned, and only by representatives of institutions that are directly tied to implementing the SCWP. One regional groundwater management agency shared that stormwater recharge will not produce a lot of volume, and that stormwater projects will be more focused on MS4 compliance than recharge. Another regional agency shared that diverting stormwater "makes more sense for environmental issues but not for groundwater replenishment" based on the characteristics of their underlying geology (dense clay) that prevents recharge.

A few participants shared that there are communities in northeast LA and southeast LA where community members cannot cross the street and children cannot walk to school during a storm due to localized flooding. One participant shared that because of these impacts, the City of LA evaluates internal Safe, Clean Water Program project proposals for their potential to address localized flooding.

One participant whose agency serves the City of LA shared that there are challenges to collaboration on multi-benefit projects—for example, for green streets, the Department of Transportation does not understand green streets, and others do not understand transportation. The same participant shared that stormwater infrastructure design being seen as solely the realm of engineers, and engineers myopically focusing on meeting regulatory requirements, can be a barrier to achieving multiple benefits like providing green space and reducing heat island effects. The same participant also shared a more positive example. In Pacoima, collaboration between CBOs, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), and consultants led to collaborative development of a green alley adjacent to a housing development and set a precedent for bringing together different funds for multi-benefit projects.

While the institutions interviewed did not initially discuss homeless access to water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure, CBOs focused on homelessness shared how unhoused people are impacted by localized flooding and stormwater quality. Additionally, these participants shared concern about displacement of unhoused people due to construction of stormwater infrastructure.

Water Access for Ceremonial Purposes and for Recreation

Most participants did not have a substantive response to this question. One participant shared that their community is "fairly built out", highlighting limited community access to open spaces adjacent to rivers. A few participants shared that there is wide disparity in access to water for recreational or ceremonial purposes within their institutions' service areas, and that recreational and ceremonial access to water should not be limited to beach access. One participant mentioned a motion by Supervisor Solis to examine barriers to tribal cultural practices, sharing that the effort identified access to water as a barrier. A few participants shared about water quality concerns related to ceremonial and recreational needs, including progress in managing beach water quality and the challenges of watershed protection in their area, especially to address the long-term impacts of fires.

Regulatory and Compliance Issues

Most participants voiced concerns about MS4 compliance and compliance with potential upcoming drinking water regulations.

Some participants with a regional perspective shared that MS4 requirements pushed municipalities to focus on stormwater deficiencies, as stormwater is not "on their radar until they have an MS4 permit compliance issue." Some participants from municipalities shared more negative perspectives on MS4 compliance, including that it is "unrealistic", "an unfunded mandate", and further "cutting up the pie" of their already limited general fund.

Participant framing of potential new drinking water quality regulations for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) varied. Most participants framed potential new MCLs for PFAS as a problem they needed to grapple with, as opposed to framing the challenge as the groundwater contamination itself. One participant framed potential drinking water quality regulations for PFAS as an opportunity to hold entities responsible for PFAS contamination responsible for funding treatment or alternative water sources. This participant also shared that litigation could help minimize the impact of expensive treatment on their ratepayers.

FINANCIAL HEALTH OF THE WATER SYSTEMS

Question 3: What do you think (or know) about the financial health of water systems in your community?

Participants generally said their institutions were in good financial health. They could meet their capital improvement project needs and invest in operations and maintenance. However, some participants were skeptical that all water suppliers in the region are financially sound. One participant stated that "agencies aren't willing to open their books and show that they don't have adequate funding to keep up with O&M [operations and maintenance] and CIP [capital improvement projects]." Several participants pointed to the challenges of the recently consolidated Sativa Water District as an example of what can happen if a system does not have the financial or managerial capacity. One participant said, "we don't know how many Sativas are out there."

Some participants shared that their financial health could be improved, particularly smaller systems. Participants from these institutions frequently cited regulations and their rate structure as challenges to their financial health. Specifically, their rate structures were not set up in a way to cover all of their costs. Several participants pointed to regulations, both existing and forthcoming, as having the ability to severely disrupt system financial health and impact affordability for community members. Participants frequently cited PFAS, water efficiency, and MS4 permits when discussing these challenges.

