



# **San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC)**

## **Organizational Development Assessment of the Environmental Justice Advisors Program**

### **Final Report**

**Submitted to:**  
**BCDC**

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## 1.0: Executive Summary

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) partnered with MIG and Benchmark to evaluate its Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisors program, which was launched in 2021 to help the agency implement its Environmental Justice and Social Equity policies. This assessment aimed to:

- Assess the challenges and successes of the EJ Advisors program after two years of implementation.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities of the EJ Advisors to support BCDC in implementing its Environmental Justice and Social Equity policies and integrating environmental justice throughout the agency's work.
- Identify ways to strengthen relationships among EJ Advisors, BCDC staff, and Commissioners, addressing diversity, equity, inclusion, and power dynamics.
- Provide strategic guidance on advancing the program to improve mission alignment, overall effectiveness, and impact on environmental justice outcomes.

The assessment revealed several challenges within the program, including role ambiguity, cultural misalignment, communication gaps, and resource constraints, all of which affect morale and program impact. At the same time, we found that much progress has been made over the last two years—and particularly the last six months, in part because BCDC invested resources and time to better examine the structural issues at play and commit to change.

This assessment was precipitated in part by the 2022-23 departure of two EJ Advisors and one alternative, who alleged racist behavior by BCDC and systemic issues with inclusivity, trust, and respect within the agency. Subsequently, BCDC embarked upon an internal review, and although the findings did not support any evidence of racist actions by staff, agency leaders felt that the experience pointed to the need for external support for conflict resolution and organizational development. Although this assessment does not focus deeply on the resignations, we did seek to understand the context and aftermath of those events as one significant factor among many that have influenced the EJ Advisors program's trajectory over the past several years.

Key findings of this assessment include:

1. The EJ Advisors program has many assets and elements of success to build upon.
2. There is a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of EJ Advisors.
3. There are significant cultural and philosophical differences between BCDC staff and EJ Advisors.
4. Communication gaps lead to misalignment, erode trust, and create systemic conflict.
5. Decision-making authority is tightly controlled within BCDC.
6. The EJ Advisors can help BCDC improve its community engagement practices.
7. More robust management and resources will help the EJ Advisors program thrive.

BCDC should address these challenges by clarifying roles, improving processes, investing in relationship building, and integrating environmental justice principles and practices throughout its planning and regulatory departments. Right-sizing workloads, clearly defining responsibilities, building cross-cultural communication skills, training, and creating strong accountability frameworks are essential. This approach can heal existing rifts, rebuild trust, and facilitate productive collaboration to achieve shared goals. By removing structural obstacles and trying out new ways of working together, BCDC can reap the benefits of its EJ Advisors program, serve as a model among coastal management and State agencies, and make meaningful progress toward environmental justice and social equity in the Bay Area.

## 2.0: Introduction

### 2.1: Background on BCDC

The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) protects, enhances, and responsibly develops the Bay Area's coastal resources. Founded in 1965 in response to concerns about industrialization and urbanization, BCDC became the nation's first coastal management agency, setting a standard for environmental stewardship and sustainable development. BCDC balances economic growth with ecological conservation, managing a 660-mile Coastal Zone under the McAteer-Petris Act. It regulates development to protect natural resources, improve public access, and mitigate climate change effects, shaping the region's built environment.

Adapting to changing regional dynamics, BCDC collaborates with diverse stakeholders, including businesses, community groups, local governments, and environmental organizations, to promote cooperation and innovation. As a leader in environmental governance, BCDC addresses issues like habitat restoration, environmental justice, and sea level rise, demonstrating how development and conservation can coexist for the long-term health of the San Francisco Bay region.

### 2.2: Background on the EJ Advisors Program

The EJ Advisors program was formed in 2021 to help BCDC develop best practices for engaging with frontline communities at risk of rising sea levels and to support the implementation of the agency's [Environmental Justice and Social Equity policies](#), adopted as part of a 2019 [Bay Plan Amendment](#). The EJ Advisors group includes representatives from communities across the Bay Area that have experienced decades of environmental injustice and social inequity, including Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income populations. There are [six EJ Advisors](#) and several alternates; each EJ Advisor receives an annual stipend in recognition of their time and expertise, funded by Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) and grant funds awarded to BCDC.

