



# CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

## NOAA COASTAL MANAGEMENT FELLOW PROGRAM

Application for 2022 - 2024:

*Enhancing Meaningful Engagement with Affected Coastal Communities*



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## **1. Background and Introduction**

Since 1977, the California Coastal Commission has worked to uphold the Coastal Act, a statute grounded in the principles of public inclusion and equity. The agency, which has regulatory and permitting responsibilities over development within the 1,271-mile coastal zone, has had numerous victories over the years. Despite this, the statute's vision of coastal protection and access for all people has not been fully realized. Concern remains that historically much of the Commission's work has been largely shaped by coastal residential, commercial, and industrial landowners, without adequate consideration of those whose lives and livelihoods are connected to our coast through their labor, recreation, and cultural practices but who cannot afford to live on the coast. Generations of injustices towards California's Native American communities, people of color, and other marginalized populations through forms of discriminatory land use policies, desecration of sacred lands and cultural resources, and concentration of environmental pollution has resulted in inequitable distribution of environmental benefits and burdens that still disproportionately impact these communities today. Taking an environmental justice (EJ) approach to coastal policy requires a fundamental rethinking of who is connected to the coast, and how.

In 2016, the California Legislature amended the Coastal Act to give the agency authority to go beyond traditional environmental considerations and specifically consider EJ issues when making permit decisions. Three years later in 2019, the Commission adopted its Environmental Justice Policy (EJ Policy) to provide guidance and clarity for commissioners, staff, and the public on how the agency would apply this new authority. The policy spells out how the agency will implement and integrate the principles of environmental justice, equality, and social equity into all aspects of the Coastal Commission's program and operations. During the same period, the agency adopted a Tribal Consultation Policy aimed at improving consultation with tribes. The Commission also drafted a racial equity action plan to integrate the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the agency's internal workplace environment, which led to the establishment of the agency's Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) team. In 2020, this work culminated in the Commission adopting a new five-year Strategic Plan to prioritize actionable goals and increase public accountability to ensure the agency continues to make progress on its EJ and Tribal Consultation Policies and internal racial equity action plan.

While the Commission has worked steadily to implement these policies, there is more to do than agency resources can handle and staff have struggled to make progress on several priority goals, such as establishing proactive meaningful engagement with affected communities and tribes and considering EJ in sea level rise adaptation planning. For the 2022 National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Coastal Management Fellowship, the Commission seeks a fellow to be integrated as a core staff member with the statewide EJ unit. The fellow will play a critical leadership role in building out the Commission's priorities in its EJ Policy for enhanced engagement with affected communities, from partnering with EJ leaders and groups, to developing educational and outreach materials, to establishing protocols for disseminating and receiving that information. As a core member of the EJ unit, the fellow will also work with the agency's tribal liaison team to further the agency's implementation of its Tribal

Consultation and EJ Policies. Meaningful engagement is a central component of achieving environmental justice for communities and tribes, who disproportionately experience environmental burdens and are often left out of the decision-making process. The fellow's work will fill a critical gap in efforts to make greater progress on the priority areas.

The fellow will also play a central role in the EJ unit's work on integrating environmental justice into sea level rise adaptation planning. Sea level rise adaptation is a high-priority issue for the Coastal Commission. However, the intersection between EJ issues and sea level rise impacts, how that might shift in the future, and how these issues can be addressed through coastal planning and permitting are not well understood. The fellow will help with this by working on how to integrate the principles of environmental justice into state and local adaptation planning efforts, including local planning policies. These themes of building resilient communities through planning and permitting, and supporting resilient communities and public access in the face of sea level rise were included in the agency's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan and its 309 Assessment and Strategy. The fellow would be fully integrated in moving these goals and strategies forward.

## **2. Goals and Objectives**

The goal of the Commission's NOAA Coastal Management Fellow proposal is to create resources, training materials, and policy guidance critical for the agency's long-term implementation of its EJ and Tribal Consultation Policies. The fellow will also add capacity to the Commission's ability to carry forward key projects within the Commission's climate change and sea level rise planning and regulatory work, particularly with regard to the intersection between EJ, climate change, sea level rise planning, and resilience. As such, policy research and tasks related to these issues will be another component of the fellow's workplan, and will be co-developed with the fellow based on the interests and skill sets they bring to the position.

Objectives for this proposal include:

- 1) Create a **meaningful engagement toolkit** of resources for the agency, including a stakeholder database and key priorities and needs for local, regional, and statewide EJ advocates as well as protocols for disseminating this informational material in an easily understood form for EJ communities impacted by coastal development projects.
- 2) Develop **training and guidance materials to integrate toolkit resources** in the agency's regulatory review and analysis of EJ in projects.
- 3) Work collaboratively with California Native American Tribes to better understand the significance of local and regional cultural concerns, including collecting data and learning from indigenous peoples' unique historical, cultural, and ecological knowledge of California's land and resources to **enhance implementation of Tribal Consultation Policy** on issues that overlap with EJ concerns.
- 4) Develop **policy guidance and training materials on addressing EJ and equity in sea level rise planning** for the Commission and local governments.

