

REPORT: Hard-to-Reach Community Input and Mitigation Actions Ideas for the San Mateo County's 2021 Multijurisdictional Local Hazard Plan Update

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This report was prepared by the San Mateo County Office of Sustainability, Planning and Building.

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Introduction

This report summarizes the input gathered through community engagement with hard-to-reach and socially vulnerable populations throughout San Mateo County for the County of San Mateo's Multijurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan Update.

The San Mateo County Office of Sustainability (OOS) conducted outreach activities designed to include socially vulnerable groups that are typically under-represented populations in LHMP planning in order to benefit from the experience and expertise of socially vulnerable community members and to support planning staff to incorporate social vulnerability considerations in mitigation actions.

OOS selected eight organizations in a competitive process to support outreach and engagement from March to July 2021. The organizations engaged frontline, traditionally underserved and/or socially vulnerable populations and communities that have not been effectively included in many traditional planning processes in the past.

The goal was to better understand what hazards were impacting these communities and how the impact was affected by social vulnerability, and then to gather community mitigation action ideas that would minimize community risk. For a description of the organizations and the communities they serve and an overview of events, see Appendix A.

Populations Reached

The community members engaged primarily included low-income communities, people of color including Latinos, African Americans, Pacific Islanders and others, rural and urban communities, monolingual community members, previously redlined communities, undocumented people, people with disabilities and medical needs, older adults, farmworkers and unhoused residents. Additional engagement to these and other hard to reach populations should be conducted in future planning. Several of the events were conducted in Spanish and some of the communications were modified to support access by people with disabilities.

Community members were engaged and put at ease because of the leading role of trusted and culturally and linguistically competent community-based organizations and online activities were accessible to transit-dependent urban and rural people. The recommendations made by the communities should be understood in the context of daily experiences of barriers, hardships, and creativity, leadership and resilience to overcome them. More detail about these frequently intersecting and compounding barriers is included in the Social Vulnerability section.

Summary of Community Mitigation Ideas by Hazard

WILDFIRES



Information in Spanish delivered by trusted CBOs



Well-publicized **evacuation routes and shelters** access for people with disabilities



Bilingual text alert system for evacuation warnings



Emergency preparedness training and how to stay safe if you can't evacuate



Defensible spaces assistance for seniors, people with disabilities

DROUGHT



Drought resistant landscaping and rain barrels in households



Habitat restoration and incentives for people to replace lawns



Greywater use, policies for new construction in commercial & multifamily building



Underground water storage, groundwater recharge, updating wastewater treatment plants to clean water to potable standards



Rain water catchment and dual plumbing to utilize grey water for landscaping in large land / commercial properties

HEALTH & PANDEMIC



Send test & vaccine info through **SMC Alert**, help vaccination appointments



Partner with CBOs to **communicate with people with disabilities & medical needs**



Foster community building and offer support for isolated seniors and other isolated people



Integrate **mental health & trauma support** into training for emergency responders



Free bus, home pick-ups and paratransit evacuations to shelters during an emergency

HEAT & POOR AIR QUALITY



Combined cooling & clean air centers accessible to people with disabilities



Partner with CBOs to **improve public messaging**, bilingual SMC Alerts



Programs: Solar + storage, updating HVAC systems, backup generators, home weatherization, tree planting



Community team to inspect homes for air leaks, thermal loss, to prevent heat & smoke intrusion



Education for employers on the risks for outdoor workers, provide protective equipment

FLOODING



Creek dredging, drainage ditch maintenance



Policies to allow **building higher**



Incentives for landlords to upgrade rentals and farmworker housing



Fixing roads, adding rain gutters, sidewalks, and **evacuation routes signage**



Subsidies to raise and flood-proof homes; county-sponsored contractor help

EARTHQUAKES



Handbook of numbers to call for help in case of an disaster



Pre-made emergency kits or list of items for an emergency kit



Text alert system for evacuation warnings



Safety and preparedness training especially for people living in apartments



Retrofit homes, apartment complexes not up to current building code standards

Summary of Key Mitigation Themes

COMMUNICATION and CAPACITY BUILDING

- Increase multilingual and multimodal communication, improve text alert systems.
- Invest in local broadcast media capacity to use during an emergency.
- Partner with trusted CBOs to improve outreach and provide preparedness training.
- Foster two-way communication and collaboration with organized and spontaneous community-led hazard mitigation and emergency preparedness efforts.

POLICY and INFRASTRUCTURE

- Consider disability access, vulnerable populations, language barriers and financial barriers to assure inclusive implementation in emergency planning.
- Address infrastructure needs for communities facing chronic hazards (such as heat and flooding), historic underinvestment in infrastructure or difficulty getting to resources elsewhere.
- Invest in solar power generators, batteries and power storage.
- Add more shelters and cooling/clean air centers and power charging sites.
- Provide more advance warning of known hazards and lower thresholds to open sites.
- Address the long-term viability of highway 1 due to sea level rise and erosion.