### 2.3: Assessment Methodology

BCDC selected the consulting team of MIG and Benchmarq through a competitive Request for Proposals. Together, we conducted an organizational development assessment of the EJ Advisors program over a six-month period (November 2023 to May 2024). The aims of this assessment were to evaluate the EJ Advisors program's successes and challenges two years in; clarify the EJ Advisors' roles and responsibilities; identify ways to strengthen relationships between EJ Advisors, staff, and the Commission; and provide guidance to improve the program's mission alignment, overall effectiveness, and impact on environmental justice outcomes.

This report describes the assessment methodology, findings, and recommendations to help continuously improve the EJ Advisors program and better integrate environmental justice throughout BCDC's work moving forward. The consultant team collected and analyzed data through a mix of methodologies:

- **Meetings and semi-structured interviews:** Conducted ten meetings with EJ Program staff and senior leadership, many of which were semi-structured interviews designed to gather insights and suggestions on the EJ Advisors program. Topics included governance, decision-making, communication, and community engagement. The flexible format allowed exploration of participant-specific concerns and emerging themes.

- **Document review:** Conducted an in-depth analysis of program-related documents, including the San Francisco Bay Plan, 2019 Environmental Justice and Social Equity Bay Plan Amendment, EJ Advisors program charter, EJ Advisors Year 1 & Year 2 summary reports, “EJ and Permitting” training materials, EJ Advisors chair guide, and related background materials.
- **Focus groups:** Facilitated four focus groups with BCDC staff, including the Chair and Executive Director, senior staff and upper management, and Planning program staff. These structured discussions explored experiences with past conflicts, roles and responsibilities of EJ Advisors and staff, communication practices, organizational goals and vision alignment, and future expectations.
- **Workshops:** Facilitated three workshops—two with EJ Advisors only and one with both EJ Advisors and staff—to promote communication, collaboration, and solution co-creation. These sessions enabled participants to share experiences, discuss program goals, and generate actionable recommendations through structured exercises and open discussions. Participants engaged in collective problem-solving and consensus-building on key challenges and priorities.
- **Comparative analysis:** Conducted an analysis of other agencies’ environmental justice programs integrating our own subject matter expertise. This approach identified common issues, trends, and success factors that informed recommendations for BCDC's program.

### 3.0: Findings

Through the interviews, focus groups, workshops, and data analysis, we identified key strengths and areas for improvement in the EJ Advisors program and BCDC more broadly.

#### 1. **The EJ Advisors program has many assets and elements of success to build upon.**

In the last 18 months, BCDC doubled its EJ Program staff capacity by hiring two skilled, experienced people to fill the positions of Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement and Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement. Both have been integral to facilitating the EJ Advisors program and rebuilding trust and momentum following significant turnover in 2022-23. There is now a complete group of six EJ Advisors, who bring a wealth of technical expertise, relationships, and lived experience in frontline communities. And there is buy-in from staff and agency leadership on the necessity of improving work processes to integrate environmental justice fully throughout BCDC's operations.

In their first two years, the EJ Advisors developed a [charter](#) with foundational values, goals, and shared principles to guide this first-of-its-kind program among U.S. coastal management agencies. The EJ Advisors also contributed to various planning and programmatic elements including BCDC’s Community Vulnerability and Community Based Organization Directory [Map](#). This tool helps support early community engagement on shoreline development projects.

A key outcome of this six-month assessment period is that the EJ Advisors and EJ Program staff developed a [Program Organization Structure and Governance](#) document and a [2024-25 work plan](#). The consultant team cannot take credit for this, but we believe that having a focused period of reflection and organizational development helped catalyze the formation of these critical documents. Like any new body, the EJ Advisors

program had a startup phase that included some successes and some setbacks. It is now stable and well-positioned for its next phase.

**2. There is a lack of clarity regarding the roles and responsibilities of EJ Advisors.**

This was a recurring theme in focus group discussions and workshops, where stakeholders expressed frustration and confusion about the roles of the EJ Advisors, staff, and the EJ Working Group. Unclear expectations have led to misalignment, inefficiencies, and a breakdown of trust. From the program's inception, BCDC avoided being prescriptive about the structure of the EJ Advisors group in a sincere effort to support the group's self-determination. While well-intentioned, this resulted in unclear structures and processes, leading to issues such as separate work plans, poor communication, and role confusion between the EJ Advisors and staff, hindering the integration of the EJ Advisors into the agency.

