



“Water and People” Nonprofit Workshop Summary

June 28, 2018

Workshop Overview

The “Our County” Strategic Engagement Team invited nonprofit organizations throughout Los Angeles County to provide input on the topic of Water for the County’s first Sustainability Plan. The “Water and People” workshop, held on June 28, 2018 at The California Endowment, attracted over 80 attendees from nonprofit organizations, as well as several public agencies. The 6-hour workshop engaged 66 individuals representing 55 nonprofit organizations (see Appendix A) who participated in several key sessions to provide input on Water goals and strategies the “Our County” plan should emphasize.

The workshop provided an explanation of how the “Our County” plan will be developed and an overview of water issues the County faces. After introducing the Water Goals from the Water Briefing document, attendees provided general feedback on broad water goals in a plenary discussion format. In the second session, attendees were broken up into three different groups according to their topic of interest (Housing and Land Use, Economy and Workforce Development, and Public Health and Safety), with each section having a lead facilitator, butcher paper scribe, and computer notetaker. Participants in each morning section were asked to provide comments on the proposed Water Goals as it relates to the topic, and then report back to the larger group. After a lunch break, the last session involved an interactive exercise that allowed participants to write their own recommendations to the plan. After posting their proposals on butcher papers, they had the opportunity to vote for their priority recommendations via dot stickers. Throughout the exercise, facilitators were present to help spur discussion while computer notetakers transcribed comments.

This compilation represents a succinct synthesis of more than 600 comments that the Strategic Engagement team was able to capture through butcher paper notetaking, computer laptop transcription, written note cards from the afternoon activity, as well as written feedback received after the workshop. While each nonprofit organization brought their own unique set of recommendations and input for the “Our County” plan, there was general support for the proposed Water Goals. Additionally, several common themes emerged throughout the workshop that either seek to address missing issues or enhance the Water Goals. The following are the top water-related themes identified:

Key Themes

- Improving governance structure for **more inclusive water management and accountability.**
Individuals expressed the need for a simpler water governance structure for better coordination throughout the County, stronger oversight bodies, and more inclusive public participation processes, including greater representation from low-income communities on decision-making boards. Further, participants advocated for better consultation with tribal governments.

- Increasing **water literacy** through strategic, comprehensive education initiatives.
Many advocated for more culturally meaningful engagement opportunities for the public, particularly youth, to interact and learn about water including water quality and efficiency programs and practices, as well as access to outdoor water activities.
- Striving towards the **elimination of water related impacts** and prioritizing benefits to historically polluted communities.
From stronger enforcement and regulation of industries to targeted infrastructure investments, participants voiced support for focused efforts to improve the quality of life of low-income residents with sufficient policies in place to safeguard communities from displacement pressures.
- Improving water efficiency and quality through **regenerative nature-based infrastructure**.
Several individuals expressed the multiple benefits from environmentally sustainable, natural retrofits to the built environment to promote better water conservation practices, such as stormwater infiltration, grey water systems, permeable pavement and drought-tolerant landscaping.
- Creating a **diverse and inclusive workforce** in water-related careers.
Participants brought up the need for stronger workforce development and local hire initiatives that build a career pipeline for unemployed and underemployed residents throughout the County.

Draft Goals

Overall, there was strong endorsement of the Draft Goals from the Water Briefing with Goals 3, 4, and 5 receiving the most feedback. Participant comments either strengthened goal language or identified missing issues. There was strong support for bolder, aspirational language that prioritized the needs of communities disproportionately impacted by inadequate water quality. For instance, many advocated for standardized water testing in apartment units and public schools to better identify areas of high need. Participants also repeatedly identified complex governance and water literacy as key barriers to facilitating better coordination and participation of residents and indigenous people in water decision-making. Appendix B includes a detailed summary of comments by Goals.