ELIMINATING ACCESS BARRIERS

- Address needs of low literacy people, people with disabilities and medical needs, low income people, undocumented residents, transit dependent populations, renters, vulnerable workers, communities with limited routes in and out and/or limited resilience resources, and people temporarily or permanently without access to the internet and/or telephone service.
- Address current infrastructural and institutional access barriers, such as related to sidewalks, buildings, construction, etc. to aid evacuation for people with disabilities, older adults, people with medical needs, strollers and bicycles, during hazard events.
- Provide free or affordable and conveniently located supplies, such as sandbags or air filters, and subsidized or loaned equipment, such as back-up batteries.
- Provide free coordinated evacuation including at the door pick-ups for people with disabilities and transit dependent people.

MANAGING MULTIPLE HAZARDS

- Planning and capacity to manage a combination of heat, smoke, COVID-19 and or power outage. Assure clean air and cooling in shelters and cooling centers.

See Appendix B for additional themes and details.

Mitigation Ideas by Hazards

The following section summarizes community recommendations for hazard mitigation.

Extreme Heat and Poor Air Quality

Heat and poor air quality due to wildfire smoke was one of the most commented upon topics.

General Recommendations: Most were centered on the need to have more cooling and clean air centers throughout the County that are accessible to people with disabilities, have stated policies welcoming undocumented residents, and better outreach including disability access information. People suggested mobile centers to deploy in vulnerable communities and using schools, libraries and churches as centers and shelters. Participants asked for improved communication about heat warnings and excessive heat events and for a list of cooling centers available ahead of extreme heat so that people with disabilities and medical conditions can have more time to prepare and respond.

Preparedness and Equipment Solutions: Providing free or loaner equipment such as fans and air purifiers, distributing better extension cords or surge protectors, and free pool access for residents on high heat days. People suggested having something like a Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) to inspect homes for air leaks, thermal loss, and to certify that structures are working as efficiently as possible to prevent heat and smoke intrusion.

Infrastructure Solutions: Ideas included investing in updating HVAC systems and solar plus storage for public facilities and shelters to address power shutoffs associated with heat events, providing backup generators for elderly and at-risk individuals, home weatherization for vulnerable communities, and tree planting as a strategy to reduce heat in communities lacking trees and shade.

Communications Solutions: In terms of communications, ideas included partnering with community-based organizations to improve public messaging around the impacts of extreme heat and preparedness strategies by implementing multilingual outreach to raise awareness about what they could do and where to go during a heat or poor air quality emergency, especially in unincorporated communities. Another solution recommended was to identify residents to be block representatives that can disseminate information to neighbors and notice who might need help. Using text messaging and phone calls to provide this information is the best way to reach the Latino community, and there is a need to assure all SMC Alert messages are bilingual. Multiple community members requested a list of cooling centers available ahead of extreme heat. Special information and education are needed to help employers understand the dangers of working outdoors during a heat or poor air quality event, as well as providing workers with protective equipment.

Wildfire

Wildfire was identified as one of the hazards of most concern by community members.

Information gaps and concerns: Lack of clear communication was one of the main issues identified, especially by Coastside communities. People mentioned that they did not have clear information about how and when to evacuate or where to go during the CZU-Lightning Fire in 2020, specifically lacking information in Spanish. Furthermore, they stated that the information provided and CalFire guidance was not easy to access or to understand for elders and low-income residents. Several people expressed

concern about the difficulty to use ZoneHaven. More shelters are also needed on the Coastsides along with accessible and affordable transportation to the sites.

Communications and Education Solutions: Ideas included more information in Spanish delivered by trusted community organizations, well-publicized evacuation routes, promoting the Firewise USA program to increase awareness and preparedness regarding wildfires, and sending multilingual messages via the text alert systems for wildfire evacuation warnings. Suggestions related to emergency preparedness training included education on how to stay safe from fire and smoke if you can't evacuate, since farm and outdoor workers, especially on the Coastsides, are often required to keep working even during a wildfire situation.

Defensible Space: People said that creating and maintaining defensible spaces was difficult for seniors, people with disabilities or those who cannot afford or don't know how to clear defensible space around homes. Some organizations on the Coastsides provide a home repair program that could be expanded to provide some services in this regard.

Other Wildfire Solutions: More funding for volunteer fire brigades was recommended. To address the lack of personnel to fight fires or to maintain defensible spaces in public lands/open spaces, people suggested an internship towards firefighting career path working with prisoners, homeless residents, and high school students. Ideas to address lack of water to fight wildfires included capturing stormwater runoff, building more water reservoirs and establishing pre-existing agreements for private water providers to be reimbursed.

Flooding

Policy Solutions: Policy related ideas include changing regulations to allow building higher, subsidies or training on how to flood-proof your home that include County-sponsored contractor help, providing low-cost loans to raise homes and post-disaster funding for repairs and appliances after a flood event to help people get back on their feet. Other ideas are related with providing incentives for landlords or lowering permitting fees to upgrade rental housing and farmworker housing, plus promoting community drain clearing and flood-conscious architecture.

Infrastructure Solutions: Ideas included assuring good road conditions and securing effective rain gutters prior to a disaster, completing drainage ditch maintenance, providing sidewalks for roads that don't have them to assure pedestrian safety, and creating evacuation routes signage and signage indicating whether it is safe to drive through flooded areas in communities prone to flooding. On the Coastsides, suggestions included to continue Butano Creek bank restoration, and creek dredging.