These challenges were exacerbated by turnover within the EJ Program staff and the EJ Advisors group, impeding progress over the past two years. Additionally, the EJ Advisors, who all have full-time jobs, meet only once a month, mostly virtually. This limits their ability to build relationships with BCDC staff beyond the EJ Program and restricts what the group can accomplish. However, the last six months have been a period of intensive reflection, onboarding, and strategic planning for the EJ Advisors. We hope that this focused time has helped the EJ Advisors, staff, and Commission better understand their complementary roles in advancing environmental justice through BCDC's work.

**3. There are significant cultural and philosophical differences between BCDC staff and EJ Advisors.**

BCDC's mission is to protect and enhance San Francisco Bay and advance the Bay's responsible, productive, and equitable uses for this and future generations as we face a changing climate and rising sea levels. The EJ Advisors support this mission and also work to operationalize the [principles of environmental justice](#) in the context of a public agency. The EJ Advisors aim to evolve the agency's norms and strategies in response to changing environmental and societal dynamics, including by integrating communities into BCDC's decision-making processes.

While their goals generally align, BCDC staff and EJ Advisors approach their roles from entirely different frameworks. The EJ Advisors are rooted in their experiences with environmental racism and community power building, and bring expertise in organizing and advocacy as well as science, policy, and climate planning. Their perspectives are extremely valuable, as the EJ Advisors are very well versed in policy issues and help BCDC staff understand the real-life impacts of the agency's decisions. In contrast, the agency currently has limited racial/ethnic diversity among staff and leadership, with few individuals having lived experience in frontline communities. Staff have technical backgrounds in planning, engineering, law, or science and are steeped in the bureaucratic culture of a state agency. Each group has its own norms and language, which often differ from one another.

Recognizing these cultural and philosophical differences is crucial. Turnover and capacity limitations within the EJ Program and a lack of familiarity with environmental justice principles and practices among BCDC staff have placed an unfair burden on the EJ Advisors to bridge this gap. This expectation is inequitable given their part-time advisory role and relatively low compensation. While the EJ Advisors are adept at navigating bureaucratic environments, BCDC staff and leadership must invest time and

resources to learn about environmental justice, including its language, mindset, and methods. This should not be an individual effort but a collective one. Similarly, EJ Advisors need to remain patient, as changing agency culture and practices is slow and requires consistent effort.

**4. Communication gaps lead to misalignment, erode trust, and create systemic conflict.**

Both BCDC staff and EJ Advisors expressed frustration with communication gaps between the two groups. Language differences contribute to some of these challenges. Staff expressed apprehension about using inappropriate or "triggering" language when communicating with the EJ Advisors. At the same time, the EJ Advisors noted that staff sometimes use jargon and legal language that can feel exclusionary. It is essential to acknowledge these differences and work towards bridging them. Effective communication should aim to unite rather than divide; all parties should ask questions, admit when they do not know something, and use language that everyone can understand.

Additionally, there are structural misalignment issues between staff and the EJ Advisors. Staff meet and work together daily, while the EJ Advisors meet monthly, often just amongst themselves and with EJ Program staff rather than with Planning and Regulatory staff included. The two groups are not set up for consistent collaboration, and currently there is no budget available to increase the EJ Advisors' compensation for spending additional time working with staff. Consistent interaction will make communication and collaboration easier over time. The EJ Program staff can help translate and bridge these gaps, but this responsibility should not fall solely on them.

**5. Decision-making authority is tightly controlled within BCDC.**

BCDC must work within the framework of its legal authority, and staff can be hesitant to share ideas externally until they are fully vetted by legal counsel, due to litigation risks. This cautious approach, while understandable given the agency's context, can hinder relationship-building, trust, and innovation by limiting external input, including from the EJ Advisors. BCDC is a unique agency; its jurisdiction and legal authority are different from that of city, county, and most state agencies. While BCDC's work does impact environmental justice outcomes in shoreline communities, the agency does not have purview over many environmental concerns including air quality in shoreline communities and beyond. This can create confusion and frustration among communities and EJ Advisors alike. BCDC would benefit from explaining its purview more clearly so constituents understand what they can and cannot ask of the agency.