### **3. Milestones and Outcomes**

Phase 1: August 2022 – January 2023 (Months 1-6): Review and understand existing Coastal Commission, EJ, tribal consultation, and sea level rise planning products and information. Become oriented to the Commission’s existing community engagement practices. Conduct needs assessment for the meaningful engagement toolkit and begin relationship-building. Complete fellow work plan. Some travel throughout the state may be necessary during this phase to support the needs assessment. Travel expenses will be covered by the host.

Phase 2: January 2023-December 2023 (Months 7-18): Draft toolkit components, including engagement protocols to better connect the public, applicants, staff, and affected EJ and tribal stakeholders on issues of importance. Begin developing guidance and/or trainings to aid the Commission and local governments in using toolkit materials to engage affected communities on project-specific issues. Conduct outreach scoping on issues of interest on the intersection of EJ and sea level rise and begin development of the agency’s Sea Level Rise and EJ Policy Guidance. Review and revise fellow workplan. Travel to district offices and meet with community groups. Travel expenses will be covered by the host.

Phase 3: January 2024-August 2024 (Months 19-24): Work with EJ unit and district staff to implement and iterate on meaningful engagement toolkit protocols. Document lessons learned and update toolkit accordingly. Finalize guidance and/or trainings, including the Sea Level Rise and EJ Policy Guidance. Traveling to district offices and meeting with community groups is likely during this phase. Site visits related to specific projects that raise EJ issues may also occur. Travel expenses will be covered by the host.

Final Products: (1) Engagement Needs Assessment Summary; (2) Meaningful Engagement Toolkit, including updated stakeholder database, engagement protocols, and outreach and educational materials; (3) Guidance and/or trainings on toolkit for district staff and local governments; (4) Sea Level Rise and EJ Policy Guidance; (5) fellow work plan; and (6) additional training and/or guidance materials related to emerging issues of concern (to be developed based on fellow interest and agency priorities).

### **4. Project Description**

The fellow will complete the project in three phases. Phase 1 will focus on fellow orientation and conducting an engagement needs assessment to better understand outreach and engagement gaps. The second phase of the fellowship will be focused on developing the meaningful engagement toolkit, including creating training materials for staff and developing engagement resources to support tribal consultation efforts. The fellow will primarily be working with the agency’s statewide EJ Unit but will also work collaboratively with the Federal Programs Manager, Statewide Planning Unit, and the agency’s Tribal Liaisons. The fellow will assess agency engagement needs, build relationships with EJ communities and California Native American Tribes, and identify EJ issues and tribal concerns in coastal development permitting. The fellow will create an updated stakeholder database and begin developing engagement

protocols. In addition, the fellow will be researching and writing on best engagement practices and emerging EJ topic areas (e.g., offshore wind, homelessness, and affordable housing) to enhance the Commission and local government's ability to consider EJ in projects. The third phase will be spent testing and implementing engagement protocols and working closely with community groups and Commission staff on project-specific outreach. Woven throughout the duration of the two-year fellowship, the fellow will also conduct outreach and research on the intersection of EJ and sea level rise. The fellow will play a primary role drafting Commission guidance on addressing EJ in sea level rise planning, developing a plan for gathering public input, and preparing the guidance for adoption by the Commission.

**Phase 1 (Months 1-6) – Orientation, Review Background Materials; Conduct Meaningful Engagement Needs Assessment; Develop Fellow Work Plan**

Mentors will orient the fellow to the Coastal Commission and its staff, laws and policies, and the regulatory processes governing development in the coastal zone. The fellow will also review information such as staff reports that illustrate the breadth of projects and issues that come before the agency. This includes materials that address EJ and tribal issues, the Coastal Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, the agency's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, and other key documents. The fellow will also review materials for sea level rise planning. Finally, the fellow will be introduced to the EJ unit, tribal liaison team, JEDI team, sea level rise team, and will be included in ongoing monthly meetings.

During this initial phase of the project, the fellow will also be introduced to the EJ Policy and Tribal Consultation Policy, as well as the existing materials and resources the EJ unit has developed. The fellow will familiarize themselves with the Commission's current approach to outreach and engagement with affected communities as well as district staff work on EJ issues, including understanding the agency's approach to tribal consultation and intersections with EJ. Once familiar with the existing resources, the fellow will connect with district staff, community groups, and other stakeholders to conduct an engagement needs assessment for project-specific and statewide issues to better understand outreach and engagement gaps. Phase 1 will also include development of a two-year work plan that reflects the fellow's interests and skills, including the potential for engaging on other Commission projects as interest and time allows, which will be updated at least every six months.