Health and Pandemic

Overall, community members wanted to see health, medical, and disability considerations addressed throughout hazard mitigation and emergency planning and implementation.

Community Capacity: There was interest in increasing community-based capacity, for example training residential block leaders to conduct wellness checks and act as emergency contacts for neighbors. Community members noted that they developed their own strategies to respond rapidly and cope with COVID-19 with neighbors and community organizations and they want government to learn from and engage with these strategies.

Medical and Disability Needs: The needs of residents with health and mental health conditions as well as disabilities were highlighted as needing special attention in emergency planning, shelters and cooling/clean air centers and evacuation.

Communications and Outreach: Community members wanted COVID-19 information, particularly about where to get tests and vaccinations, to be more readily available and distributed in a more visible way such as through SMC-Alert or through a one-stop-shop website and app including real time information during an emergency. Guidance on wearing masks, getting tested and getting vaccinated was seen as inadequate if community members could not afford or even find masks, or get testing and vaccination appointments. Community members wanted masks for those who couldn't afford them and resources for getting vaccinated and tested to accompany these messages.

Earthquake

Earthquake Preparedness Solutions: Participants called out a need for earthquake safety training and basic preparedness information, especially for people living in apartment buildings. Participants suggested promoting the use of emergency kits by either distributing pre-made emergency kits or providing people with a list of items that should be included in an emergency kit. Another idea was to include a handbook of numbers to call for help in case of an earthquake or other disaster.

Infrastructure Solutions: Other suggestions included teaching people how to retrofit their homes and the need to address big apartment complexes that are in bad shape and/or not up to current building code standards.

Drought

Water Conservation Solutions: At the household level, water conservation ideas to address shortages included encouraging drought-resistant landscaping and rain barrels in households, retrofitting to save water in residential areas. Infrastructure solutions at the county and city scale included increasing water storage capacity, underground water storage, groundwater recharge, updating wastewater treatment plants in order to clean water to potable standards, and allowing access to non-potable water for large users like golf courses. Nature-based solutions include habitat restoration and incentives for people to replace lawns.

Policy Solutions: Policy considerations include the removal of restrictions for greywater use programs, water use policies for new construction in commercial and multifamily building, and cities setting targets to conserve water. Other ideas include low-impact development (LID) requirements for all new residential and commercial construction, requiring large land and commercial properties to have rainwater catchment and plumbing that allows for reuse of grey water for landscape purposes.

Communications Solutions: Broadcast information on programs such as Lawn Be Gone and Rain Garden Rebate Options from the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency (BAWSCA).

Multiple Overlapping Hazards

Many people described the challenges they faced in the summer of 2020 when extreme heat, smoke from wildfires, and the pandemic all happened at the same time with overlapping Public Safety Power Shutoffs (PSPS). This combination of events meant that people couldn't take the usual measures to get relief from the individual hazards. For example, people couldn't open their windows to get relief from the heat because then the harmful smoky air would get into their homes or run fans when the power

was out. Going to a cooling center with air filters to get relief from the heat and smoke would put them at greater risk of catching COVID-19. In normal times people would usually go to the coast and beach for relief from the heat, but the beaches were closed due to COVID-19.

- Provide clean air and cooling in shelters and cooling centers. A need for capacity to manage a combination of heat and smoke or heat, smoke and COVID-19 plus access to power was raised frequently.
- Assistance with roof replacements for both fire protection and solar installations.
- Use a messaging text alert system, such as SMC Alert, for evacuation warnings related to wildfires, flooding and earthquakes, and for heat advisories and extreme heat warnings.
- Conduct outreach to disabled community about signing up for alerts.
- Develop/replace farmworker housing to withstand extreme storms, floods, quakes, and fire.
- Overlapping power outages were a substantial challenge. See more recommendations in the Power Outage section.

Overarching Social Vulnerability Considerations

This initiative received extensive input and solution suggestions from community members that address how to prevent social vulnerability (see box) from increasing hazard risk. Most participant input could be addressed by adapting the principle of Universal Design, that is to design all hazard mitigation and emergency planning to be accessible for all community members by devising solutions to social vulnerability-driven and other barriers to access.

Community input: mitigate hazards and social barriers together - examples

Plan for improvements in emergency communications to assure socially vulnerable groups can access and feel comfortable accessing emergency operations including evacuation and shelters.

- Assure information is accessible, relevant and helpful to and reaches low income people, monolingual non-English speakers, people of color, people with disabilities and medical needs, youth and older adults.
- Include on site and online publicly posted inclusion policies confirming undocumented people will be served equally.

Conduct emergency planning that mainstreams the needs of and addresses barriers for low-income and socially vulnerable people and assures inclusive implementation.