**6. Environmental justice review is not formalized in the Commission in the same way as design and engineering review.**

The EJ Advisors serve in an *advisory* capacity and are only invited into BCDC's internal process at specific times and in limited ways. Unlike the Design Review Board and Engineering Criteria Review Board, EJ Advisors are often seen as external stakeholders, lacking robust input into planning and regulatory procedures. The current structure suggests that environmental justice review is not as valued as design and engineering review.

Regulatory staff expressed a desire for more community input in the pre-application and application stages of a permitting process. However, staff have been directed not to publicly share information about active permits, and the EJ Advisors are functionally members of the public in BCDC's process. Often, by the time an application goes before



the Commission—when the EJ Advisors and public are privy to the details—it is too late for the EJ Advisors to provide meaningful input on promoting environmental justice in the project. This is something that BCDC is reconsidering as part of its Mission Based Review process, which will be completed later in 2024.

**7. The EJ Advisors can help BCDC improve its community engagement practices.**

Staff have identified the need for more resources, tools, and best practices for effective community engagement. Specifically, they seek help defining "meaningful community engagement" for permit applications. EJ Advisors can help the agency develop better definitions and guidelines for what this looks like in practice and the time and resources it takes. EJ Advisors can also identify metrics that staff can use to evaluate whether applicants' engagement has been meaningful in impacted communities. This can help developers and local jurisdictions understand what they need to demonstrate in order to comply with BCDC policy.

Additionally, the EJ Advisors can help BCDC staff conduct more meaningful community engagement themselves, recognizing that projects and plans that reflect the community's desires, culture, and needs are more likely to progress smoothly without public opposition and attract outside funding. EJ Advisors have urged that community-based organizations (CBOs) be the ones to lead outreach and engagement efforts—and that they be fairly compensated as technical experts. However, BCDC's budget lacks a dedicated line item for community engagement, and providing stipends to CBOs and community members is challenging for a state agency. Bay Adapt, the regional sea level rise adaptation project, is cited as BCDC's best example of community engagement because it is funded by grants that require strong engagement. Securing similar grants and advocating for changes to State processes to compensate CBOs for their engagement work are key opportunities moving forward. The EJ Advisors are eager to help with this work, which is central to their role, but need a clear process to avoid ad-hoc requests that are overburdening.

**8. More robust management and resources will help the program thrive.**

BCDC's EJ Program staff play a crucial intermediary role between the EJ Advisors and the staff and Commission. Unfortunately, the recent departure of the Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement has left the program understaffed once again. Although adding a NOAA Fellow for the next two years will help, more staff capacity and resources are required to fully integrate environmental justice into BCDC's operations and effectively manage the EJ Advisors program as it enters its next phase.

Internally, the EJ Advisors would benefit from more structure and defined leadership roles to achieve their goals. EJ Advisors have expressed frustration over not accomplishing more in the past two years, partly due to turnover and other situational factors, but also because of structural issues. The current ad-hoc nature of the chair role lacks sufficient accountability. Clarifying leadership roles and establishing accountability measures will enhance the group's effectiveness. This has been a key focus of the EJ Advisors and EJ Program staff in recent months. Together, they have developed a work plan for the remainder of 2024 that should serve to better integrate the EJ Advisors into BCDC's work.

The next two years are crucial for advancing the program. This may involve reallocating responsibilities, increasing EJ Program staffing beyond the NOAA Fellow, and experimenting with new working methods. While some tasks fall under the EJ Program staff's responsibilities, it is essential to avoid reinforcing silos. Integrating environmental



justice into BCDC's work is a collective responsibility, and everyone should leverage the EJ Advisors as a valuable resource.

## 4.0: Recommendations

These recommendations are designed to address the identified challenges and enhance the effectiveness and impact of the EJ Advisors program. Many of these suggestions originated during our final workshop with staff and EJ Advisors and have yet to be fully developed. As such, this document is not a definitive roadmap but rather a set of strategies for BCDC to consider to improve the EJ Advisors program moving forward.