Often the regulatory challenges are heightened by policy restrictions and requirements. Proposition 218 (Prop 218) requires rate increases be approved by either a two-thirds approval by the electorate or 51 percent approval as a land-owner ballot. Many participants discussed the challenges associated with public perception on rates—that their community is unaware of why rate increases are necessary and unwilling to support them. Due to requirements and public perception, several participants mentioned that they have not raised their rates in several years, ranging from two to six years. One of these participants mentioned that their inability to raise rates has significantly reduced their reserves and threatens their capital improvement project plan. Another participant shared that community perception of water rates during their last water rate increase process was shaped by many recent water main breaks and a newspaper article questioning whether their rates were adequate to provide high quality service.

Additionally, Prop 218 restricts utilities from cross subsidizing or using the fees from one ratepayer to cover the cost of another ratepayer. Many participants mentioned how this limits the ability to provide low-income assistance and manage affordability. Unlike the public systems confined by Prop 218, California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) requires that private water suppliers cross subsidize among their rate payers.

Participants also shared their view on grants as a key influx of capital for projects. One participant described themself as a "grant-chaser," sharing that they cannot afford to pass up any opportunities for additional funding. Another participant said they cannot get projects done without grants. However, there were some participants who said they were unable to apply for grants either due to eligibility requirements and/or technical capacity. These participants said they are often unable to compete for grants because of lack of both in-house capacities to develop a grant application and lack of funds to hire consultants to complete the application for them.

When discussing grants, most participants mentioned support from regional entities like the IRWM program, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD), or the Water Replenishment District of Southern California (WRD). Several participants shared positive feedback about the MWD member block grants program. One participant shared that recently revised guidelines for MWD member block grants expanded eligibility in a way that was helpful to their organization. There was a general consensus that these regional programs were beneficial to their institution's overall financial health.

It is important to understand the context in which participants were asked about the financial health of water systems in their communities. The interviews were held during the COVID-19 Pandemic, a socially and economically turbulent time. Participants discussed the impacts of COVID-19 on their finances, emphasizing issues associated with water bill delinquency. On April 2, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-42-20, implementing a statewide water shutoff moratorium and reconnection mandate. This mandate was still in effect at the time this document was written. The extent to which the moratorium and overall pandemic has impacted, and will continue to impact, water institutions is not clear, and one participant shared that relatively few water systems replied to a State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) survey of COVID-19 Pandemic impacts to their system. However, several participants mentioned that their financial health has been impacted by the pandemic. They gave examples of delaying capital projects and rate increases, in addition to delayed approval for permits and difficulties associated with staffing.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Question 4: How engaged are members of your community in decisions about water?

This question prompted answers that have been fairly common within water management for decades and reflect the belief that because water management is complicated and technical, communities and community members struggle to understand how or even why they should be engaged. Another common concern shared is that communities are overburdened (e.g., working multiple jobs), and therefore, unable to be engaged for lack of time and attention. As those interviewed reflected on engagement efforts they undertake within their communities, many shared that engagements are often centered on specific projects, or in response to a particular crisis. Similarly, several felt that the community was much more likely to engage when they were upset, rather than in a sustained way when everything seemed fine.

Interestingly, however, several of those interviewed expressed an understanding that institutions are intended to represent the community's wishes and goals, and that those are non-technical and can be found by listening. For several of those interviewed, the link between community wishes and institutional activity starts with listening to the community. Those who shared this perspective were more closely related to elective office than those who are staff of public administrative institutions, with the one exception where the participant's role at a public administrative institution is focused on social justice and civil rights.

Of those interviewed who have management responsibilities related to stormwater quality compliance, most felt that the community was disconnected from the problem, and the opportunities, in a way that made attainment of the management goals very difficult. Those interviewed who are required to hold engagement meetings related to stormwater management

relayed that the meetings have familiar faces, usually representatives of consulting practice staff and people who work with non-profit organizations that focus on environmental quality, and very rarely anyone from the community the engagement was meant to reach. Several conveyed similar stories of engagement meetings that saw relatively low attendance despite what they felt was a robust effort to make them known to the community and meaningful.

Of those interviewed who are elected representatives, or are members of institutions that provide drinking water, almost all shared that communities need to better understand from where water is sourced and to what extent their drinking water is made safe by the public and regulated private institutions. Several also shared a recognition that the lack of confidence the communities feel towards drinking water is impacted much more by popular media stories of failures at systems locally, regionally, elsewhere in California or the U.S. than they are by the routine correspondence in which agencies share data about reliability and safety.