- Comprehensive integration of disability access, access to power, medicines, service and comfort animals throughout Emergency Planning with a focus on developing staff leadership, adding disability community oversight, coordinated evacuation and mainstreaming disability access and access to uninterrupted power for people with physical and mental disabilities and those with medical needs.
- Comprehensive planning for people who cannot access private transportation due to cost or availability of transit, rural or remote location, lack of paratransit, inability to drive at night, one car households and youth, older adults, people with disabilities and others who do not drive.
- Comprehensive planning for financial barriers, for example low-income people may not be able to afford air filtration devices, generators, air conditioners, or to replace spoiled food resulting from power outages.
- Comprehensive planning for vulnerable workers such as the informal workforce, agricultural and outdoor workers and their employers.

Conclusion

This report summarizes feedback gathered through targeted outreach and engagement activities to socially vulnerable communities and hard-to-reach community members. Working in partnership with eight community-based organizations, Office of Sustainability staff gathered feedback from over 600 people and reached 30,000 people through social media and email listservs.

The feedback highlighted community members' interest in being involved and active participants in hazard mitigation, and emergency planning and response activities in their communities. Many of the comments from community members were around suggestions for improving hazard-related communications. In summary, community members requested more frequent alerts and information in Spanish and other languages. Addressing barriers faced by one group is likely to help other groups, for example increased disability access could greatly benefit older adult populations, and people recovering from hazard caused or other temporary injuries. The outreach and engagement efforts conducted as part of the Multijurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan is part of an ongoing effort to understand community needs and improve hazard mitigation and response for all individuals in the county and especially those most vulnerable to hazards.

Appendix A. Overview of Community Partners in MJLHMP Outreach

The County of San Mateo Office of Sustainability developed an RFQ to expand the capacity to engage hard to reach and socially vulnerable communities for the Multijurisdictional Local Hazard Mitigation Plan process. Eight organizations were selected in a competitive process. Some of the key competencies being sought were:

- Organizations with established relationships of trust with their communities.
- Capacity to meet community members where they gather and in culturally appropriate ways
- Provide culturally and linguistically appropriate community engagement
- Convening culturally, linguistically and accessible focus groups
- Familiarity with the concerns of areas with overlapping social vulnerability and hazard risk.

The county developed tailored scopes of work with each organization based on their recommendations on how to best reach their communities. A summary of events is at the end of this section.

Ayudando Latinos A Soñar

- Ayudando Latinos A Soñar, known as ALAS (wings) is dedicated to giving creative expression to Latino youth and families of Half Moon Bay. Their mission celebrates “the rich cultures, traditions and values of Mexico and Latin America” which are incorporated in all their work including cultural arts, education, mental health, farmworker support, social justice advocacy, and COVID crisis response programs. ALAS was part of the City of Half Moon Bay Climate Action and Adaptation Plan supported as a Climate Ready Pilot Project which developed culturally appropriate ways to engage the community on climate and natural hazard issues.
- ALAS provides support to the Latino community, many of whom are monolingual Spanish-speakers, from Half Moon Bay to Montara.
- ALAS reached 65 community members through engagement at food distributions, a mother’s group and other existing programs serving Coastal Latino immigrant individuals and families in English and Spanish. Social media posts on Facebook and Twitter (1,322 followers) and email blasts were shared.

Bay Area Community Health Advisory Council

- The Bay Area Community Health Advisory Council (BACHAC) is dedicated to eliminating health disparities across generations and diverse communities through education and services. Since its founding in 1995, BACHAC has fostered a cross-sector coalition and volunteer corps dedicated to increasing awareness of and reducing the debilitating effects of health concerns that disproportionately affect communities of color
- BACHAC includes and serves community members of color and allies concerned about health equity. African Americans, Pacific Islanders, Latinos. Countywide including City of San Mateo, Daly City and East Palo Alto.
- 356 individuals were reached through a combination of presentations and discussions at monthly meetings, email distribution, and at vaccine clinics (English and Spanish) and 620 individuals were reached through email outreach.

Center for Independence for Individuals with Disabilities

- Center for Independence for Individuals with Disabilities’ (CID) mission is to provide support services, community awareness, and systems change advocacy to promote full and

equal community integration and participation for people with disabilities. CID supports older adults and people with disabilities during the activation of a Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) event or other emergency. The goal is to enable them to remain safe while independent in their residences and communities. CID coordinates various programs for those who depend on power for durable medical equipment or for their livelihood.

- CID is a center for independent living run by and for people with disabilities countywide.
- CID reached 916 individuals through email newsletters, Facebook, and Twitter and 34 individuals through focus and support groups as well as individual engagement to provide for specific access needs. Collaboration to increase accessibility of County presentation.

Climate Resilient Communities

- Climate Resilient Communities (CRC) specializes in community-led resilience in underserved communities. In 2019, they developed and coordinated the East Palo Alto Climate Change Community Team (CCCT). The CCCT completed a Climate Change Community Survey and Community Adaptation Pilot Project (community-led vulnerability assessment and resilience planning) funded by San Mateo County. In 2020, CRC partnered with the North Fair Oaks Climate Ready Team and where we currently coordinating the team's efforts to address environmental justice and climate change issues. CRC is an independent organization fiscally sponsored by Acterra.
- Populations served: Residents of East Palo Alto, Belle Haven and North Fair Oaks. Latino, Pacific Islander and African American community members.
- Collaboration to develop culturally appropriate community engagement through a community meeting 6/23. Participants include the general public (English and Spanish speaking residents of East Palo Alto, North Fair Oaks and Belle Haven) held jointly with a focus group engagement for community members and leaders actively working on climate resilience and civic participation.

