

# 10 IDEAS

**FOR BUILDING COLLABORATION  
among environmental justice  
communities, publicly owned electric  
utilities, and public water agencies**

# I. INTRODUCTION



Addressing environmental justice concerns in state and local policymaking is an issue of growing interest in California and one that impacts publicly owned electric utilities (POUs) and public water/wastewater agencies and their customers in a variety of ways. Many issues have evolved over time as a result of external actions out of the control of water and electric agencies. Today those agencies are recognized as part of the solution to address community-wide concerns. Developing a suite of potential actions that can help ensure environmental justice policies are effective and accurately reflect the needs of local communities is an objective that would benefit California.

This policy paper examines ideas where POU, public water/wastewater agencies, and environmental justice advocates can work together at the local and state levels to establish and advance mutually beneficial goals that address environmental justice while supporting affordable, reliable, and sustainable electric and water service that directly benefits local communities.<sup>i</sup>

Publicly owned electric utilities (POUs) and public water/wastewater agencies are not-for-profit local government entities that provide the essential services of electricity, water, and/or sewer. These local agencies serve California's diverse communities — varied in geographic, socioeconomic, political, and racial/ethnic composition; urban, rural, and desert lands; and widely different income levels, environmental justice challenges, and regional affordability. To address regional differences in populations served, POU and water service providers work with their elected governing boards and members of the community to maintain reliable and affordable service for all their customers, including, as possible, offering programs to serve the needs of a particular subset of customers.

Furthermore, requirements of the California state constitution, state and federal law, regulatory policy, and regional differences all can significantly impact the decisions made by locally elected and appointed governing boards of POU and public water/wastewater agencies. The diversity of the communities served by POU and public water/wastewater agencies is an important consideration when it comes to policy and decision-making because a one-size-fits-all approach to decision-making does not serve all Californians equally. The staff and governing boards of the state's POU and public water/wastewater

agencies understand this important distinction and seek to implement programs that are customized to the needs of the customers and residents within their specific service territories. They are laser-focused on serving their entire communities and meeting their needs.

One important part of the local decision-making process is incorporating the perspectives and addressing the issues affecting low-income and disadvantaged communities (DACs). Environmental justice advocates often share these perspectives and concerns, particularly those around equitable access to resources and affordability, with the public power, water, and sewer industries. Their goals often align with the goals of POU and public water/wastewater agencies, but frequently there are legal limitations, competing policy objectives, and/or funding gaps that inherently limit advancing some of these jointly held goals. While public agencies did not create the legal limitations and policy objectives, they are faced with challenges inherent in adapting to the conflicting needs. There is room for better coordination and understanding between environmental justice advocates and public utilities/agencies; however, it requires commitment and resources to improve coordination and understanding, and to build strategic partnerships.

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<sup>i</sup> The views expressed in this paper are meant to be suggestions when technologically, organizationally, and fiscally feasible for POU and public water/wastewater agencies.





## II. THE CONCEPT OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

According to the Pacific Institute, the idea of environmental justice “contextualizes the environmental conditions that threaten the physical, social, economic, or environmental health and well-being” of communities by pointing out “patterns of racism, classism, and other forms of discrimination.”<sup>1</sup> The “modern [environmental justice] movement emerged [from] social justice activism in the 1970s [and] gained momentum from grassroots struggles around the country to protect community lands and people from pollutants.”<sup>2</sup> The movement continues to challenge environmental decision-making by ensuring the “voices of those most affected by environmental decisions are involved in a transparent decision-making process.”<sup>3</sup>

While there are a variety of perspectives on what the term *environmental justice* means, it generally describes how people of color and low-income communities have borne disproportionate harm from air, water and solid-waste emissions, and how certain federal/state governmental systems and policies may play a role in perpetuating those inequities. The academic study of environmental justice illuminates links between environmental

degradation and inequity. It also helps to explain why low-income communities and communities of color bear disproportionate environmental burdens. For example, for a variety of reasons, communities of color are more likely to live adjacent to facilities with emissions, such as fossil fuel power plants, oil refineries, agricultural production, landfills, and transportation corridors.