Detailed Strategies

The following are the top themes with detailed strategies from input received:

**IMPROVE GOVERNANCE
STRUCTURE FOR
BETTER
ACCOUNTABILITY AND
WATER MANAGEMENT**

- Simplify water governance to facilitate more effective regional coordination
- Increase opportunities for public input and culturally-appropriate community engagement
- Collect and make water data publicly available
- Consult with and work alongside tribal governments and communities
- Support and provide technical assistance to smaller jurisdictions
- Hire and appoint individuals that are more representative of communities
- Re-educate County decision makers about a sustainable water approach, with an emphasis on equity

**SUPPORT EDUCATION
INITIATIVES THAT
ENGAGE RESIDENTS
WITH WATER & THE
ENVIRONMENT**

- Invest in a broad, culturally-competent and popular education initiatives to improve water literacy
- Increase access to and opportunities for school field trips to coastal areas, beaches, and other water bodies
- Advocate for a mandatory swimming curriculum
- Support the creation of school composting centers and healthy communities curriculum
- Provide free or reduced transit passes for youth visiting green spaces
- Educate residents on the harmful effects of cleaning products on personal health and water quality

**ELIMINATE WATER
RELATED IMPACTS ON,
AND PRIORITIZE
BENEFITS TO,
DISADVANTAGED
COMMUNITIES**

- Prevent the expansion and development of toxic industrial facilities
- Ban companies that take water rights away from communities and contaminate water bodies
- Standardize and require water testing and remediation in apartment units, commercial properties, and all school facilities
- Provide incentives for residential retrofits, such as improved water fixtures, in disadvantaged communities
- Safeguard renter populations from pass-through housing cost increases related to water infrastructure improvements (such as plumbing), and increased property values

**RESTORE THE NATURAL
ENVIRONMENT AND
ENHANCE WATER
EFFICIENCY & QUALITY
THROUGH
REGENERATIVE
NATURE-BASED
INFRASTRUCTURE
PROJECTS**

- Require storm water and grey water capture and infiltration systems in new buildings
 - Prioritize the creation of green, permeable streets and spaces that connect communities and make streets safe, walkable, and cool
 - Ensure an equitable urban forest with a climate-appropriate, healthy tree canopy, particularly in freeway-adjacent neighborhoods
 - Incentivize native plant and drought-resistant landscaping and eliminate barriers such as Homeowner Association "turf" requirements
 - Build small water capture projects like pocket parks and green alleys instead of just large regional parks
 - Invest in and coordinate with other agencies on healthy soil management
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- Protect and improve groundwater quality
 - Support the de-pavement of LA River and beyond

**BUILD A DIVERSE AND
INCLUSIVE WATER
WORKFORCE**

- Implement local hire requirements for publicly funded water projects
- Support the creation of water career pipelines early in education system
- Integrate vulnerable populations (e.g., formerly incarcerated, at-risk youth and climate and asylum refugees) in the water workforce
- Invest in green career education programs, such as transition to native plant landscape maintenance standards
- Invest in environmental stewardship jobs
- Ensure adequate outreach from training and workforce development facilities to reach vulnerable people and communities

Other themes, although not as prominent, also emerged, including:

- Ensuring **water affordability** through equitable utility pricing, Cal Fresh/EBT water supplements, and subsidized water-efficient appliances,
- Promoting stronger enforcement of **water conservation** measures, especially in wealthier areas that use vastly disproportionate amounts,
- Advancing better **flood resilience and management** efforts including coordinated watershed governance and restricting development in flood-prone areas,
- Providing **technical assistance and credits for local businesses** seeking better water practices,
- Maximizing opportunities for **urban agriculture** efforts through reduced water fees and eased restrictions.

A more detailed list of condensed comments is included in Appendix B.

Appendix A: Workshop Attendee List by Organization

- Amigos de Los Rios
- API Forward Movement
- Arid Lands Institute
- Arroyo Seco Foundation
- Bike San Gabriel Valley
- California Conservation Corps
- California Water Foundation
- Center for Biological Diversity
- City of Los Angeles
- City Project
- Climate Resolve
- Communities for a Better Environment*
- Council for Watershed Health
- Council of Mexican Federations
- Day One*
- East Yard Communities for Environmental Justice*
- Economic Roundtable
- EJ Coalition for Water
- Environmental Defense Fund
- First 5 LA
- Food & Water Watch
- Friends of the LA River
- From Lot to Spot
- Good Food LA (LA Food Policy Council)
- Grades of Green
- Grant Housing and EDC
- Heal the Bay
- Hunger Action LA
- LA Alliance for a New Economy (LAANE)
- LA City/County Native American Indian Commission
- LA Community Garden Council
- LA Waterkeeper
- Leonardo diCaprio Foundation
- Milken Institute
- Mujeres de la Tierra
- National Forest Foundation
- Natural Resources Defense Council
- Nature Conservancy
- Nature for All
- North East Trees