Several of those interviewed expressed a similar set of barriers faced by community members when an engagement is planned. The list is familiar, including non-English speakers, lack of personal technology, crowded schedules with multiple jobs, lack of trust and past failures of transparency, the need for childcare or food at meetings. None of those interviewed shared that these are not in-fact barriers for the community, they are barriers for the institutions themselves. None of those interviewed expressed a recognition that these challenges are a to-do list for achieving successful engagement.

The last common answer across several of those interviewed was the attenuation some institutions feel from the communities that benefit from their mission delivery. In water management in Greater Los Angeles, there are agencies that provide wholesale services to other agencies, and it is those "member" agencies that hold direct relationships with communities. Several other water managers expressed that this separation was by design, and that any time a community becomes engaged with them it is a sure sign of a crisis, because when their mission is being delivered effectively, the community doesn't even know they are there. This idea of a "distance" between the water managers and the community that is hard to overcome is also not uncommon. In some interviews it was clear that the distance was seen as something to be cured, and in others it was clearly seen as positive.

The truth is, of course, that either through elected representatives or through government regulatory bodies, all water managers are accountable to the people of their service area. Only one of the interviews with non-elected members of a public institution acknowledged the connection of the people through the elected leaders of the institution to the mission and staff of the institution. This fundamental linkage, that the people elect representatives who empower agencies to carry out activities to the collective benefit of the people, was not raised by any of those interviewed.

Homelessness

The challenges for water managers in the homelessness crisis in California were addressed by some of those interviewed. A focus group of community-based organizations that provide services for people who are unhoused was also conducted. None of those interviewed offered an awareness that providing clean drinking water for people experiencing homelessness is a duty of a drinking water institution. Water agencies uniformly expressed a worldview that homes, schools, and businesses that hold accounts with the utility are those who receive their

service. And, those interviewed who provide services to people experiencing homelessness did not offer an awareness that high-quality and low-cost water provided by a utility is something to seek for their programs. The drinking and washing water provided at shelters and at other service facilities was not something those interviewed had considered.

After prompting, many shared the observation that public drinking fountains and bathrooms have become rarer, relying instead on private facilities in restaurants and stores. Several mentioned that a move towards rehabilitating this public service was underway in the larger cities, and what an important role they could plan in serving those experiencing homelessness.

COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

Question 5: Please describe any collaborative efforts between multiple agencies or institutions in your community?

Participants shared many perspectives and details about regional collaboration on water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.

History of Collaboration on Water Resilience

Those interviewed shared many stories about how regional collaboration has long been at the core of providing water and wastewater services for LA County, and the passage of Measure W has prompted more regional collaboration on stormwater. Many participants spoke about the strength of the region in working together (within LA County and with other external actors) to build large-scale infrastructure or "megaprojects" like the State Water Project, Colorado River Aqueduct, "world-renowned treatment plants", and a regional water grid that can provide reliable, resilient water service. Some participants described how different entities work together to manage different aspects of the water cycle in LA County, with one participant describing the different agencies involved in treating wastewater to indirect potable reuse standards, injecting that water into the groundwater basin, pumping that groundwater, treating it for potable use, and distributing it to community members. One participant shared the phrase "collaboration as increasing resilience" to describe their perspective on the extensive effort they put in to engaging with related agencies and their community.

Participants described ongoing regional efforts through the IRWM Program, Gateway Water Management Authority, San Gabriel Valley Council of Governments, Water Replenishment District of Southern California, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, and others as the natural backdrop to their work. Collaboration between water-related agencies is framed as necessary to tackle the challenges of water supply, wastewater conveyance and treatment, and stormwater infrastructure in LA County.

Regional Agencies Providing TMF Support for Smaller Agencies

Participants shared about technical, managerial, and financial (TMF) support they provide or receive to augment local capacity. Regional water and wastewater agencies shared examples of how they provide this support, including: engineering design and construction management support for local infrastructure projects; guidance in responding to new regulations, especially for emerging contaminants; "cookie-cutter" templates for information to provide to community members; grant and loan programs; long-range planning support; assistance in finding funding for wellhead treatment; and water quality sampling.