**Many issues have evolved over time as a result of external actions out of the control of water and electric agencies. Today those agencies are recognized as part of the solution to address community-wide concerns.**

The concept of environmental justice cannot be confined to a single definition but the federal and state government agencies have codified definitions to form policies which we will explore in the next section. In practice however, the understanding of environmental justice varies from community to community

because low-income communities throughout a single region may face different harms. Therefore, a one-size-fits-all approach to incorporating environmental justice concerns will address some issues but is unlikely to resolve all of them.

To explore this further, it is important to examine how federal/state government agencies, state law, and academia define environmental justice and how the concept is woven into California policymaking.



**3,000**  
community  
water systems in  
California



**46**  
publicly owned  
electric utilities  
(POUs) in  
California



**9.3 MILLION**  
Californians live in  
a disadvantaged  
community

### III. DEFINITIONS OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



Given there are varying notions of environmental justice, it is helpful to understand how academia and federal, state, and local governments define it. As the environmental justice movement has evolved, federal and state agencies have adopted varied definitions to help direct agency policies, regulations, and actions.

A definition of environmental justice was codified in California law in 1999.<sup>4</sup> Notably, the state's environmental agencies tend to define environmental justice in terms of persons; however, the California State Legislature defines environmental justice in terms of persons *and* actions that have yet to be completed.

Other adopted definitions of environmental justice at the state and federal levels also can influence California state policy.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA)<sup>ii</sup> defines environmental justice as:

“the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. This goal will be achieved when everyone enjoys: the same degree of protection from environmental health hazards, and equal access to the decision-making process to have a healthy environment in which to live, learn, and work.”<sup>5</sup>

**The concepts of environmental justice are woven throughout California regulatory agency policies, and it influences almost all regulatory decision-making within the water and electricity sectors.**

Similarly, the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) defines environmental justice as:

“fairness, regardless of race, color, national origin or income, in the development of laws and regulations that affect every community's natural surroundings, and the places people live, work, play and learn.”<sup>6</sup>

The California Legislature also recognized the importance of environmental justice by codifying a definition in California Government Code section 65040.12(e)<sup>iii</sup>, which defines environmental justice as:

“the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and incomes with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”<sup>7</sup>

From an academic perspective, the Center for Regional Change at University of California, Davis, views environmental justice as:

“a field of study and action that addresses the inequitable distribution of environmental hazards and opportunities, examining its effects on low-income communities, and communities of color. [Environmental justice] also promotes the inclusion of disadvantaged populations in meaningful participation and decision-making about the environment.”<sup>8</sup>

ii The USEPA goes even further in its environmental justice definition to explain fair treatment and meaningful involvement. Fair treatment means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental, and commercial operations or policies. Meaningful involvement means people have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that affect their environment and/or health.

iii Originally adopted by SB 115 (1999) and amended by AB 1628 (2019).

## IV. HOW ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IMPACTS STATE WATER AND ENERGY POLICY



Although there are varying definitions, the concepts of environmental justice are woven throughout California regulatory agency policies, and it influences almost all regulatory decision-making within the water and electricity sectors. State legislators have increased attention given to environmental justice through legislative actions in the water and electricity sectors; those legislative actions direct focus on addressing disproportionate impacts borne by DACs within California's water and energy regulatory settings. Public agencies adapt to changing law and policy within means available, but these agencies have inherent limitations with regard to ensuring access to water and energy and moderating utility rates reflective of providing service. At times, the demands at the state level cannot easily be translated to action at the local level.

In the water sector, the focus has been on ensuring equal access to safe and affordable water. In the electric sector, the focus has been on ensuring equitable access to clean and renewable resources and energy efficient technologies, reducing power plant emissions, maintaining affordable energy rates, and acquiring funding to support energy efficient projects and programs in low-income communities. The water/energy policies adopted to address these overall concerns work in tandem with environmental justice policies implemented to ensure fairness and inclusion of all races, cultures, and incomes.

Despite recent progress, the policies established in each sector — water and energy — during the past few decades leave room for additional collaboration and understanding, as explored below.

### A. Water Policy and Environmental Justice

In 2012, the California Legislature passed AB 685<sup>9</sup>, codifying the Human Right to Water (HR2W) principle. The HR2W<sup>10</sup> specifies that:

- (a) "It is hereby declared to be the established policy of the state that every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable, and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking, and sanitary purposes.