- Pacoima Beautiful*
- Physicians for Social Responsibility-LA
- Prevention Institute
- Proyecto Pastoral (Promesa Boyle Heights)
- River Project
- Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
- SEIU 721
- Social Eco Education
- Social Justice Learning Institute
- Southern California Watershed Alliance
- Strategic Concepts in Organizing and Policy Education (SCOPE)*
- Surf Bus Foundation
- Surfrider Foundation
- Sustainable Law Group
- The Wilderness Society
- Theodore Payne Foundation
- Tree People
- Trust for Public Land
- Union de Vecinos
- William C. Velasquez Institute
- Women Organizing Resources Knowledge and Services

*Community-based Organization Anchor

Appendix B: Summarized Water Related Comments

Morning Plenary on Goals

Goal	Comment
1. Reduce Water Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders noted the importance of institutionalizing and adhering to water conservation measures. In particular, participants noted the unequal enforcement of water use during the drought. Many advocated for more intentional implementation to ensure water conservation goals are applied equitably across the County, especially in wealthy areas that consume the largest quantities on a per capita basis. There was also strong support for retrofitting the built environment for more efficient water use. Recommendations included requiring drought tolerant landscaping, collecting rainwater, installing wastewater reclamation systems, and transforming food production processes to be less water intensive.
2. Advance Water Self-Sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There was strong support for land use practices that promote urban infill to prevent further sprawl that adds strain to the County’s water systems. Participants also recommended more thoughtful, equitable building codes that encourage efficient use of water. This included requiring rainwater and grey water capture and infiltration systems as well as eliminating “turf” requirements set by homeowner associations. Many coupled water self-sufficiency with climate resilience. Localizing water sources with a prioritization on methods that produce the least GHG emissions was brought up several times. Additionally, dozens of comments advocated for adequate reparations for communities in the Central Valley and indigenous groups adversely impacted by LA County’s extraction of water sources. Relatedly, others noted advancing water literacy is intimately tied to water self-sufficiency.
3. Enhance Water Infrastructure while Prioritizing a Natural Systems/ Green Infrastructure Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal 3 received the strongest endorsement and number of comments from workshop participants. There was significant support for restoring the County’s water system in all aspects (from source procurement, filtration, and delivery) to advance water use efficiency and quality. Similar to comments related to Goals 1 and 2, participants recommended retrofitting the built environment through a “natural systems/green infrastructure” approach to achieve water self-sufficiency. Numerous comments advocated for, as one stakeholder called it, a “sponge County” where nature-based infrastructure improvements would restore LA County’s local water supply and quality. Depaving streets, in particular, received strong support from participants. Other strategies included better soil management, recycling wastewater, and restoring natural water bodies.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many also offered several strategies that would better embed the built and natural environments to build climate resiliency and conserve water use. An equitable urban forest, permeable streets, and green alleys emerged as key recommendations from participants. Other comments strongly advocated for restoring and protecting natural water bodies to increase the supply of local water. There were also multiple suggestions to tie water education initiatives with school trips to places that are important to water conservation and quality.