While well-resourced regional water and wastewater agencies are able to provide TMF support and services (e.g., regional water supply, wastewater treatment) for smaller agencies in their service area, a local agency may still struggle to maintain and update local infrastructure. One regional agency described local water suppliers as lacking financial resources for capital projects or "sophistication" to access state resources necessary to fund them.

In a few cases, regional agencies described taking over local infrastructure when the local institution was struggling. This includes examples of consolidating drinking water systems, but also in taking over management of local sewer infrastructure for a struggling municipality. One participant voiced concern about consolidation in terms of losing local control, especially when water rights would be subsumed by the larger system.

Mutual Aid Between Smaller Institutions

In addition to regional agencies' support for smaller institutions within their service area, participants described examples of mutual aid between similar institutions. One participant shared about the recently formed Community Water Systems Alliance that helps systems serving disadvantaged communities operate according to standards and address emerging challenges. Mutual aid efforts include creating "a stronger voice for smaller communities" in state-level advocacy; working together to address emerging contaminants, including organizing to litigate against polluters; and creating interties between water distribution systems for reliability and emergency response. One participant described how working together with neighboring water systems is dependent on functional relationships between staff and elected officials at different institutions.

One participant shared how the COVID-19 Pandemic revealed a greater need for redundancy; with a small staff, operation of facilities can be in jeopardy if one employee gets sick, and if others need to quarantine. This participant shared that some mutual aid agreements allow water agencies to share staff in such cases.

Collaboration Across Sectors

In addition to collaboration between institutions that focus primarily on water, wastewater, and stormwater, participants shared examples of collaboration across sectors, and about opportunities and challenges in additional cross-sector collaboration.

One participant shared the LA Mayor's Water Cabinet, which brought together all LA City departments that "touch water", was instrumental in developing the Hyperion Reuse and Resiliency Program.

A few participants shared about the importance of institutions that focus on stormwater infrastructure collaborating with parks and transportation departments to develop and implement multi-benefit projects, and the need to avoid siloing within sectors. One participant shared an example of a Watershed Area Steering Committee coordinating with the California Department of Transportation. Another participant shared that a barrier to collaboration is a lack of understanding between different departments, stating that "transportation does not understand green streets, others do not understand transportation."

Several participants pointed to Measure W and the SCWP as an outcome and opportunity of collaboration around multi-benefit projects, with one participant referring to Measure W as the

"financial extension" of long-term collaborative processes. One participant shared that there is a "huge expectation from the community to do something great" through Measure W, and there is a need to deliver projects that people see, like, and benefit from.

One participant shared that they want to see collaboration on fire response and watershed protection, specifically in coordinating a state, federal, and local response to address long-term impacts of the Bobcat Fire.

Examples of Specific Collaborative Projects

Several participants gave examples of specific collaborative projects when asked about collaboration in general.

Several participants shared about multi-benefit projects that were a collaboration between institutions with different goals and focuses. One participant shared that a street widening project with stormwater capture and treatment "all penciled out as being a good project on paper for each goal." This participant highlighted that collaborators must be able to meet their goals, and not feel like they are investing an undue number of resources into others' goals, for a collaboration to be successful. A few participants shared about collaborative projects with Pacoima Beautiful, an environmental justice organization in the San Fernando Valley, and one participant shared that Pacoima Beautiful projects set a precedent for collaboration between different funds.

A few participants shared about interties between drinking water systems for reliability or emergencies, or specifically to bring in an alternate source because of contamination of their primary water source, highlighting the willingness of neighboring agencies to support each other. One participant discussed the consolidation of an older water system with relatively shallow wells that went dry during the recent historic 2012-2016 drought.

Collaboration Breakdowns

Institutions having clear and complementary directives allows for collaboration, and participants highlighted countless examples of successful collaboration in providing reliable access to water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure across LA County. Participants also shared examples of different types of breakdowns in collaboration, or blind spots in the collaborative network that has arisen over decades.

Several participants described how smaller water suppliers in LA County may struggle to provide safe, affordable water to their community because of challenges including technical, managerial, financial, social, and political (TMFSP) capacity and groundwater contamination but shared that their knowledge is limited in terms of where the specific issues are. One participant shared that problems are known at a high-level, but it is hard to "drill down" and overcome specific obstacles. Another participant shared that the needs are scattered over the county in a "checkerboard". Another participant shared that they "wish we knew where the other Sativas are", referring to the Sativa Water District that was subsumed by the LA County Department of Public Works after many failures of the system came to light.