- (b) All relevant state agencies, including the Department of Water Resources, the state board, and the State Department of Public Health, shall consider this state policy when revising, adopting, or establishing policies, regulations and grant criteria when those policies, regulations, and criteria are pertinent to the uses of water described in this section.
- (c) This section does not expand any obligation of the state to provide water or to require the expenditure of additional resources to develop water infrastructure beyond the obligations that may exist pursuant to subdivision (b).
- (d) This section shall not apply to water supplies for new development.
- (e) The implementation of this section shall not infringe on the rights or responsibilities of any public water system."

**... the policies established in each sector — water and energy — during the past few decades leave room for additional collaboration and understanding ...**

State legislators codified this broad water policy to help ensure that state policies recognize the need for equitable access to safe and affordable water among marginalized and low-income communities. These elements — equitable access and affordability — have been incorporated in state action and are considered when establishing new policies. Beyond

those elements, every component of HR2W needs to be adhered to in order to ensure the parties the policy aims to protect are receiving the intended consequences of the policy.

Since the HR2W was adopted a decade ago, progress has been made to secure access to clean water for marginalized and low-income communities and people of color. California has initiated efforts that monitor the accessibility of water pursuant to the HR2W; although imperfect, the efforts demonstrated the state's attempt to assess impacts. For example, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) was enlisted to develop a tool assessing the status of water quality, accessibility, and affordability across the state. The Human Right to Water Framework and Data Tool (CalHRTW), which was made available in January 2021, "presents a baseline assessment that evaluates the degrees to

which individual water systems deliver, clean, safe, affordable, and reliable water to their customers.”<sup>iii</sup>

Similarly, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) finalized a tool, along with recommendations, to support small water systems and rural communities which include many DACs and low-income communities, that are most at risk during a drought.<sup>12</sup> Over a two-year period, DWR held meetings to learn from stakeholder experiences about what puts small water systems and rural communities at higher risk of water shortages and what is needed to build drought resiliency. The final report<sup>iv</sup>, released in March 2021, was intended to spur efforts that reduce the risk of inadequate water supply amid a drought, and the report led to SB 552,<sup>13</sup> requiring small water suppliers to develop Water Shortage Contingency Plans and other drought-planning elements. Despite these state policies and actions geared toward ensuring access to water is guaranteed to all, fundamental challenges cannot be overcome such as water supply shortages, dry conditions increasing water demand, and aging infrastructure limiting efficiency of water delivery. The burden of overcoming these fundamental challenges is often borne by public water agencies.

The HR2W also tasks environmental agencies to consider water affordability, which includes affordability at the tap for customers and affordability of the system overall. Notably, the California state constitution limits rate development by public water/wastewater agencies, which can impact affordability. Proposition 218 (1996)<sup>14</sup> governing “property-related” fees or charges effectively limits how a public agency sets retail water rates. Public water/wastewater agencies are required to set rates proportionally: rates cannot be higher than what it costs to provide the water service. Compliance with legal requirements also impacts the cost of providing water service. Within their authority, public water agencies keep water rates as low as possible to be consistent with HR2W.

While state agencies have limited influence on how public water agencies set water rates, they have explored avenues to assist public water agencies in ensuring rates are affordable. For example, the California Public Utilities Commission’s (CPUC) affordability proceeding looked at measuring affordability across utilities.<sup>15</sup> The State Water Resources Control Board likely will use the

information learned, and resulting decision from the proceeding, in forthcoming regulatory actions that inevitably will impact public water/wastewater agency rates.

Development of these recent tools and policies pushes the dial toward achieving the HR2W in those areas of California where the principle has not been met; however, more can be done to attain equity in water access and affordability. Stronger state investments that would help public water agencies to comply with regulatory requirements could alleviate pressures and enable more attention to promoting low-income payment assistance programs. It is crucial to ensure that the funding set aside by the Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Fund (SB 200)<sup>16</sup> to address the drinking water needs of low-income Californians does reach communities in need as soon as possible. Beyond exploring affordability factors, getting state funding into the hands of communities is a key strategy, as is working collaboratively to develop sustainable, long-term solutions that utilize expertise from POU and public water/wastewater agencies. Additionally, future policy and legislation needs to ensure better planning, preparedness, and protection of water access for vulnerable small water systems and rural communities during periods of drought.