<p>4. Protect and Improve Water Quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants expressed concerns about water quality being inadequate in disadvantaged communities. There were several recommendations on improving water quality throughout the County, with a prioritization on low-income communities. Regarding the built environment, participants requested regular water testing in all buildings, including multi-family apartments and public schools. They also suggested incentives for retrofitting plumbing in aging buildings with adequate protections for renters to stay in place. There was significant support for holding polluting industries accountable. Participants advocated for stronger regulations and enforcement mechanisms to combat issues such as storm water run-off or pesticide drift. Many comments suggested more concerted efforts at addressing soil health and quality to ensure adequate water filtration.
<p>5. Reduce Water Related Impacts on, and Improve Benefits to, Disadvantaged Communities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There were numerous comments related to Goal 5. Participants generally wanted stronger language on equity that acknowledges past and current environmental harms related to water in disadvantaged communities. Recommendations ultimately sought to rectify environmental injustices in a manner that prioritizes the needs of the County's most impacted communities. Related to other comment goals, participants were mostly concerned with unequal levels of water quality. There was strong support for "eliminating" rather than just "reducing" water related impacts. They recommended better water data collection to identify bad water quality "hot spots," to better direct resources for communities most in need. Some suggested water testing at all public schools, while others advocated for stronger regulations on industrial facilities that pollute water. There was also strong support for incentivizing water fixture improvements with adequate protections in place so renters are not impacted with increased housing costs. Many noted the disproportionate burden on low-income households who purchase bottled drinking water due to concerns about poor tap water.
<p>New Goal suggestions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Issues dealing with the complex water governance emerged as the most commented topic throughout the workshop. Participants noted that governance must be simplified and streamlined in order for any of the proposed goals to be accomplished efficiently. Further, many expressed concerns that residents are not adequately participating in water decision-making processes. They suggested more concerted efforts to engage residents and an increase in resident representation on boards and committees.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tribal consultation was a key recommendation offered by participants. They advocated for better coordination and consultation with tribal governments on issues related to water procurement and quality. Some suggested having tribal representation on governing water bodies. • Increasing water literacy emerged as a missing goal throughout the workshop. Participants suggested several education-related strategies that would increase residents' understanding of water sustainability and outdoor recreation options. Some participants, for instance, suggested swimming lessons for youth and school trips to natural water bodies. • There were several comments related to agricultural systems as they relate to water use and quality. Some participants advocated for a sustainable agriculture plan that takes into account food infrastructure, foodsheds, and urban gardening. • Multiple participants expressed concerns over the privatization of water. They advocated for stronger policies in place to prevent companies from buying important sources of water. • Other comments suggested a paradigm shift regarding the perception of water as a commodity. Numerous comments recommended giving water "personhood status" in order to stop extracting and using water as an economic good without regard for its broader ecological role.
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Summarized Morning and Afternoon Comments by Category