### 4.1: Near-Term Priorities and Recommendations (July – December 2024)

#### **Recommendation #1: Formalize a leadership structure within the EJ Advisors group.**

Formalizing the leadership structure of the EJ Advisors is essential to enhance the efficiency, clarity, and impact of the program. During our engagement, we were able to identify inefficiencies within the current operating structure, and helped establish the need for well-defined leadership structure which provides a clear framework for decision-making, accountability, and communication within the group. By establishing specific roles and responsibilities, the EJ Advisors can ensure that each member understands their duties and contributions, thereby improving coordination and productivity. This structure also facilitates the effective delegation of tasks, enabling the group to tackle multiple initiatives simultaneously and more efficiently.

Moreover, a formal leadership structure fosters continuity and sustainability within the EJ Advisors program. With a documented succession plan and terms of service, the program can seamlessly transition leadership roles, reducing disruptions and maintaining momentum. Conflict resolution mechanisms and clear administrative records further support a stable and transparent environment, ensuring that any issues are addressed promptly and fairly. By formalizing the leadership structure, the EJ Advisors can build a robust foundation that supports long-term growth, resilience, and the successful fulfillment of their mission to advance environmental justice in Bay shoreline communities.

Action Item 1: <i>Finalize Internal Operating Structure of EJ Advisors</i>	The EJ Advisors and Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement should complete the EJ Advisors Program Organization Structure and Governance document.
Action Item 2: <i>Revise Policies, Procedures &amp; Processes</i>	The Senior Manager should work with EJ Leadership to elaborate on critical sections including Terms of Service, Succession Plan, Conflict Resolution, Administrative Record, and Onboarding and other important structures.
Action Item 3: <i>Clarify Roles &amp; Responsibilities</i>	The Senior Manager should revisit and clarify Roles and Responsibilities once a new Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement is hired to share responsibilities for administering the program.
Action Item 4:	The Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement should collaborate with BCDC senior staff to review

<i>Form Working Sessions with BCDC Staff</i>	and provide input on the document at a minimum of three times over the next six months.
Action Item 5: <i>Create Project Timeline</i>	Ensure the EJ Advisors finalize and adopt the structure and governance guidelines within the next 1-2 months, and before the end of calendar year 2024.

**Recommendation #2: Finalize the 2024-25 EJ Advisors work plan and establish accountability measures for its implementation.**

During our joint staff/EJ Advisors workshop, staff received a presentation on the proposed [2024-25 work plan](#). It is critical that the EJ Advisors and staff work plans align and for both groups to be aware of each other's priority projects. We recommend that select senior staff attend the July or August EJ Advisors meeting to further discuss the work plan. The Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement can collaborate with BCDC senior staff to review the work plan and compile a list of staff questions beforehand. Small breakout groups can then focus on specific project priorities, solidifying the activities, deliverables, timelines, and roles and responsibilities for each one.

The work plan is an important tool, but it will only be meaningful if it is implemented. To ensure accountability, we recommend that the EJ Advisors and/or staff provide a monthly or quarterly report on work plan progress. Given the limited time and compensation the EJ Advisors have for their BCDC work, it is imperative to maximize the time they are already committed to meeting. Consider using a portion of the monthly EJ Advisors meetings or EJ Working Group meetings for staff/EJ Advisors collaboration on shared projects.

Action Step 1: <i>Initial Review and Alignment</i>	Distribute the proposed 2024-25 work plan to all EJ Advisors and relevant staff members before the joint workshop. Conduct an alignment session during the joint staff/EJ Advisors workshop to ensure both groups understand and agree on the priority projects and goals.
Action Step 2: <i>Senior Staff Involvement</i>	Schedule select senior staff to attend the July or August EJ Advisors meeting for a detailed discussion on the work plan. The Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement should collaborate with BCDC senior staff to review the work plan and compile a list of questions and discussion points beforehand.
Action Step 3: <i>Work Plan Finalization</i>	During the meeting, organize small breakout groups to focus on specific project priorities. Each group should define activities, deliverables, timelines, and roles and responsibilities, documenting their outcomes and agreements. Compile these inputs into a comprehensive final work plan and distribute it to all EJ Advisors and staff for final review and approval.
Action Step 4: <i>Project Management</i>	The Senior Manager for Climate Equity and Community Engagement should provide detailed updates on progress, challenges, and next steps. They should also dedicate a portion of monthly EJ Advisors or EJ Working Group meetings to staff/EJ Advisor collaboration on shared projects. The use of project management tools to track progress against the work plan, ensuring transparency and accountability is essential. Finally, establish a feedback mechanism for ongoing input on the work