**Phase 2 (Months 7-18) – Develop Meaningful Engagement Toolkit Components; Conduct Research and Writing on Intersections of EJ and Sea Level Rise**

Building on the needs assessment conducted in Phase 1, the fellow will continue to build relationships with EJ stakeholders and California Native American Tribes to understand their priorities and develop and refine protocols and tools to assist in EJ engagement efforts and tribal consultation. The fellow will also do a deep dive into the Commission's existing contact lists to better understand who is on the current list, who might need to be engaged and added, and how to organize contacts based on the type of engagement and information they might need based on project type and/or location. Following this, the fellow will develop components for the toolkit, including an updated stakeholder database,

engagement protocols, and other materials. During this phase the fellow will also conduct research and writing tasks on EJ and sea level rise. This work will include hosting stakeholder engagement workshops and listening sessions on sea level rise and EJ intersections in preparation for drafting the Commission's Environmental Justice and Sea Level Rise Policy Guidance.

### **Phase 3 (Months 19-24) – Finalize Meaningful Engagement Toolkit, Trainings, and Sea Level Rise and Environmental Justice Policy Guidance; Finalize Long-term Meaningful Engagement Protocols**

The final phase of the fellowship will be dedicated to using the protocols developed for the meaningful engagement toolkit with district staff, applicants, and affected communities on project-specific bases. This phase will be designed to gather lessons learned and update the toolkit's protocols, resources, and materials accordingly. This iteration phase will also include development of a system to update the toolkit regularly. In this phase the fellow will also work to finalize select drafts of guidance and/or trainings, including a public review draft of the Commission Sea Level Rise and Environmental Justice Policy Guidance. This phase will include fellow presentations and trainings to Commission staff, local governments, and other stakeholders and/or tribal representatives, as appropriate to gather lessons learned and iterate on the toolkit components.

The candidate's work during their fellowship will live on after the program ends in several ways. The fellow will work closely with the various units to develop protocols, materials, and guidance that will be used by agency staff for years to come. The EJ unit will also develop a plan with the fellow that will guide next steps to finalize and prepare the Sea Level Rise and Environmental Justice Policy Guidance for adoption and implementation by the agency and local government partners.

### **5. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice**

The project objectives seek to advance the principles of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice by conducting needs assessments and working with stakeholders and targeted communities to enhance and expand the Commission's meaningful engagement with underserved communities. The fellow will also work with the Commission's tribal liaisons to improve relationship with California Native American Tribes. The development of the toolkit will result in protocols and materials that will aid in project scoping and development outcomes that enhance the Commissions' and local governments' ability to consider EJ in projects, permitting, and planning. Through this work the fellow will take a leadership role in engaging with and supporting underserved and historically marginalized communities; reducing procedural barriers to participating in the Commission's regulatory process these communities face, including by broadening access to information; and analyzing and addressing the needs of EJ communities related to coastal hazards and public access.

### **6. Fellow Mentoring**

The Commission has a very strong and proven commitment to NOAA's Coastal Management Fellowship Program as demonstrated by the many fellows the agency has had over the course of the program. The agency is facing a steady number of retirements over the next three to five years and we are looking for

new staff to carry on the Commission's important mission under the Coastal Act. The program has introduced exceptional candidates to the Commission, which has hired many of its fellows.

The supervising mentor will be the Commission's Federal Programs Manager Ashley Reineman, with supporting mentorship and project supervision from Environmental Justice Manager Sumi Selvaraj and Communications Director Noaki Schwartz. The supervising mentor will be responsible for the fellow and provide project direction, time management, and guidance as the candidate works with other Commission staff members on the EJ Policy and Tribal Consultation Policy implementation and other tasks. The supporting mentors and project supervisor, as well as project team members, will be available for day-to-day management of specific tasks and activities and coordination assistance amongst agency staff and with outside partners. The fellow will have the opportunity to meet with the supervising mentor on a regular basis during which time the mentor will review completed work, update the fellow's work plan as needed, and facilitate collaboration with other agency staff. The fellow will also have direct and frequent access to other mentors and project team members for direction and guidance.

This project offers a challenging and exciting opportunity for professional development as an integral member of the EJ unit, a small interdisciplinary team that was formed in 2020. In addition to overseeing the agency's EJ and Tribal Policy implementation, the unit also supports the agency's JEDI team. The fellow will be included in all JEDI team meetings and initiatives. The fellow will also have the opportunity to collaborate with other Commission staff members working closely with community groups and individuals, California Native American Tribes, local jurisdictions, and other partners to include EJ into planning and regulatory decision making. The fellow will have specific responsibilities and is expected to complete the tasks as outlined in the project description to help fill critical gaps in the Commission's EJ, tribal relations, and climate change work.