## **B. Energy Policy and Environmental Justice**

There is a nexus between climate change, public health, and air quality — in particular, the specific criteria pollutants that result from fossil fuel combustion, as well as from other sources.<sup>v</sup> Climate change is also making low-income and disadvantaged communities more vulnerable to extreme weather, natural disasters, and other weather impacts.<sup>17</sup> Measurable air quality hazards can have direct impacts on residents’ health through exposure to criteria air pollutants. At the same time, climate change solutions can improve air quality by addressing these criteria pollutants: for example, replacing combustion engine cars with electric vehicles (EVs) improves air quality and powering those EVs with clean energy could have further benefits.

In the process of implementing climate change solutions, POUs are increasingly challenged to maintain affordable electric rates for the utility’s

iv The final report, *Small Water Systems and Rural Communities Drought and Water Storage Contingency Planning and Risk Assessment*, is available on DWR’s website: <https://water.ca.gov/Programs/Water-Use-And-Efficiency/2018-Water-Conservation-Legislation/County-Drought-Planning>.

v Criteria pollutants also come from waste disposal, clean and surface coatings, petroleum production, and many other sources. More information is available on the state’s criteria pollutant inventory: <https://ww2.arb.ca.gov/applications/statewide-emissions>.



entire customer base. Affordable rates are integral for meeting the state's electrification goals, and are an important strategy to reduce statewide greenhouse gas emissions. Electrifying buildings and vehicles in California will not occur efficiently or effectively if electric rates are too high because people will be disincentivized by the high prices. This is one reason among many others why climate change and air quality are separate yet related issues. The nuances of how these interrelated issues are impacting environmental justice communities are similarly complex and continue to be explored. When it comes to the intersection of electricity generation and air quality — as well as air quality impacts from many other large sources, like transportation — California has passed legislation addressing financial impacts to disadvantaged and low-income communities and to bring direction attention to the concerns DACs face.

For example, the Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, established by AB 32<sup>18</sup> in 2006 and further modified by SB 32<sup>19</sup> in 2016, directs the California Air Resources Board (CARB) to undertake measures that reduce the impacts of climate change and to consult with the environmental justice community in its efforts. The state's Cap-and-Trade program is one of CARB's main tools for achieving the state's goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 40% below 1990 levels by 2030. The Cap-and-Trade program results in revenues for the state of California generated through the auction of emission allowances. AB 32 also called on CARB to convene an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee (EJAC) to advise the Board in developing pertinent materials to implement AB 32. The EJAC prepared recommendations for the 2008, 2013, and 2017 Scoping Plan updates and continues to schedule community outreach meetings to assess the different needs of member groups in preparing recommendations for the 2022 Scoping Plan update. SB 350<sup>20</sup> required formation of a similar advisory group — the Disadvantaged Communities Advisory Group (DACAG) — to ensure that disadvantaged communities benefit from proposed clean energy and pollution reduction programs enacted by the CPUC and the California Energy Commission (CEC). The group helped the CPUC develop its Environmental and Social Justice Plan in 2018.

SB 535<sup>21</sup> was passed in 2012 to ensure that 25 percent of Cap-and-Trade revenues are directed toward providing a benefit to DACs. AB 1550 (2016)<sup>22</sup> took SB 535 a step further by requiring that 25 percent of proceeds from the state Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund be spent on projects located

in DACs. To assist with this effort, CalEPA created a tool called CalEnviroScreen to geospatially determine DACs based on socioeconomic, health, and environmental information, and it is used to produce scores for census tracts in the state.

AB 617, signed in 2017, aims to develop new community focused programs that more effectively reduce exposure to air pollution and preserve public health.<sup>23</sup> The law directs CARB and local air districts to take measures that protect communities disproportionately impacted by air pollution. Low-income communities may apply for funding under the law to establish community-level air quality monitoring networks. Additionally, California has significantly increased the number of state government staff in energy-related agencies who are focusing on environmental justice. Environmental justice leads were appointed at the deputy secretary level at both CARB<sup>vi</sup> and the CalEPA<sup>vii</sup> in 2021. It would be valuable to evaluate the effectiveness of these programs to determine how they are impacting public health.