While regional agencies do support regional water resilience, there are limitations in terms of what they are able or willing to do to support water suppliers. One participant shared that they "do their piece at the regional level, but then when you get down to the ground-level

there may be breakdowns" in terms of lack of institutional capacity and proactive system maintenance.

A few participants shared concerns about corruption within a regional agency, with one participant stating that they are "going through crisis and wasting taxpayer dollars".

A few participants shared concern about lack of integration and understanding between different water related institutions across LA County. One participant specifically pointing to the need to "get on the same page" about all the projects and programs that are being funded, while another shared that it is challenging to coordinate because "you can't have everyone at every meeting." Some participants shared their concern that smaller municipalities and water suppliers may be overlooked for funding compared to larger cities.

Responses to questions about water provision for people experiencing homelessness also revealed breakdowns in county-wide collaboration. Some participants shared about a "services first" approach to interacting with people experiencing homelessness and that they are a part of collaborative efforts to provide services for people who are unhoused, while other participants shared about a lack of access to drinking water, bathrooms, and showers in LA County. Some participants specifically questioned why available resources are not being spent to increase water fixtures accessible to unhoused communities. One participant from an agency related to but not focused on water posed the hypothetical question: "Can we provide last mile connection to water features if that's what we are hearing from the community?" It seems that the institutions that could play a role in providing water and sanitation services to unhoused people are not clear as to their directive, and do not effectively collaborate to provide adequate services.

CONCERNS

Question 6: What other concerns do you have for your community now and into the future?

The participants mostly used this time to reiterate previously discussed challenges. These include topics such as aging infrastructure, affordability, and changing regulations. However, the broadness of this question allowed the participants to expand beyond the water world. On the topic of aging infrastructure, participants mentioned replacing pipes, but also discuss the need to update all public infrastructure such as roads and parks. Several participants noted the difficulty of maintaining their current infrastructure while also planning for the future.

As for affordability, many participants restated the challenges they face with Prop 218 and their inability to cross-subsidize rates. Some participants were also concerned about maintaining affordability in the face of population growth. While a larger population means a larger rate payer base, it also means more capital outlay for connections and maintenance. One participant was concerned that their rate payers would be unable to sustain their organization; rising capital costs and compliance with new regulations were seen burdens potentially too great to overcome.

Many participants repeated their frustration with regulations, drinking water quality, water conservation, and MS4 compliance. They shared that these mandates are burdensome and "overwhelming", stretching their already limited budget, and make it difficult to prioritize.

While not a regulatory challenge, participants used similar language to discuss climate change; it is an overwhelmingly large issue that is competing with other challenges for resources and attention. For most participants, this question on concerns was the first time they explicitly discussed climate change. From the water supplier view, participants were concerned with the impacts of climate change on hydrology. From larger storms to reduced surface water imports from Northern California, many participants recognized that climate change would alter their priorities. When thinking beyond water, participants mentioned concern over excessive heat and another participant linked climate change to direct impacts on tourism.

Another topic that was repeatedly mentioned as a concern is the idea of equity. Several participants noted that their organization values and encourage equity, but they were not sure about its implementation or application to their work. They felt that equity was lacking a definition. Others also mentioned concern about the equitable distribution of resources. One participant noted that often public infrastructure projects can create more harm than good to low-income communities; their suggestion was to design and implement projects that lift communities up without creating additional burdens.

OPPORTUNITIES

Question 7: What other opportunities do you see for your community now and into the future? Participants shared many general and specific opportunities to address challenges in providing equitable access to the benefits of water, wastewater, and stormwater infrastructure.

Infrastructure Projects

Participants from smaller water suppliers shared about specific infrastructure projects within their service areas that would help them to sustain provision of safe, affordable drinking water. These identified projects include wellhead treatment for emerging contaminants, well rehabilitation, water main replacement to address leaks, replacement of water storage tanks, adding generators for reliability, and installing interconnections with surrounding water systems for reliability and emergency response. When discussing these opportunities, participants often shared barriers to implementing these projects, including lack of grant funding or ratepayer funding, specifically noting that they are unable to raise water rates because of the COVID-19 Pandemic. One public utility company shared that the CPUC has supported using imported water instead of installing wellhead treatment, which has kept them from proceeding with wellhead treatment projects.