El Concilio of San Mateo County

- ECSMC has worked with, for and in low-income/vulnerable communities since 1980. ECSMC's signature Promotora model ensures community engagement in assessment and planning of programs. ECSMC implements multiple federal, state, local, and privately funded low-income programs inside SMC. ECSMC is nationally recognized as a leader in representing low-income issues and helps to shape policies effecting low-income residents across the State. Some of their programs include: PG&E Energy Savings Assistance Program (ESA), Peninsula Minor Home Repair, Community Help and Awareness of Natural Gas and Electric Services (CHANGES), Telecommunications Education and Assistance in Multiple-Languages (TEAM) Program, PCE Outreach and Education Grant, Green Business Program Outreach, Low-Income COVID-19 Outreach, Climate Ready North Fair Oaks, Broadband Awareness and Adoption and Family and Individual Support Services.
- Populations served: Countywide including residents of South San Francisco, East Palo Alto, Belle Haven and North Fair Oaks. Low income residents including Latino, Chinese, and African American community members.
- 72 participants in low income serving programs were engaged to take the LHMP hazards survey. The great majority of participants indicated their ethnicity / race as Latino or from a

specific Latino country and a few participants indicated Caucasian, Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese and Palestinian. Participants included residents of North Fair Oaks (37), South San Francisco (22), San Bruno (6) and East Palo Alto, East Menlo Park, Redwood City, San Mateo and Burlingame.

Nuestra Casa

- Nuestra Casa has conducted outreach and education projects in the Bay Area for almost 20 years. They are best known for rapid response to immigrant community needs and specialize in community outreach and education services to marginalized populations. Their programs and campaigns help immigrant community members understand their rights and connect to safety net resources. Their Environmental Justice includes the Parent Academy and food distribution among other programs and fosters community member capacity to understand, develop, and prioritize local solutions to address environmental equity and justice issues. Nuestra Casa works with Promotoras as the backbone of every program. They live, work, and worship in the communities served.
- Nuestra Casa primarily Spanish-speaking Latinos in East Palo Alto, eastern Menlo Park (Belle Haven), Redwood City and North Fair Oaks.
- Nuestra Casa led a joint workshop on mitigation actions in Spanish and English for 25 participants. They conducted extensive outreach through food banks in East Palo Alto and North Fair Oaks, utilizing paper surveys to increase access for Spanish speaking participants.

Senior Coastsiders

- Senior Coastsiders provides opportunities, support and resources for older adults and adults with disabilities living on the Coastside, from Montara to Pescadero and Skyline to the Sea. We celebrate the value of seniors and act as a community resource for information, caregiver support and innovative approaches to successful aging.
- Senior Coastsiders serves older adults and adults with disabilities living on the Coastside, from Montara to Pescadero and Skyline to the Sea, including Chinese-speaking residents and unhoused residents.
- Senior Coastsiders social media, media and email outreach went to 27,729 Coastal older adults and members of the general public including a subset of Chinese speakers (40) and a subset of unhoused local residents. Senior Coastsiders hosted a workshop for older adults and other coastal residents with presentations by City of Half Moon Bay and County staff attended by 12 individuals and hosted an outdoor engagement for unhoused residents reaching 5 individuals.

South Coast Sustainable

- South Coast Sustainable is a coalition of community leaders who work intentionally to build trust with neighbors and other stakeholders. We understand the nuances of rural culture, where people still prefer to share information face-to-face at the post office, market, and taqueria. We can reach the hidden communities, road by road, and can shape messages and information in ways that will be best received by the intended audience.
- South Coast Sustainable serves residents of the South Coast including the Latino community and partners closely with Puente de la Costa Sur.
- SCS reached 630 rural individuals through social media and email outreach and 98 individuals through online meetings and individual in person engagement such as through the Pescadero PopUp Market and SC4 Amateur Radio Club.

Overview of MJLHMP Event Outreach					
Date	Organization	Event	People reached	Demographics	Language
3/20/2021	South Coast Sustainable	SC4 Amateur Radio Club	50	Coastside community	English
3/25/2021	Senior Coastsiders	Survey Outreach for Unhoused Populations	5	Unhoused residents (Coastside)	English
4/12/2021	BACHAC	Monthly Meeting #1 (presentation from County staff)	22	90% African American	English
5/13/2021	Senior Coastsiders	Evergreen Seniors (panel from various coastal jurisdictions)	12	Coastside Seniors & community	English
6/7/2021	Center for Individuals with Disabilities	Meeting of Staff and Board members	15	People with disabilities	English - for visual disability access
6/10/2021	Nuestra Casa	Environmental Justice Academy focus group	25	17 Spanish / 8 English	English and Spanish
6/14/2021	BACHAC	Monthly Meeting #2 (presentation from County staff)	22	90% African American	English
6/17/2021	Center for Individuals with Disabilities	CID Virtual Peer Support Group Meeting	6	People with disabilities	English
6/23/2021	Climate Resilient Communities	Community leaders and community members focus group NFO, Belle Haven, East Palo Alto	44	27 Latino, 6 Pacific Islanders and 6 African Americans, 5 Caucasians	English and Spanish
6/24/2021	South Coast Sustainable	Coastside focus groups with Puente de la costa Sur	15	Coastside community, farmworkers, Latinx	Spanish
04/05 - 05/05	South Coast Sustainable	Sustainable Pescadero meetings on 04/05 and 05/05	32	Coastside community	English
06/03 - 06/29	South Coast Sustainable	Coastside focus groups	24	Coastside community	English and Spanish
Total			272		