These legislative efforts, coupled with new environmental justice leadership positions in California regulatory agencies, are helping to address air quality-related inequities within low-income communities. However, the impacts of climate change might necessitate additional resources to protect low-income communities. While California continues to lead the nation in climate policy, its efforts alone will not moderate climate-related impacts. As reported by OEHHA, climate change is expected to disproportionately affect those who are socially and economically disadvantaged.<sup>24</sup> Climate solutions need to be inclusive of disadvantaged communities and help them secure necessary resources, technical support, and the capacity to provide ongoing program support. These climate solutions should support California's climate resilience policy as well as state investments in clean energy resources that provide benefits to DACs.

Another priority in need of ongoing attention is ensuring access to existing low-income rate assistance programs. POU's have already established low-income discount programs that offer financial assistance for electric service. If programs are undersubscribed, POU's can consider additional ways to increase participation and access to these rate assistance programs. This can be achieved by providing more targeted outreach and streamlining the application process for low-income customers who are interested in signing up for these existing programs.

vi Chanell Fletcher was appointed to this position by CARB.

vii Bidtah N. Becker was appointed to this position by Governor Newsom.

## V. CORE CHALLENGES FOR PUBLIC UTILITIES/AGENCIES AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVOCATES



While California has made great strides to uplift disadvantaged communities through new laws and policies, some core challenges still remain.

The first challenge is the biggest: how to make meaningful long-term change. Policy is often enacted when a crisis emerges, but responding to emergency situations typically puts people in a reactive mode and does not allow communities most at-risk to build the capacity necessary for advancing strategic, long-term, and sustainable change. There are many effective environmental justice, social justice, and community-based organizations that work with communities and lawmakers to advance their interests. These groups have become more active in the legislative and regulatory process and have taken an increasing role in discussions about water and energy policy and advancing their specific agenda/perspective. The challenge is putting the legislative and regulatory fixes into action. For example, funding has been allocated to the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program, but it is a long process to make changes to the water situation for many of the at-risk communities. Reaching long-term solutions for DACs additionally involves community capacity building and intentional advocacy. Changing long-standing conditions that contribute to the formation of disadvantaged communities is necessary, requires thoughtful collaboration, and input from technical and professional assistance of POU and public water/wastewater agencies.

The second challenge is how to provide access to an appropriate level of understandable data that can help inform decision-making. Data are a critical tool for water and energy providers when partnering with environmental justice, social justice, and other community-based organizations. Data can help to build awareness and provide capacity to advocate for and provide avenues for partnerships to facilitate change. Based on the community profile, data should also be organized and presented in a way that is accessible to various groups and to language speakers other than English. POU and public water/wastewater agencies are already required to collect and report myriad data to regulatory agencies on

a regular basis, such as the monthly conservation reporting public water agencies submit to DWR. Given the high volume of data already collected, any additional data collection requirements must be carefully thought out to determine if they are appropriate and necessary. One example where this analysis is needed is the state's continuing effort to integrate reported water data into a unified database that aims to improve access to high quality data for state agencies, water agencies, and environmental justice organizations.<sup>25</sup> Support for integrated data reporting will help with access concerns.

The third challenge is that, although there are many POU and public water/wastewater agencies actively partnering with environmental justice organizations, building bridges to fill the gaps and get information to low-income communities is crucial in advancing long-term, sustainable change. Whether the gaps exist due to lack of financial resources or other issues, awareness is a key first step. Stronger partnerships that incorporate longstanding policies of the public utility sector and environmental justice communities can help ensure reliable and sustainable solutions to the state's challenges.

The fourth and final challenge is that there is often a disconnect with environmental justice groups as to what it takes to provide essential services, the regulations and the laws that govern POU and public water/wastewater agencies, the work of water agencies and POU to balance the resulting costs, and the actual practices of those local agencies. This issue impacts all involved parties in slightly different ways; community groups are not bound by the same legal requirements as local governments, but local governments are in a position to educate and provide information to community groups so those groups can understand the nuances and difficulties of providing essential services equitably. This general lack of understanding inhibits these groups from communicating cohesively. Increased collaboration, communication, and partnerships can help environmental justice groups understand the complex process of providing power, water, and sewer service.