Category	Comment Summary
Air Quality	N/A
Climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several attendees noted the importance of promoting conservation habits and programs that focus on climate - such as integrating nature and living soils in urban areas - that achieve water self-sufficiency in an equitable and inclusive manner. Additionally, achieving water self-sufficiency was seen as an important goal to address climate issues, particularly the protection of local water supplies (rivers, streams, wetlands) that support biodiversity and reduce GHGs. Someone also requested an update on the county hydrology manual to reflect the latest soil data. • Other comments offered water neutrality strategies, such as, integrated water capture plans and big capital projects that focus on wastewater recycling and storm water capture, as well as proper emergency planning, in order to be better prepared for droughts. • Many commented on the need to use more climate-appropriate landscaping and construction design that promotes resilience to high heat and conserves water. • There were also suggestions to re-envision the future flood risk mitigation and careful consideration on the relationship between developers and the establishment. Strategies included "un-building" in floodplains and starting a floodplain buy-back program.

<p>Economy and Workforce Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local hire requirements and workforce development initiatives emerged as key priorities for workshop participants. Several comments were related to more training and apprenticeships in order to create adequate career pathways, such as infrastructure maintenance and environmental stewardship. Some suggested working with NGO partners and education institutions to tie literacy to economic development and jobs, such as paid high school internships, "making it happen" after education. Others stressed the importance of employers to hire locals with adequate data tracking for accountability. Many attendees advocated for more affordable water through initiatives such as water bill reductions, CalFresh/EBT supplements for subsidized bottled water cost, or pricing water relative to parcel size to ensure equity. Others stressed the importance of ensuring reliable water price and quantity for local businesses. Participants also noted the need for adequate funding sources, such as bond measures and more permanent measures, for public investment as an economic development tool with infrastructure goals to create good, quality jobs that hire locally and are tracked by data. For instance, one comment advocated for a 40% local hire requirement. Proposition 218 was noted as a significant barrier for more funding. Quality job standards included safe working conditions, unionized, and prevailing wages with benefits. A set of comments advocated for more diverse small businesses through the incubation of co-ops and other alternative business structures. Strategies included increasing access to capital as well as providing micro-loans. Someone noted the need to decriminalize recycling as an informal source of income. Others emphasized opportunities in the nonprofit sector. They suggested the County help address capacity needs for small nonprofits to obtain contracts by pre-vetting NGOs, investing in organizations that work in communities of color, and building partnerships between small and large NGOs. Someone specifically suggested for investments, such as the \$40 million conservation fund, to be used for community empowerment purposes. Several comments centered on more effective incentive mechanisms that improve private industry performance standards and water conservation practices. They suggested a combining enforcement and incentive measures. For instance, someone recommended helping small farmers cover water costs by reducing other fees. Another participant advocated for a market-based strategy similar to cap & trade that takes away onus on County to regulate and instead incentivizes responsible business practices. On the other hand, others recommended stricter regulations, such as requiring infrastructure upgrades for new developments and those seeking to flip properties. Another attendee wanted more opportunities for small businesses and renters to engage in issues related to water price, quantity, and quality, while ensuring taxation doesn't hit low income communities and that incentives don't disproportionately benefit higher income communities. A comment specifically called for adequate water conservation enforcement in places like Pepperdine. A variety of comments advocated for more effective partnerships, whether they are between public and private entities or labor groups. According to some attendees, genuine partnerships would facilitate better labor agreements as well as open up funding opportunities, such as co-funding mechanisms for waste water infrastructure.
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<p>Housing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attendee comments recommended updating building infrastructure - such as plumbing, adequate soil, and stormwater retrofits - to address water quality issues while also ensuring residents the right to return and combat displacement. Along the same lines, participants noted that infrastructure improvements should be cognizant of renters so that costs aren't passed down to them. A comment recommended adding a development tax on new and refurbished housing to fund plumbing upgrades. In terms of better understanding displacement, someone noted LA County's Enterprise Linkage Project having important data for reference. Some attendees also suggested embedding equity into utility pricing and building codes as well as creating a toolkit for development equity. Other strategies included additional water meter facilitation with landlords, ensuring independent water bills to tenants from DWP (and other agencies), as well as more efficient appliances. Other participants suggested prioritizing housing development on remediated brownfield and superfund sites. Someone also advocated for aging infrastructure in schools to be addressed.
<p>Land Use</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Numerous attendees provided a variety strategies that restore and protect the natural environment, while increasing access to green space for low income communities. Comments included the creation of ecologically significant areas (ESAs) that prioritize urban habitat linkages and increase biodiversity, integrating small parks and green alleys, extending the Coastal Act beyond developers, and better connecting trails and open spaces to natural waterways. Another comment suggested renaming public spaces to their Tongva names. Several comments were related to more integrated land use practices that prioritize infill development and thoughtful placement of infrastructure in order to both prevent sprawl and mitigate potential water pollution. Some suggested parcels be redrawn more sustainably and promote an ecosystem-oriented management scheme that prioritizes water efficiency and conservation. Other participants pointed to transit oriented development policies and conversion infrastructure planning, where representation of environmental and nature organizations is assured, as potential strategies. Many attendees emphasized the need to promote urban agriculture by integrating agricultural development codes, incentivizing native and climate appropriate plants, using waterways for edible vegetation, as well as embedding community sharing networks into urban agriculture policies so produce is not being over produced or replicated. There were some comments on being more cognizant of flood plains, allowing for floodplain reclamation through tools such as buy-back programs. A comment advocated for more de-pavement. Additional comments emphasized the environmental impacts of outdoor water use with landscaping. Someone suggested the LADWP Watershed policy around outdoor landscape is a good policy to replicate at the County level. Others noted the need for more public parks with climate appropriate greenery.