Appendix B: Summary of What We Heard: Mitigation Themes

Communication & Education

In general, people indicated that they were not receiving notifications at all or in their language and wanted to be notified ahead of an anticipated disaster. They wanted information about what actions they could take to protect themselves, what resources are available to them and advance information about resources and expected duration of predictable events like a PSPS. Suggestions also include early outreach to people in hazard areas to help them understand the risk where they live and how to prepare.

People wanted more information and education (both for themselves and for the larger community) on the following topics:

- Existing emergency plans
- Evacuation plans and what to do and bring if you are required to evacuate
- Emergency kits
- How and where to obtain supplies needed during a disaster (for example, masks in a pandemic)
- Shelter locations, including the accessibility of shelters for people and service/comfort animals
- Assistance programs for people with disabilities and/or people who require access to power
- More education about specific hazards and information for employers on the danger of working outdoors during extreme weather or wildfire smoke events

Participants suggested a variety of different communication methods and noted the need to use multiple forms of communication to reach everyone. Suggested communications methods included:

- Website and app (one-stop shop)
- Email
- Social media
- Workshops / Zoom meetings
- Posters
- Flyers & Pamphlets
- Posting information at hotels
- Community groups
- Neighbor to neighbor
- Door to door
- Libraries
- Outreach in frequently visited places such as schools, markets, clinics.
- Newspapers
- Radio
- Magnets/stickers with emergency numbers to call for information
- Calls to elders who are not tech savvy or to those who have language barriers
- Signage in hazard areas
- Alert Systems

Participants also commented on the best ways to package hazard information. They said that information needed to be easy to digest, illustrated/accessible to low literacy community members, and provided in multiple languages. They suggested that meetings and workshops should be short and designed for families. Participants also flagged the need to provide tailored outreach to specific populations like people with disabilities, people living in rural areas, and people who are elderly or don't have access to the internet. People also mentioned the need to plan for communication when the internet and cell phone service goes out.

Several comments reflected on a need for government be involved in the local fast-moving conversations about hazards in person, online, and via community-based organizations at the local community level to share resources when they are most needed. Participants wanted to educate the community on how to reach out to local government, and to let people know it is ok to call your city/county and ask for help. Another suggestion was for better coordination between agencies, so information does not contradict.

Emergency Planning and Community Role

There was interest in community-wide involvement in Emergency Planning to include partnerships with trusted community-based organizations, increased investment in community capacity building in socially vulnerable neighborhoods and more community-tailored communication, outreach and opportunity for leadership and input. People expressed that government processes should include youth and residents.

There were many concerns about effective inclusion of socially vulnerable populations in Emergency Planning. Participants asked for approaches including:

- Expert staff, responder training, and oversight by people with disabilities, to assure effective inclusion of people with disabilities and medical needs including technology, disability legal rights, etc. during an emergency.
- It was noted that older adults, monolingual people and low-literacy people need assistance to access response and recovery resources, especially those that require filling out applications.
- More trauma/ mental health training and services during emergencies.
- A clearly communicated policy that undocumented immigrants would be served respectfully.

There were many comments asking for an emergency plan, wanting to know where it was and wishing there was more outreach about emergency plans and opportunities to participate in the planning. Community members also requested designated emergency areas, evacuation routes and advance lists of cooling centers.

There was desire for the County to be more proactive in “solving hazard issues, creating disaster plans, and increasing community awareness of the plans” and concern that Office of Emergency Services only responds when “the threat level is very high”, indicating that response thresholds for heat, smoke and COVID, did not seem adequate to communities experiencing hazard impacts. In particular, community members were concerned that they didn’t know whether and where cooling centers would open and felt there were not enough of them, they were not open when needed, and that they should also address clean air. Many community members indicated they could not afford to buy air conditioners, air purifiers or fans and funding or loaned equipment was recommended.

There were numerous comments about how community members would like to be involved in planning for hazards, particularly for emergency communications, evacuation, preparedness and response. Support for block organizing and local preparedness capacity building such as Block Action Teams (BAT) and Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT) was recommended. For context fewer of these programs are active in socially vulnerable communities and they may need to be adapted to be culturally and linguistically competent and accessible to people with disabilities.

There were recommendations to work with community-based organizations and promotoras (Latino community outreach workers) to reach community members due to their established relationships of

trust and their localized cultural expertise to support preparedness, response and to help community members to prepare for current and coming climate impacts. They had many additional suggestions reflected in the Emergency Planning, Evacuations, Shelters and other sections.

