



Guiding Equity Principles for Resilient Coast Santa Cruz 2.0 - Shoreline Adaptation and Management Blueprint

Background on Equity in Coastal Resilience Planning

There are many approaches to defining and evaluating equity, but at its core, equity is about everyone getting what we need to survive and thrive. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), equity is the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people, whether those groups are defined socially, economically, demographically, or geographically. It is also a process of addressing historic and current inequities to strive for greater equality. There is an extensive field of practice related to equity and planning processes, climate equity and disaster equity.

The Bay Area Climate Adaptation Network Equity Working Group's Equitable Adaptation Guide (Salz et al. 2020) states that "Equity ensures fair outcomes, treatment, and opportunities for all people, ensuring everyone gets what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. It is the process of reducing disparities that are systematically associated with social advantage/disadvantage." Equity is one of three priority values of the City (along with sustainability and public health) where work is operationalized through its Health in All Policies (HiAP) initiative. Equity, as defined in the City's HiAP ordinance (2019), is both an outcome and a means to an end. It is just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability or functional impairment, or geographic location, or the combination of any of these factors.

The first step to integrate equity into coastal planning is recognizing that disparities in health outcomes, inequities in living conditions, and lack of political power place many low income communities, people of color, people with disabilities, pregnant women, and historically disadvantaged people, among others, at greater risk of hazards and limits their capacity to adapt, respond and recover.

What is equity?

Equity ensures fair outcomes, treatment, and opportunities for all people, ensuring everyone gets what they need to enjoy full, healthy lives. It is the process of reducing disparities that are systematically associated with social advantage/ disadvantage. (Bay Area Climate Adaptation Network, 2021)

What is an equity lens?

Using an equity lens means being deliberately inclusive when making decisions. It introduces a set of questions to help decision makers focus on equity in both their process and their outcomes.

What is social vulnerability?

Social vulnerability is defined by the characteristics that influence an individual's or group's ability to prepare for, respond to, cope with, or recover from a hazard event. Understanding where populations have increased vulnerability and exposure to natural hazards can help emergency managers take actions to lessen impacts to these communities before an event or distribute needed recovery dollars after an event.



Conceptual Grounding of Equity (*UC Berkeley's Institute of Othering and Belonging*)

Othering is defined as the structural, cultural and institutional processes by which particular people or groups are treated as outsiders, less than full members of society, or excluded from full participation.

Belonging then is the aspirational counter to othering: having meaningful voice, the opportunity to participate in (and shape) the social, political, cultural structures that affect one's life – rather than simply being included within structures as they currently exist.

Equity, in this framing, is not simply “treating everyone the same” (equality) but recognizing that people are differently situated, that structures and systems produce differential access/opportunity, and thus fairness and justice sometimes require differential treatment (or different supports) to address those structural differences.

Traditionally understood notions of equity (e.g. closing gaps) still falls short. Work is needed to advance approaches through goals that everyone aspires to, and then designing targeted strategies for different groups as needed, to enable all to reach that aspirational goal.

Under traditional equity efforts focus might be on “closing the gap” between historically disadvantaged group and reference group. That approach can inadvertently frame the advantaged group as the benchmark or create competition between groups.

Setting an aspirational goal – what is the goal? How are different groups currently situated relative to that goal? What barriers do they face because of structures/contexts (not because of inherent deficits)? Then design strategies accordingly.

This is an operational way to build belonging (not just inclusion) by making sure the structural, cultural and policy barriers are addressed so that marginalized groups aren't just present but fully participating and shaping the structures themselves.

Embedding equity in projects means designing for belonging – not just bringing people into the process, but giving meaningful voice, co-creation authority, shaping the design of structures.

As equity relates to coastal management, environmental justice means that not only are all people are entitled not only to clean air, clean water, environmentally safe working and living conditions – through this project, it is important to extend that meaning to include access to safe and healthy recreation spaces that connect to the ocean. This expanded notion aligns with the California Coastal Commission's stance on justice: “The Commission will use its legal authority to ensure equitable access to clean, healthy, and



accessible coastal environments for communities that have been disproportionately overburdened by pollution or with natural resources that have been subjected to permanent damage for the benefit of wealthier communities.”

The City has historically foregrounded equity in its coastal adaptation work, notably in its inclusive approach to advisory group membership and targeted focus groups with frontline neighborhoods and tribal groups. It strives to overcome disparities by providing enabling conditions for participation such as meeting location selection, translation and interpretation, food, stipends and, in some cases, childcare. Furthermore, City staff reflect feedback from disadvantaged groups, checking for accuracy and highlighting in decision making. Staff also reflect with disadvantaged groups on how to optimize their participation and improve upon the design of enabling participation conditions.

Draft Equity Guiding Principles for Resilient Coast Santa Cruz 2.0

To intentionally ground equity into the project, the following working set of guiding principles were drafted with the project’s advisory committee, consultant and staff project team. At each phase in the project, these equity principles and how they are operationalized are revisited and refined.

- Design project to build belonging, not just bringing people into the process, but giving meaningful voice and co-creation ability
- Identify and address barriers that different groups may face with regards to achieving project goals, including outreach and engagement goals
- Use an equity screening tool/ or equity lens to evaluate how project actions could benefit or impact/burden different groups
- Use best practices for culturally responsive engagement
- Allow the community to define what meaningful engagement looks like, with City and partner roles focused on facilitation, listening, and co-creation.