<p>Public Health</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop participants consistently brought up the issue of water quality as it relates to public health. Many suggested for drinking water quality (both public and private) to be addressed proactively, with a priority on the most disadvantaged communities, particularly those alongside industrial centers that are prone to be affected by industrial runoff. Strategies included identification of areas with poor water quality, stronger enforcement and regulations on industries that pollute air, water, and soil, prioritized investments and expedited track for remediation, as well as more transparency on their pollution levels in order to provide success metrics to maintain accountability. A comment also noted the need the for standardized clean water measure. Attendees suggested tying Cap and Trade proceeds and enforcement fines back to communities where pollution occurs. • Others also emphasized the importance of healthy soil to address groundwater contamination, including in the San Joaquin Valley, and encouraged collaboration with state programs (i.e. Healthy Soils Act) that promote healthy water infiltration and embed more nature into cities. Water testing in schools and dedicated technical assistance and funds (Measure A) for disadvantaged communities was also mentioned. • There were several comments that sought to promote health through small projects that increase access to ecologically significant areas and bodies of water to encourage kids to swim and be more involved in water recreation, particularly during hot days. Attendees recommended restoring impaired water bodies, such as the LA River, for safe recreation. • Participants also advocated for stronger enforcement of state laws, such as the human right to water and the “Show Me Water” bill (SB 610/AB 22).
<p>Governance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many participants reiterated the need for better engagement with environmental justice and Native communities to overcome distrust in and disconnection with water agencies. Several suggestions included community-centered and inclusive public engagement strategies that are language accessible, consistent, and genuinely ground up so it doesn’t feel like “checking a box.” Others noted a decentralized outreach approach that also promotes broader water literacy and education that uses a health frame. Many pointed to community colleges and universities as important avenues to engage in interdisciplinary, community-based work. Suggested education and outreach topics included bottled water cost and waste management. An attendee noted that infographics are much easier to understand for the public. • There were also comments explicitly calling for the County’s recognition of Native rights in order for adequate consultation with tribal governments to occur. Someone recommended appointing tribal representatives on governing bodies. • Several attendees suggested the inclusion of low income residents in decision making through either more representation of current boards or the creation of an oversight body. Strategies included more grants and technical assistance programs to support civic engagement and leadership development work in disadvantaged communities. Further, they emphasized the need for transparent information, such as use of funds, and options for communities to decide from, with full implications of policies described. Relatedly, many voiced support for more available and accessible data. Someone shared concern that Joint Powers Authorities lack accountability to the communities they serve.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dozens also noted the need for a more simplified governance structure in order for better coordination amongst government agencies to occur. Others mentioned restructuring county agencies that emphasizes water conservation, i.e. “Ecosystem management center,” integrated planning among agencies, and to work with nature rather than against it, while another attendee would like more CBO and agency partnerships like the Los Angeles Regional Open Space and Affordable Housing Collaborative. Another comment suggested more coordinated watershed governance (based on natural resource boundaries), driven by stakeholder groups. • Other general comments included better hiring and staffing practices and for the County to take a capital-facing strategy. One comment suggested for hiring more in-house scientists rather than relying on outside consultants, while another supported the idea of more natural and social scientists in government employee classifications.
Miscellaneous	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Several participants emphasized the need to intentionally couple issues (i.e. urban agriculture and drainage) and determine how to define multiple benefits in projects. Some suggested looking at other countries to learn and share best practices. • There were many comments on the type of language used and tone of the document. For instance, someone noted the need for urgent language in order to prevent further harm. Others noted that the term “intersectionality” should be used appropriately, acknowledging its racial equity and justice origin looking at black women’s health. Additional comments requested language to be more explicit on how things will get done. • Some requested looking at water from a non-Western, de-colonial perspective, using non-western values to re-educate and respect indigenous perspectives on water. A comment recommended adopting the “Jemez Principles of Democratic Organizing.” • Another comment suggested the aspirational goal of giving personhood status to water in order to move away from the exploitative treatment of water. • A post-workshop written comment letter recommended goals to be more aspirational, including metrics and/or deadlines. Along the same lines, another comment letter noted the need for the County to use data to better understand current conditions and track progress moving forward.