**Given the high volume of data already collected, any additional data collection requirements must be carefully thought out to determine if they are appropriate and necessary.**



## VI. 10 IDEAS FOR NEXT STEPS



Greater collaboration among POU and public water/wastewater agencies and environmental justice advocates can improve regulatory and legislative policy outcomes for all stakeholders. Regulatory agencies rely on stakeholders — these public utilities and agencies as well as environmental justice advocates — for guidance on how to effectively implement regulatory actions. Likewise, legislators look to their constituents to shape legislative proposals. There are many untapped opportunities that could focus on common goals and use those partnerships to shape how regulations are developed.

Addressing the problems illuminated in this policy paper will require commitment to form partnerships, a focus on common goals, enhanced communication, and problem solving. The sections that follow highlight some opportunities that public utilities/agencies can focus on to better engage the environmental justice community and how the environmental justice community can work with public utilities/agencies. A one-size-fits-all solution for California is infeasible because of region-to-region diversity and the differing makeup of cities and counties. Therefore, the following suggestions are intended to broadly offer opportunities for stronger collaboration and stronger partnership between public utilities and environmental justice advocates.

### How Public Utilities/Agencies and Environmental Justice Advocates Can Collaborate to Advance Environmental Justice Goals

#### 1. **Raise the Priority of Environmental Justice:**

Public utilities and agencies can continue to establish environmental justice as a priority within their service territories, review options for their own low-income assistance programs (within the confines of Propositions 218 and 26), provide equity training, and support meaningful investments in related programs.

- Successful community-driven policy initiatives might become a blueprint for replication in other jurisdictions.

#### 2. **Promote Direct Engagement:** Public utilities and agencies can directly engage with environmental

justice advocates as well as organizations representing communities of color, low-income communities, and DACs by setting meetings, keeping communication lines open, and even inviting environmental justice advocates to provide information at Board meetings.

- Governing boards and staff overseeing long-term and sustainable power, water, and sewer services can engage these organizations directly. This action would help ensure these boards have heard, considered, and included the view of these communities in their decision-making processes. Inclusion often requires efforts to ensure members of the public are aware of the factors that make various forms of government uniquely different. For example, the general public might be unaware that special districts have their own government structures that differ from a city or county.

#### 3. **Build Staff and Organizational Awareness:**

POUs and water agencies can review opportunities for achieving greater inclusion of represented communities and advancing racial equity. POU and water agencies can also empower staff to understand environmental justice issues to increase awareness among staff agency-wide.

#### 4. **Build Partnerships to Address Environmental Justice Concerns in the Community:** POU and public water/wastewater agencies can partner with environmental justice communities on workforce development, education, and training opportunities that focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion.

- This can benefit both POU and public water/wastewater agencies by helping to create a skilled and diverse workforce while opening greater employment opportunities for high-quality, well-paying jobs that serve their community. Additionally, when feasible POU and public water/wastewater agencies can work to develop communication strategies that are culturally appropriate to encourage environmental justice stakeholders to participate in decisions and actions that may impact their communities. These communication strategies may include tours of low-income communities for staff to bring first-hand knowledge of impacts these communities face.

**A one-size-fits-all solution for California is infeasible because of region-to-region diversity and the differing makeup of cities and counties.**

**5. Establish Environmental Justice Goals and Metrics:** POU and water agencies can mitigate disproportionate impacts of state-level decisions and activities within their service areas by engaging environmental justice communities in these efforts.

- Engaging local advocates can be a successful step toward addressing community-identified problems with innovative, multi-benefit solutions. In areas where community-based organizations are not well established, local government leaders can place a greater emphasis on engaging all sectors of the community, setting goals, and measuring results.

**6. Encourage Local Hiring:** When feasible, POU and public water/wastewater agencies can promote contracting with local companies, hiring local workers, and engaging in business outreach to local companies to encourage them to bid on contract work with the agencies.