The project team will track and report how each principle is operationalized through each project phase. Each project deliverable (e.g., Technical Briefs) includes an explicit section on how community engagement and feedback is incorporated into the deliverable outcomes or recommendations to provide transparency and clarity on operationalization of the equity principles and demonstrate the similarities, differences and value of all voices in this work.

Best Practices for Equitable Engagement

Among other best practices the City strives to incorporate as mentioned earlier, the following best practices represent commitments for this project:



- **Early & Ongoing Involvement** – Engage residents at the start of decision-making processes.
- **Multiple Engagement Methods** – Provide a mix of in-person, virtual, and mobile-friendly digital tools.
- **Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Approaches** – Provide multilingual outreach and culturally competent facilitation as appropriate.
- **Compensation for Community Expertise** – Offer stipends, childcare, food, and other incentives to encourage broad participation.
- **Partnerships with Trusted Community-Based Organizations** – Work with local groups that have deep relationships with City communities.

Draft Equity Screening Process for Coastal Resilience:

As projects and policies are developed for the 20-30 year time horizon, this equity screening process will become part of the criteria for evaluating and recommending projects and policies.

1. Identify issue/problem/risk and benefits of a proposed action
2. Identify target audience/beneficiary
3. Evaluate how the action could reduce risk from coastal hazards to different groups
4. Evaluate benefits to different groups
5. Evaluate any burden/ impact to or whether the action could leave out different groups
6. Identify performance metric to evaluate progress on action

Groups Engaged and Considered in Equity Screening for Coastal Resilience:

- Black community, Indigenous communities, Communities of Color, and other historically excluded groups
- Differently-abled people, those with disabilities and/or access and functional needs
- Economically disadvantaged people
- Households with limited English Proficiency
- Households without access to reliable transportation
- LGBTQI+ community
- People who do not have access to outdoor space
- People experiencing homelessness/ unhoused population
- Renters
- Seniors (65 or older)
- Undocumented people
- Youth, including high school and college students

date	Event	Location/Subarea	# participants	Objective/Distribution	Demographics (if known)	Distributed	Stipends	Food	Childcare
9/18/2025	Mtg w/ Amah Mutsun Land Trust	Virtual		Introduce project, objectives, processl gain 4 feedback on how to engage going forward	tribal representatives	slide deck	Yes	No	NA
9/18/2026	UCSC Coastal Climate Resilient Course	Seymour Discovery Center	20	Introduce project, objectives, process	Practitioners	slide deck; stickers	NA	NA	NA
10/13/2025	Resilient Cities Catalyst CA Coastal Cities Acceler	Oceanside, CA	12	Introduce project, objectives, process	Practitioners	slide deck agenda report, draft equitable engagement strategy; slide deck	NA	NA	NA
10/28/2025	City Council Meeting	Council Chambers/online	unknown	Update City Council and residents on status of project	council members, staff and residents				
10/30/2025	Advisory Committee	City Hall Planning Conference Room/ zoom	40	Update SRC on project objectives/status, equity principles and request feedback on upcoming engagement	Diverse residents, regulatory reps, nonprofits, academia	working equity guiding principles, glossary, fact sheet drafts; slide deck; stickers	Yes TBD	Snacks	
11/5/2025	West Cliff Community Convo #1	Seymour Discovery Center	50	Introduce Project, share timeline, existing and future conditions; gain feedback	mostly residents	fact sheets, glossary, other project fact sheets	No	Snacks	Coloring books
11/6/2025	Main/Cowell Community Convo #1	Shrine of St. Joseph Community Room	14	Introduce Project, share timeline, existing and future conditions; gain feedback	mostly residents	fact sheets, glossary, other project fact sheets	No	Snacks	Coloring books
11/13/2025	Seabright/East Cliff Community Convo #1	Santa Cruz Natural History Museum	35	Introduce Project, share timeline, existing and future conditions; gain feedback	mostly residents	fact sheets, glossary, other project fact sheets	No	Snacks	Coloring books
11/13/2025	Cabrillo Collect Guest Lecture	Cabrillo Horticulture Center	30	Familiarize residents with project and next steps for input	students	stickers only	No	No	
12/17/2025	Beach Flats neighbors (in spanish)	Beach Flats Community Center	60	Familiarize residents with project and next steps for input	spanish speakers; families	translated fact sheet and glossay	to first 22	provided	
2/10/2026	City Council Meeting	Council Chambers/online	unknown	Update City Council and residents on status of project	council members, staff and residents	fact sheet, data summary technical brief snapshot, existing / future condition maps fact sheet, glossary, activity books for docents to share;			
2/18/2026	Seymour Center Docent Training	Seymour Discovery Center	12	Share project objectives and status with docents to share with public	Docents	slide deck	NA	NA	
2/19/2026	UCSC ENVS 150 and 250 panels	UCSC	70	Shared project objectives and status with students; Q and A	students	stickers only; slide deck	NA	NA	
2/23/2026	Sustainability + Resiliency Committee	Council Chambers	7+	Update SRC on project objectives/status and request feedback on upcoming engagement	committee members from all demographics	glossary, fact sheet, technical brief snapshot, working equity guiding principles, existing and future conditiions existing and future conditions, working equity guiding principles, working tradeoff tables; slide deck	Yes TBD	NA	
2/24/2026	Advisory Committee	Police Station Community Room/zoom	25+	Update SRC on project objectives/status and request feedback on upcoming engagement	Diverse residents, regulatory reps, nonprofits, academia		Yes TBD	Yes	