The fellow will be considered a member of the team and included in all opportunities offered to the Commission's professional staff. The fellow will have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to the Commission's broader tribal consultation efforts and climate work, including various special projects such as coastal adaptation planning guidance documents and outreach and education on sea level rise and adaptation strategies. This work could extend to multi-state agency collaborative efforts including the State's SLR Leadership Team, the Coastal States Organization (CSO) Adaptation Work Group, and others. The fellow will also have access to training and educational materials provided by the Commission as well as other professional development opportunities outside of the agency and through conversations about the fellow's interests and professional development goals. The fellow will be supported and guided in ways to meet those goals during their two years at the agency.

## **7. Office Environment**

While NOAA fellows have traditionally been located in the Commission's headquarters in San Francisco, since the COVID-19 pandemic most of agency's staff has been working from home. When it is safe to return to the office, the fellow could be based at our headquarters, or in one of our district offices such

as Ventura or Long Beach where there is a supervising mentor. The Commission is currently developing a telework policy so the fellow may be able to work both from home and the office as a part of a hybrid work structure. The agency is actively developing its telework policy pursuant to a state telework policy requirement. Regardless of location, the fellow may need to travel to meet with staff in other offices and with other state agency representatives, community groups, local governments, etc. Extent of travel will depend on available budget, scheduling constraints, and other factors. The fellow will be expected to check-in weekly or bi-monthly with the supervising mentor and will be included in standing meetings for all applicable projects. The fellow will be included in all virtual and in-person all-staff, or district-specific office meetings and gatherings. The Commission will provide networking opportunities with sister agencies and through conferences, when available. If the fellow is working from home, they will be provided with all necessary hardware and software to ensure their successful completion of the project, including a laptop, keyboard, mouse, and monitor.

### **8. Project Partners**

This project will be highly interactive and require contact with a broad range of experts including EJ and tribal stakeholders, local, state, and federal agency staff, academics, and others. The fellow will be expected to work with all these groups to get their input and feedback on the Phase 2 and Phase 3 products as described. The fellow will participate in a monthly EJ partnership call hosted by NOAA's West Coast Office for Coastal Management and will have the opportunity to meet and collaborate with team leads for EJ and JEDI efforts at sister agencies, including the Ocean Protection Council, San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission, State Coastal Conservancy, and State Lands Commission. There may also be opportunities to work with other federal agency partners such as the United States Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other entities like the CSO, California and University of Southern California Sea Grant.

### **9. Cost-Share Description**

The \$15,000 cost-sharing element of this proposal will be funded from the Coastal Commission's California Coastal Management Program federal assistance under the Coastal Zone Management Act. In addition, the state will provide the fellow with other in-kind services, including office space and general supplies, computer equipment, training and mentoring, telephone, and some travel costs, depending on budgetary constraints. The Commission will prepare its federal grant budget to ensure that the \$15,000 is available for the fellow over the two-year period. If the fellow is based in the agency's headquarters office, the Commission will also provide a monthly public transit subsidy equal to what is given to state employees if needed.

### **10. Strategic Focus Area**

The proposed project addresses multiple components of all three Strategic Focus Areas. Under "Healthy Coastal Ecosystems" the fellowship will help "engage and convene meaningful partnerships with federal, state, territorial, and local agencies, as well as nongovernmental organizations . . . to . . . address the scope and scale of coastal ecosystem challenges" and "increase and enhance opportunities for the

public . . . to understand and appreciate coastal ecosystems, and motivate community involvement in resource management” by conducting needs assessments and working with stakeholders and targeted communities to enhance and expand the Commission’s outreach and engagement with EJ communities.

Under “Resilient Coastal Communities,” the fellowship will “increase understanding of the equity issues that arise as communities face coastal hazard and climate impacts, and foster inclusion and meaningful assistance for all” as well as “provide coastal hazard- and climate change-related . . . guidance, training, and technical assistance to people working to enhance community resilience and to communicate risk to the public” by analyzing and addressing the needs of EJ communities related to coastal hazards and public access and developing guidance on the policy approaches to EJ and sea level rise planning.

Finally, under “Vibrant and Sustainable Coastal Economies” the fellowship will “increase the understanding of the social and economic implications of coastal and ocean management approaches” and “protect economic investments along the coast, including important ecological, cultural, and historical areas, for public enjoyment” through development of a meaningful engagement toolkit. This will result in protocols and materials that will aid in project scoping and development outcomes in the coastal zone that enhance the Commissions’ and local governments’ ability to consider EJ in projects, permitting, and planning pursuant to Section 30604(h) of the Coastal Act.