Evacuation

Community members wanted to be informed about evacuation plans, to be able to access the plans and to be consulted in plan development. Participants with disabilities and medical needs indicated that currently some individuals choose not to evacuate due to accessibility barriers and concerns. They recommended coordinated evacuation of people with disabilities including disability community oversight – key issues include accessibility to people with the full range of disabilities including non-physical disabilities, access to power, escorting those who need assistance to shelters, medicines, support network, transportation, and service / comfort animals. It was recommended to develop criteria to aid evacuation prioritization (related to people with disabilities).

Further the need to address current every day, baseline conditions and institutional access barriers was elevated as important to have in place to ensure access for evacuation for people with disabilities, older adults, people with medical needs, such as:

- In all evacuation operations and communications including accessible transition from evacuation to shelter and
- Through infrastructure improvements such as installing sidewalks, traffic islands and ramps and
- Through guidelines for signage, construction and other operations to eliminate temporary and project-related barriers.

There was also concern about evacuation for transit-dependent people that is affordable accessible, and at the needed times and places. A Senior Coastsiders' program was mentioned as a best practice: a buddy system pairing seniors or other community members who drive with those who don't in the event of an emergency. There was concern that current traffic congestion would need to be decreased to aid evacuation which was mentioned in Belle Haven/Menlo Park and on the Coastside, where there is desire for additional ways to evacuate from the Coast. Coastal residents requested more local services, such as shelter in place and outdoor sheltering options so transportation off the Coast is not needed.

Disability Access and Medical Needs

Comprehensive Access: Comprehensive disability access implementation was recommended including new staff positions with detailed knowledge of how to help people with diverse disabilities including non-physical disabilities, technology needs and legal rights. Dedicated staff and detailed training on these topics for first responders and emergency personnel including shelter and cooling center staff was also strongly recommended. Address current infrastructural and institutional access barriers, such as related to sidewalks, buildings, construction, etc. to aid evacuation for people with disabilities, older adults, people with medical needs during hazard events.

Additional accessibility needs included the following:

- Access to power including batteries with appropriate life span, back-up generators for people who would have difficulty traveling, and hotel, and hotel rooms with power.
- Limited resources on the Coast was noted as a major challenge with a participant noting there were no open gas stations and one hotel room using generator power during a PSPS event.
- Improving mechanisms for people to learn about where shelters are during an emergency that addresses disability access, access for folks that can't access the internet or phone system, and

which utilizes best practices customized for specific community and disability needs, such as partnerships with community organizations.

Evacuation: Coordinated evacuation including disability community oversight was recommended. Training for first responders, emergency and shelter personnel to include laws governing service animals, comfort animals versus pets including questions they are not legally allowed to ask was recommended to encourage more participation. It was suggested that people with medical needs or disabilities should be enabled to use Zonehaven to request help. Evacuation plans should include continuous access to power, medical devices and medicines including refrigeration for some medicines, escorting those who need assistance to get to shelters. Multiple participants recommended coordinated transportation solutions including free bus and paratransit evacuations and home pick-ups and/or affordable paratransit, given current paratransit is inadequate to get people out in an emergency situation.

Communication: Communication about hazards, especially power outages/PSPS and heat events, should take place as far in advance as possible generally and to allow extra time needed for people with disabilities and medical needs to prepare and coordinate assistance. Improve mechanisms for people to learn about where shelters are during an emergency that addresses disability access, including for those that can't access the internet or phone system. Conduct a survey to find out how people with disabilities obtain information and outreach and education with the disabled community about signing up for alerts and disaster preparedness. Collaborate with relevant organizations to better communicate with people with disabilities and medical needs.

Shelters (including Cooling/Clean Air centers)

There were many comments expressing concern about the availability of local shelters and cooling/clean air centers, whether shelters would welcome or meet needs of socially vulnerable community members, and desire to know where shelters and cooling centers would be and how to find out when and where they are open. Recommendations included:

- Increase number of, open time and publicity for cooling centers. Community members want to be able to access them more frequently (i.e. at lower temperatures and fewer days of heat), more locally, and want to know under what conditions they open and who opens them.
- Provide clean air and cooling in shelters and cooling centers. A need for capacity to manage a combination of hazards such as heat, smoke, power outage and COVID-19 was raised frequently.
- Desire for consistent definition / implementation of disability access to shelters and cooling / clean air centers and training for staff.
- Desire for communication of policy that undocumented people will be welcomed by shelters, cooling / clean air centers.
- Improving mechanisms for people to learn about where shelters are during an emergency that addresses disability access, access for folks that can't access the internet or phone system, and which utilizes best practices customized for community needs, such as partnerships with trusted community-based organizations, description of images for people who are visually impaired, door to door outreach, etc. (See communications)
- Assure Shelter information and access is available to people who are monolingual in a language other than English.

- More shelters desired on the Coastside and more than one Red Cross shelter needed on the South Coast.
- Promote shelter-in-place preparedness where access to shelters is limited
- Develop outdoor shelter locations where shelter access is limited such as on the Coast (golf course, the farm fields, parking lots).