	plan and its implementation. Regularly share updates on work plan progress with all stakeholders to ensure transparency and keep everyone informed. This will help to enhance accountability and demonstrate commitment to the goals of the EJ Advisors program.
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**Recommendation #3: Secure additional funding to compensate EJ Advisors for more robust participation in meetings and BCDC projects.**

Given the State budget cuts, it is highly unlikely that BCDC itself can increase the stipends. However, we recommend that BCDC leadership request a meeting with the RLF to explore the possibility of additional funding and/or identify 2-3 other potential funders interested in supporting the program. Potential funders include The Water Foundation, the Rose Foundation, the San Francisco Foundation, the Kataly Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Gordon and Betty Moore Foundation, Sobrato Philanthropies, and local community foundations. If appropriate, consider asking RLF to conduct the initial outreach. Funder-to-funder communications and leveraging RLF's investment may be appealing to new funders.

Action Step 1: <i>Identify Potential Funders</i>	Compile a list of potential funders interested in supporting the EJ Advisors program.
Action Step 2: <i>Meeting with RLF and other agencies</i>	Request and conduct a meeting with the Resources Legacy Fund (RLF) and other identified organizations to explore additional funding opportunities and gather insights on approaching other potential funders.
Action Step 3: <i>Conduct Outreach</i>	Develop and execute an outreach strategy to engage identified potential funders, leveraging RLF's network and support for initial outreach if appropriate.
Action Step 4: <i>Secure Commitments</i>	Follow up with contacted funders, addressing questions and building relationships to secure funding commitments.

**Recommendation #4: Invite the EJ Advisors to train BCDC staff on environmental justice principles and practices.**

If possible, host the training in person, allowing ample time for group discussions and socializing. While generic environmental justice training resources are available online, we recommend leveraging the EJ Advisors' expertise and their understanding of how BCDC's work impacts Bay shoreline communities. If the training can be recorded, it can be used as a future onboarding tool for new staff and Commissioners.

Action Step 1: <i>Plan Training Session</i>	Invite the EJ Advisors to design and conduct a training session for BCDC staff on environmental justice principles and practices. Emphasize leveraging their expertise and understanding of BCDC's impact on Bay shoreline communities. Coordinate with EJ Advisors to develop the training agenda and materials.
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Action Step 2: <i>Schedule In-Person Training</i>	Organize the training to be hosted in person, if possible. Ensure the session includes ample time for group discussions, Q&A, and socializing to foster a deeper understanding and engagement among participants. Arrange a suitable venue and necessary logistics.
Action Step 3: <i>Record the Training</i>	Arrange for the training session to be recorded, ensuring high-quality audio and video. This recording will serve as a valuable onboarding tool for future staff and Commissioners, enabling consistent training over time.
Action Step 4: <i>Supplement with Online Resources</i>	Incorporate environmental justice training resources available online to supplement the EJ Advisors' training. Provide these resources as pre-reading materials or additional references to offer a comprehensive understanding of environmental justice principles.
Action Step 5: <i>Follow-Up and Feedback</i>	After the training, gather feedback from participants to assess the effectiveness of the session and identify areas for improvement. Use this feedback to refine future training sessions and ensure continuous improvement.

#### ***4.2: Longer-Term Priorities and Recommendations (July 2024 – Indefinite)***

##### **Host another in-person meeting for staff and EJ Advisors before the end of the year.**

If possible, we recommend hosting at least two in-person meetings per year to foster ongoing relationship-building, skill development, and collaboration. A small steering committee of staff and EJ Advisors could be tasked with developing the agenda and content for each meeting. Participants at our joint staff/EJ Advisors workshop noted that they had never had the opportunity to sit down together in that way before. We hope it won't be another 1-2 years before they can do it again.