Some participants spoke about the importance of water fountains, showers, and bathrooms near homeless encampments, recognizing unhoused people as some of the hardest to reach Californians to attain the human right to water. Some participants shared about the opportunity for homeless service providers and water suppliers to collaborate to install and maintain water fixtures for unhoused people to access safe drinking water.

Participants also discussed opportunities for multi-benefit stormwater infrastructure projects in their communities, with several participants pointing to Measure W as a funding source for these projects. Participants shared about the need for projects that address local flooding in northeast LA and southeast LA and opportunities to incorporate green infrastructure into new LA Metro lines, especially those that will run above grade. One participant referred to multi-benefit projects and green infrastructure as an opportunity for projects to "do double and

triple duty for us." Another participant described an "iconic" multi-benefit stormwater project that has a high capital cost, sharing that the high price tag has caused its delay.

One participant described a municipal goal for modifying streets to make it easier and "more pleasant" to walk and bike, but that this effort has not yet been infused with a focus on green streets and adding shade. This participant voiced that helping transportation agencies better understand green streets, and helping others better understand transportation, could help lead to collaborative, multi-benefit projects.

Several participants mentioned housing projects when asked about opportunities for their community and discussed the need to address lack of affordable housing.

Support for Education About Water Topics

Participants shared water topics that they have trouble discussing with their community and stated that it would be helpful to have template education materials available to ease this challenge. The topics specifically called out as challenging to communicate about were emerging contaminants, especially PFAS, and water rates and why it is important to maintain and upgrade water infrastructure.

Financing Premise Plumbing Replacement

Some participants spoke of the need to replace premise plumbing containing lead, especially for schools, rental housing, and older buildings. These participants shared about the challenge of identifying funding for premise plumbing replacement, as water suppliers cannot use ratepayer funds on building owners' property. They pointed to a need to identify financing models or incentives, and perhaps pass legislation, to support replacement of premise plumbing.

Regional Collaboration on Climate Change and Water Resilience

Participants also shared about opportunities to increase regional water resilience and independence. A few participants discussed potable reuse projects and specifically the Advanced Purification Center (APC) at the Joint Water Pollution Control Plant, sharing that they see the APC as an opportunity to reduce dependence on surface water imports from the State Water Project and Colorado River. One participant shared that their agency is helping groundwater pumpers to identify projects (e.g., wellhead treatment, well rehabilitation) to make full use of their adjudicated groundwater rights in order to reduce reliance on surface water imports. One participant shared that recent regulatory issues have prompted their portion of LA County to work together more than previously.

Several participants shared generally about an interest in opportunities to increase their community and region's resilience to climate change and drought. One participant shared that the Coastal Commission recommended they develop a Coastal Master Plan but they cannot afford to develop one, and that they need grant funding to help make plans for sea level rise adaptation. One participant shared that there is a need for a "climate office" to uplift climate priorities and benefits. One participant shared that as areas are impacted by wildfires and other aspects of climate change, city councils are shifting to have younger members more aware of and interested in mitigating climate change impacts.

Support for Small Systems

Some participants shared about opportunities for mutual aid between small water systems, or for larger agencies to support smaller systems, including through consolidation. One participant shared that a wholesaler does water quality sampling for small systems in their service area without charging them, pointing to the cohesion between water suppliers due to their shared effort to get funding to address historical contamination. One participant shared about the formation of a Community Water Service Alliance to help small water systems operate according to standards and address emerging challenges. This participant also shared about the Public Water Agencies Group (PWAG) that is building an emergency response program to address cybersecurity and other threats.

Another participant shared that MWD has changed their guidelines about what their grants can be used for, which has been helpful for smaller systems.

Workforce Development

Some participants shared about the opportunities to incorporate workforce development into programs focused on construction and especially operation and maintenance (O&M) of water infrastructure and multi-benefit stormwater infrastructure. Some participants focused on how new job opportunities can have a positive impact on individual community members, while others spoke of the importance of job creation for economic recovery as we emerge from the COVID-19 Pandemic.

