

COACHELLA VALLEY MOUNTAINS CONSERVANCY



Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) Policy

Drafted October 2022

Introduction

All Californians have the right to access the desert and mountains and to live in a healthy environment. The Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy's mission is to protect the natural and cultural resources of the Coachella Valley: the scenic, wildlife, cultural, geologic, and recreational resources that make this such a splendid place for people and all the other life forms with which we share this special place. The Conservancy is an exceptional example of local communities, state elected officials, non-profit organizations, and business and environmental interests working together for the good of all.

The Conservancy recognizes our collective history of injustice, exclusion and displacement toward California's Native Americans, Black people, non-native English speakers, people of color, disabled, immigrants, LGBTQ, and economically disadvantaged groups ("frontline" or "underserved" communities).

Frontline communities experience and disproportionately bear the most immediate and worst impacts of climate change. At the same time, they are impacted by the environmental burdens caused by toxic pollution wrought by development and industry. While environmental preservation and restoration have primarily benefitted the affluent, underserved communities experience inequitable access to the deserts, mountains, and their natural resources.

The Conservancy recognizes that we have not done enough to address inequities in the Coachella Valley and commits to addressing injustices and inequities. Striving to move forward in an equitable, inclusive manner, the Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy will:

- Create a welcoming environment where people's differences are represented and respected; which embraces multicultural and indigenous histories and presence, and cultivates community empowerment, care of natural resources, personal connections, and a sense of ownership.
- Improve its policies, programs, and practices to advance equitable access to the environmental, social, and economic benefits of California's deserts and mountains.
- Regularly evaluate and modify program priorities, grant funding, contracting, hiring practices, communications, and community engagement practices, to address existing inequities and prevent additional inequities.

- Increase the involvement and role of under-served and/or frontline communities in decision-making by the Conservancy.

Influencing Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Programs

State legislation establishes the Conservancy's mission and provides funding for programs set by the Conservancy board. Through these programs, the Conservancy can strive to promote more equitable outcomes for all Californians, especially under-served and/or frontline communities.

- **Explore the Coachella Valley and surrounding Mountains:** Increase access to the desert and mountains for all Californians, especially economically disadvantaged and historically underserved communities, and provide outdoor experiences for youth and adults that may face challenges getting to or enjoying the mountains and desert.
- **Protect and Restore the Desert and Mountains:** Ensure the benefits of healthy ecosystems, clean water, flood plains, riparian areas, deserts, mountains, working lands, urban parks, and open space are provided to all Californians.
- **Prepare for Climate Change:** Increase both social and ecological resilience to climate change and reduce its impacts on underserved and/or frontline communities within the Conservancy's jurisdiction.

Guidelines

1. Partnerships

- Build relationships with community-based organizations that are rooted in and serve underserved and/or frontline communities.
- Support people and organizations that are advocating for equity by ensuring fairness for achieving outcomes for all groups, and that no one factor, such as race, can be used to predict outcomes.
- Advance environmental justice so that all people have access to healthy, safe, livable communities, and environments.
- Work with community-based organizations to co-vision desired future conditions and provide technical assistance to build their capacity to plan, fund, and implement projects aligned with the CVMC's program areas.
- Provide assistance to community-based organizations in applying for and managing grants.

2. Funding Programs

- Fund programs and projects that increase equity and environmental justice throughout the Conservancy's jurisdiction.
- Prioritize funding for projects that benefit underserved and/or frontline communities.
- Develop and implement grant programs with input from communities.
- In grant programs, include funding for education, workforce development, and jobs related to conservation.
- Reduce barriers to accessing and spending Conservancy grant funding.
- Remain flexible throughout the grant process to support the needs of grantees and communities.

3. Meaningful Community Engagement

- Engage with communities collaboratively by working with groups of people who are affiliated by geographic proximity, special interests, or similar situations and ensure they have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health.
- Practice cultural humility to build mutual trust and relationships by reflecting on how one's own background and expectations can bias one's perspective.
- Meet communities where they are, physically and in terms of their priorities.
- Ensure underserved and/or frontline communities have meaningful input into decision- about Conservancy-funded projects.
- Engage with communities in public co-visioning processes before projects are developed to generate community-ownership and project ideas anchored in community expertise.
- Value and invest in community expertise. Ensure funds go to community-based organizations to lead community engagement to promote equitable project processes and outcomes.

4. Working with California's Tribes

- Ensure consultation with tribal governments and communities occurs early in project development and throughout project implementation.
- Ensure tribal concerns are respected and archaeological and cultural resources are protected.
- Seek solutions to state contracting issues that affect the sovereignty of tribes.
- Assist tribes to regain access to their ancestral lands through the Conservancy's land conservation or access programs.
- Work with tribes to enable traditional stewardship and cultural practices on ancestral land and co-management of their ancestral lands and natural resources.
- Ensure programs include indigenous voices, leadership, and perspectives, including traditional ecological knowledge, indigenous stewardship, and educational programs.

5. Coachella Valley Mountains Conservancy Staff and Board

- Strive for a staff that reflects California's diversity, whether it be such characteristics as race, culture, age, gender, physical and mental ability, or socioeconomic status, social identities, and lived experiences, and thereby cultivating an inclusive culture within the Conservancy.
- The Conservancy is governed by a twenty-member Board consisting of local elected officials and appointees of the Governor, Legislature and several state agencies. To the extent possible, advocate for appointments that to reflect California's diversity.
- Articulate equity and environmental justice values in the Conservancy's Strategic Plan.
- Ensure that the Conservancy participates in ongoing workshops and dialogue about equity and environmental justice to improve cultural humility.
- Ensure Conservancy project staff prioritize equity and environmental justice in their work and are supported by management.

6. Accountability and Transparency

- Include accountability metrics for equity and environmental justice objectives in the Conservancy's Strategic Plan; track and report on these metrics annually.
- Regularly assess where the Conservancy has and has not invested funding. Evaluate the impacts of our grant programs in advancing equity.

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