Preparedness

Many people asked for education and training on how to prepare for and stay safe during a disaster. In particular, a participant wanted information on how to stay safe if you can't evacuate during a wildfire. Another suggestion was for education specific to people with disabilities about how to prepare for a disaster (e.g. medicines, emergency contacts, transportation, service & comfort animals). Participants also called out the need for trainings in Spanish (like for CPR classes), and the need to promote the CERT trainings in Spanish through the LISTOS program.

Community members also discussed the need for help obtaining supplies for an emergency event. Many participants mentioned emergency kits and the need to distribute free emergency kits to low-income community members. One suggestion was to include self-care and emergency information in a kit as well as supplies. Participants suggested that the County should stock up on air conditioning and air purifiers to give out to people who can't afford or find them in an emergency. Other participants suggested helping people get affordable/comfortable protective equipment, for example helping laborers get better clothing and eye protection for Spare the Air days.

Participants recommended nurturing connections within a community so that neighbors will have the support of their neighbors during emergencies and organizing emergency teams of community members to help their community in an emergency. The County's Department of Emergency Management could support these efforts with resources and trainings.

Housing and Home Improvements

Many participants suggested providing people with assistance in making improvements to their homes and properties that would reduce the risks from hazards like earthquakes, flooding, extreme storms, heat, wildfires, smoke, and drought. Specific suggested improvements included:

- Clearing defensible space around homes and buildings
- Drought resistant landscaping and rain barrels
- Bring buildings up to current code
- Flood-proofing homes
- Installing air conditioning and providing air purifiers
- Checking for and fixing air leaks in buildings
- Checking homes for thermal loss and proper installation
- Cleaning air filters
- Providing cooling centers in large apartment complexes

Participants suggested the following methods to help with improvements:

- Financial assistance such as low-cost loans, grants, and/or subsidies
- Incentives such as lower permitting fees or more density credits
- County-sponsored contractors or a list of good contractors
- Education and training about risk reducing improvements

- Team (such as CERT) or program that certifies that structures
- Requirements for large apartment complexes to provide air conditioning or cooling centers
- Provide financial resources for low income families who are impacted by disasters

Participants also specifically mentioned the need to develop and replace farmworker housing to withstand hazards, to provide help to seniors for hazard related property improvements, and the need to make improvements in apartment buildings.

Infrastructure Improvements

Countywide suggestions for infrastructure improvement include:

- Low impact development or green infrastructure for all new residential and commercial construction
- Change regulations to allow building higher, which would allow buildings to be raised out of the level of potential flooding (this comment came from the South Coast)
- Invest in improving PG&E infrastructure to prevent PSPS events
- More shelters, cooling / clean air centers, pools for cooling
- Take better care of nature to reduce the threat of wildfires, as right now there is a lack of maintenance of public lands and open space

Participants from the South Coast had several suggestions infrastructure improvements, including:

- Underground utilities so that power lines are not impacted by strong winds and falling trees
- Dredge creeks and maintain drainage ditches to reduce flooding
- Creek bank restoration, and specifically to continue the Butano Creek bank restoration
- Build more water reservoirs and water storage capacity, both for use during droughts and for fighting wildfires
- Capture stormwater runoff for later irrigation or fire fighting
- Provide batteries or back up power for communication infrastructure (internet, cell phone, ham radio networks, and radio) and for water treatment plants (water supply can be impacted during power shutoffs)
- Invest in local broadcast media capacity and equipment that can be used during an emergency, especially when the phone and internet services fail
- Invest in microgrids and solar power; use large parking lots (like at schools) as locations for generating solar power
- Run the power lines from the Pescadero high school to town when doing the water extension
- More evacuation routes from the Coast

Suggestions from participants in the East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Redwood City areas for infrastructure improvements included:

- Raise parking lots and driveways to address flooding issues
- Build a bigger wall to hold back flooding
- Install effective rain gutters in roads to keep them safe during a flood
- Increase ways in and out of communities with limited egress and which can be cut off by flooding or other hazard
- Community members also wanted to see improved road conditions, including repair of potholes and upgrades or designs to reduce or eliminate flooding

Power Outages

Community members had many concerns and suggestions related to the increasingly frequent PSPS events and other power outages, including:

- Invest in solar power, solar generators, solar and battery, power storage. Need for more access to generators and more reliable sources of power. Cross reference to Infrastructure: undergrounding utility lines, back up battery / power for communications, PG&E and microgrids.
- Need for more power charging stations more densely distributed throughout the Coast. Need more PG&E resource centers – one in La Honda is not adequate. Need more than one hotel room with power on the Coast. Need open gas stations during PSPS.
- Continuity in access to power for people with disabilities and medical needs, older adults and other at-risk individuals.
- Accessible and affordable transportation to shelters, hotels or power charging sites during PSPS is needed for people who need power with disabilities or medical needs for medical and assistive devices.
- Communications: need better estimates of the length of the power outage.
- Food preservation – providing coolers was suggested.
- People reported extensive use of online resources accessed via computer or mobile phone so access to power is critical to access to information. Multiple comments desired a phone line to speak to an actual person.
- Bayside residents also reported power outages that were not related to PSPS events.
- A North Fair Oaks resident noted the need for equitable access to PG&E services.