A few participants emphasized the opportunity to engage youth in workforce development programs for O&M of stormwater infrastructure construction of associated green infrastructure (e.g., parks, tree planting). One participant shared their interest in developing green infrastructure operations and maintenance certification programs at local colleges.

One participant shared about potential collaborative projects that could be supported by both Measure W and Measure H with multiple benefits and opportunities for workforce training.

Defining and Working Towards Equity

Some participants shared that there is currently an emphasis on thinking about and discussing equity, but that we have not yet thought about what equity really means, especially when distributing resources. These participants shared that "we" need to clarify terms related to equity and figure out how to put it into practice. One participant shared that current activism around race and the environment is an opportunity to bring more people into decision-making and help them shape the community.

Indigenous Engagement

Few participants shared about engagement with indigenous communities and tribes, except for water suppliers that rely on surface water imports from tribal lands, as they are regulatorily required to engage with tribes. One participant mentioned that Native American Heritage Month was an opportunity to consider indigenous water and land management. Another participant reflected on the effective engagement with indigenous communities and the inclusion of tribal perspectives in a recently released plan, the Upper Los Angeles River and Tributaries Revitalization Master Plan.

Water Conservation
One participant shared that planting drought tolerant plants and implementing appropriate irrigation is an opportunity to reduce demand, make their system more reliable, and help the environment.

Pride in the Community
Several participants shared that people are proud of their community's diversity, culture, and identity, with one participant sharing that people are proud of "moving past our challenges." Several participants shared about infrastructure-related accomplishments that people in their community are proud of, including water conservation, innovative public transit, and well-maintained parks, and more generally of Southern California's role as an "economic engine."

Recent Good Examples of Positive Change in the Community
Several participants shared about shifts in perspectives in their community that they viewed as positive change, including about racial justice and community involvement in decision-making. Some participants specifically pointed to recent civil unrest provoked by the death of people of color at the hands of police, sharing that they are mobilizing to respond to their community's calls for change. Some participants shared that there has been a shift in community interest in and institutional facilitation of community-driven decision-making, and that people are dedicated to improving their neighborhoods.

Some participants mentioned recent infrastructure projects as examples of positive change, including a new bike path that connects several towns, Metro extensions, development of an "innovation zone", streetscape projects, and a "mini park" that transformed a small space.

A few participants mentioned positive changes in collaboration on regional infrastructure, management of water bodies, and identification of community needs. One participant mentioned positive change toward collaborative envisioning of infrastructural needs for climate change resilience. Another participant mentioned collaborative development of the Lower LA River Revitalization Plan as fostering a high standard of community ownership. Another participant mentioned the Southeast LA Collaborative as working together to gain recognition and trust in the community and working to identify community needs and support census work.

One participant shared about an arts festival that engaged with dozens of community artists and featured mutual aid efforts amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic, including the provision of community fridges.

One participant shared more generally about lower crime rates and violence in their community in recent years, but also countered that positive change with an observation that they have "never seen more homelessness as in the last five years in LA." They added that they do not know what to attribute the rise in homelessness to, as unemployment is lower than in the past.

Proposed Projects That Have Community Support but are Also Unable to Move Forward
Several participants shared specific projects that have not moved forward due to lack of funding, delays because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, or a need to do collaborative project development. While the anonymity of participants prevents sharing specific projects and their

proponents in this report, information gathered will be made available, or used directly by the Project Team, to the effort of the DACIP Task 4 – Project Development.

COVID-19 Pandemic Changed the Nature of Opportunities or Challenges in Your Community
Several participants shared concerns about the economic impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on their community and on community members' ability to pay their water bills. One participant shared that they are fortunate that tourism is not a key economic driver in their area, otherwise their revenue would have been more impacted by the COVID-19 Pandemic. One participant shared that, because of the low response rate to a State Water Board survey on COVID-19 impacts to water systems, there is not accurate statewide data.

One participant shared about their organization's workforce, that they are deemed essential and kept working with some modifications to transportation, and provision of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). In sharing this, they noted a sense of obligation to allow their employees to continue to work, that their employees are often the only ones bringing income into their households. One participant spoke about the challenge of adjusting hours and rotating staff to allow for social distancing. Another shared that there was an initial slow down on projects because of limited contractor availability at the beginning of the COVID-19 Pandemic and that regulators have not been as available to approve permits.