##### **Finalize the process for gathering more community input during the pre-application and application stages of the permitting process.**

BCDC staff and leadership have been thoughtfully considering this over the past few months. We recommend making this a top priority and sharing the agency's proposed approach with the EJ Advisors as soon as possible, preferably before the end of the year.

##### **Identify a subset of EJ Advisors to collaborate with EJ and Regulatory staff on formalizing a definition and guidelines for “meaningful community engagement” in permit applications.**

While this task may take more than six months to complete due to other priorities, we recommend at least identifying the team members and setting a timeline for this work. There is consensus that this is a high priority for staff and an area where the EJ Advisors can be very helpful. Prioritizing this work over the next 6-12 months will demonstrate accountability to BCDC's environmental justice and social equity goals, and it will provide an opportunity for EJ Advisors and Regulatory staff to deepen their relationships.

### **Clarify roles, responsibilities, and expectations for EJ Advisors and BCDC staff.**

To enhance collaboration and alignment, collaboratively create an annual work plan with complementary roles for both staff and EJ Advisors by involving each group in the other's planning process. Clearly define the working relationships between EJ Advisors, staff, and the Commission, continuously seeking alignment and synergy. Additionally, develop a thorough onboarding process for new EJ Advisors to ensure they are well-equipped and integrated into the team. These steps will strengthen collaboration, improve efficiency, and enhance the overall impact of the program.

### **Enhance communication channels and move away from an “us vs. them” narrative.**

Recognize that environmental justice is a shared value and goal among staff and EJ Advisors, despite different understandings and philosophical approaches. Provide training on environmental justice principles, conflict resolution, othering and belonging, and cross-cultural communication. Host an annual strategy, networking, and social event to build relationships among staff and EJ Advisors. Explore opportunities for peer learning groups to facilitate knowledge sharing, skill development, and collaboration. Bring in trusted mediators to address issues when needed.

### **Increase transparency in decision-making amongst BCDC staff and leadership.**

Integrate the EJ Advisors more deeply into the process, treating them as thought partners rather than external stakeholders. Share early-stage ideas with them, trusting that not everything needs to be fully vetted before their input. Weave the principles of environmental justice into agency practices wherever possible.

### **Enhance the environmental justice review of permit applications.**

Explore ways to formalize an environmental justice review as part of the pre-application process. Assess whether applicants have conducted equitable, meaningful community engagement during the pre-application process. Analyze the environmental justice impacts at the end of the permitting process. Engage in strategic planning for an evolving legal landscape and explore plan amendments to incorporate environmental justice.

### **Focus on enhancing community engagement.**

Identify metrics for staff to evaluate whether applicants' engagement has been meaningful in impacted communities. Outline the necessary resources and timeline for permit applicants to work with CBOs in frontline communities. Recommend specific CBOs for applicants to engage with in targeted communities. Review materials for community accessibility and cultural relevance. Invite staff to attend community meetings to listen and learn.

### **Foster a culture of collaboration, inclusivity, and equity within the BCDC.**

Prioritize meaningful participation and representation of diverse voices, including frontline community members. Create white papers and legal documents to highlight the environmental justice impacts of BCDC's work. Originate new projects with participation from both staff and EJ Advisors. Conduct regular program evaluations and impact assessments to measure progress and ensure accountability. Foster a collaborative “inside-outside” strategy among staff and EJ Advisors to accomplish shared goals, seeing one another as allies.

## 5.0: Next Steps

BCDC's EJ Advisors program, the first among coastal management agencies, holds immense potential. Staff and EJ Advisors can create a culture of collaboration, rigor, continuous improvement, and equity within BCDC, setting a model for coastal management agencies in California and beyond. This work is challenging and non-linear, offering a chance to learn, improve, and avoid past mistakes. The investment of time and resources into this assessment and the wholehearted participation of EJ Advisors and staff show promise for progress. We hope this process has opened new lines of communication, identified actionable strategies for change, and reinforced that integrating environmental justice throughout BCDC is a shared and valuable goal. MIG and Benchmarq, of course, are willing and able to help guide the BCDC on the next phase of additional training and development in pursuit of these recommendations. Our hope is that BCDC can maintain momentum and commitment to implement the recommendations of this assessment. By fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement, BCDC can pave the way for innovative and inclusive practices that benefit all communities along the Bay shoreline.