- POU and public water/wastewater agencies can further develop and advance employment opportunities such as green job opportunities in communities historically and disproportionately burdened by environmental degradation. Where workforce development strategies and training opportunities are not able to be physically located in DACs, recruitment can target residents in DACs to engage them in entry-level positions within a public utility/agency.

### How Environmental Justice Advocates Can Collaborate with Public Utilities/Agencies

**7. Make Connections Between Community Needs and Institutional Efforts:** Meaningful partnership with community-based organizations involves long-term collaboration and investments that support approaches for community transformation. Community leaders can take the opportunity to inform public agency practices to address community needs.

- A key approach of this community-driven perspective involves identifying where the community finds itself on an issue and working with residents to define solutions. This strategy involves embracing a theory of change that recognizes root causes and drivers of inequity and the prioritization of policy, legislative, and organizational practice change as key mechanisms to reverse inequities.

**8. Encourage Representation in Regulatory Decision-Making:** Low-income and disadvantaged communities are more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards, so DACs should be better represented in regulatory decision-making.

- State agencies can be empowered to convene stakeholder groups that consist of POU and public water/wastewater agencies, environmental justice organizations, and state agency staff to inform actions within the state agency's purview. These organized stakeholder groups can bring the different groups to the table to discuss trends and issues facing the impacted groups and to brainstorm potential solutions. Additionally, it is important for entities that are subject to regulations to educate members of environmental justice communities and organizations on industry needs to encourage meaningful involvement.

**9. Share Experiences and Needs:** Environmental justice communities can share their needs and concerns with POU and public water/wastewater agencies to identify overlapping goals.

**Increased collaboration, communication, and partnerships can help environmental justice groups understand the complex process of providing power, water, and sewer service.**

- Environmental justice advocates have expressed their desire for a clean and modernized grid, community resilience centers that offer clean and reliable backup power, water treatment options for removing contaminants from drinking water, and feasibility studies for water solution projects<sup>viii</sup>. Public utilities and agencies share goals of a resilient electric grid and access to a safe and reliable water supply. By collaborating with POU and public water/wastewater agencies, environmental justice partners can help ensure they are working toward creating local, well-paid jobs and economic opportunities, and building equitable energy and water solutions that are beneficial for the environment and society in general.

#### 10. **Build Partnerships for Financial Assistance:**

Environmental justice groups can partner with POU and public water/wastewater agencies to collaborate on grants and larger requests for financial assistance.

- California's infrastructure financing initiatives, including Proposition 1 that prioritizes funding for water projects in disadvantaged communities, favor an emphasis on multi-benefit projects carried out by public agencies. By working together, environmental justice groups can provide direction to ensure projects provide multiple benefits and achieve California's broader policies. For example, a mix of green and traditional infrastructure approaches has a greater likelihood of achieving equity in projects addressing stormwater pollution in a particular region.

**Building bridges to fill the gaps and get information to low-income communities is crucial in advancing long-term, sustainable change.**

<sup>viii</sup> Water solution projects are aimed to address availability, resiliency, source inadequacy, and the like.





# CONCLUSION

Work in the environmental justice arena has advanced significantly since the onset of the movement. However, it will take continued action by all parties to meaningfully advance progress on environmental justice and equity concerns. By taking the actions outlined in this paper, POU's and public water/wastewater agencies can continue to take steps toward finding common ground with the environmental justice organizations within their service territories, and environmental justice organizations can form partnerships with stakeholders that are subject to regulatory implementation. Earnest efforts to find solutions, over time, would propel the movement and unite stakeholders toward a common purpose.

## 10 IDEAS FOR BUILDING COLLABORATION

1

**Raise the Priority  
of Environmental  
Justice**

2

**Promote Direct  
Engagement**

3

**Build Staff and  
Organizational  
Awareness**

4

**Build Partnerships  
to Address  
Environmental  
Justice Concerns in  
the Community**

5

**Establish  
Environmental  
Justice Goals and  
Metrics**

6

**Encourage Local  
Hiring**

7

**Make Connections  
Between  
Community Needs  
and Institutional  
Efforts**

8

**Encourage  
Representation  
in Regulatory  
Decision-Making**

9

**Share Experiences  
and Needs**

10

**Build Partnerships  
for Financial  
Assistance**

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