Several participants also shared that the COVID-19 Pandemic is an opportunity for institutions to reevaluate their priorities and approach to providing services for their communities. A few participants specifically pointed to reimagining streets because of outdoor dining changes as an example of how the COVID-19 Pandemic has prompted a reevaluation of our built environment and public spaces. One participant shared that the response to the COVID-19 Pandemic is like "cracking an egg" and that "there's no going back." Another participant shared that we have an opportunity to re-envision the world we want "as we put the pieces back together."

Several participants also pointed to how the COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted their community engagement approach and strategies. Some participants noted that their institution had seen increased participation in public meetings due the ease of connecting virtually and providing public comment over the phone or video calls, as opposed to having to travel to a meeting location. Other participants shared about the challenge of virtual engagement with community members that lack internet access, sharing that a technology gap is also a gap in information dissemination. One participant shared that their ability to do outreach has been substantially affected, especially in low-income communities of color where door-to-door canvassing and community meetings are commonly the best way of engaging people. One participant shared that their office has been hosting teleconference town halls with a phone number for participants to text in their public comments.

OTHER THINGS TO SHARE

Question 8: Are there any things about your community that you want to share with us that we haven't already discussed?

The final question allowed participants to reflect on the entire discussion and contribute new information. In general, this question was usually answered with a summary and reinforcement of things previously shared during the interview. Because analysis found topics discussed

here as being either restated, or relevant to one of the earlier questions, this report includes no results for this eighth question, rather, material provided by interviews considering this question is incorporated elsewhere in these results, and contribute to the recommendations stated in *Section V.*

VII. APPENDIX B: DWR TRIBAL ENGAGEMENT POLICY

DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
1416 NINTH STREET, P.O. BOX 942836
SACRAMENTO, CA 94236-0001
(916) 653-5791

MAR 0 8 2016

Department of Water Resources
Tribal Engagement Policy

The Department of Water Resources (DWR) is committed to fulfilling its consultation obligations to California Native American Tribes (California Tribes[1]) and their sovereign authority over their members and territories. This Tribal Engagement Policy will strengthen DWR's commitment to improving communication, collaboration, and consultation with California Tribes consistent with the Tribal Consultation Policy directives in Executive Order B-10-11[2], the California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Consultation Policy[3], and AB 52[4].

DWR adopts the following policy principles to achieve early and meaningful tribal engagement and to strengthen and sustain collaboration with California Tribes:

- Establish meaningful dialogue between DWR and California Tribes early on in planning for CEQA projects to ensure that DWR's tribal outreach efforts are consistent with mandated tribal consultation policies, and to ensure that California Tribes know how information from consultation affected DWR's decision making process;
- Establish guidelines to share information between DWR and California Tribes, while protecting their confidential information to the fullest extent of the law;
- Consult with California Tribes to identify and protect tribal cultural resources where feasible, and to develop treatment and mitigation plans to mitigate for impacts to tribal cultural resources and cultural places;
- Develop criteria in communication plans and grant funding decisions for all applicable DWR programs that will facilitate tribal participation;
- Provide cultural competency training for DWR executives, managers, supervisors, and staff on tribal engagement and consultation practices;
- Recognize that California Tribes have distinct cultural, spiritual, environmental, economic, public health interests, and traditional ecological knowledge about California's natural resources;
- Enable California Tribes to manage and act as caretakers of tribal cultural resources.

To implement this policy, DWR's Executive Committee of the Environmental Coordination Committee will convene a work group of Division and management staff to develop the needed guidelines, procedures, and resources to implement this Tribal Engagement Policy. The work group will present its proposals to the Governance Board, essential to DWR's government-to-government tribal consultation, for approval.

Carl A. Torgersen
Chief Deputy Director

[1] California Tribes and "Tribal Communities" and "Tribal", include all Federally Recognized Tribes and other California Native Americans as defined in Executive Order B-10-11.

[2] See attached Governor Executive Order B-10-11 established September 19, 2011.

[3] See attached California Natural Resources Agency Tribal Consultation Policy established November 20, 2012.

[4] AB 52 (Gatto) added Chapter 532 (Statutes of 2014) Native American/CEQA; found at Public Resources Code section 5097.94 and in sections of 21000, et seq.

TreePeople

12601 Mulholland Drive
Los Angeles, CA 90210
www.treepeople.org