



INFORMATION ITEM

Public Participation Plan Update

Summary: Staff will provide an overview of the Council’s public participation efforts since the endorsement of the Public Participation Plan in June 2020. Staff will also share the results from a recent public survey on the Council’s participation efforts, which found that the Council overall gets good marks in its participation efforts, but can continue to improve, and that the public hopes to continue to attend meetings virtually, even after the COVID-19 emergency passes.

BACKGROUND

The Public Participation Plan

As a state agency led by a governing board, commitment to inclusive and equitable public participation processes is fundamental to ensure the Council understands the needs of the diverse stakeholders and communities of the Delta. Therefore, the Council encourages public participation through various venues, including monthly Council and Delta Independent Science Board (Delta ISB) meetings, and the tri-annual Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee (DPIIC) meetings. The Council also regularly hosts public workshops, offers public comment periods on key documents, and engages in multiple stakeholder forums.

The Council endorsed its Public Participation Plan (Plan) in June 2020. The Plan is a guide to ensure the Agency’s activities offer opportunities for stakeholders and the public to participate in Council decision-making. The Plan is not a “one size fits all” approach. Instead, it allows flexibility to develop a public participation process for each Council project, designed in a way that explicitly considers the communities affected and how Council staff will work to engage them.

A set of foundational principles guide the Plan:

- Endeavoring, to the maximum extent feasible and where not already required by law, to communicate whether (and how) input and public comments were, or were not, incorporated into final products or decisions and why.
- Striving to understand how its decisions and work-products impact all affected communities by actively working to involve all interested parties.

- Ensuring, from start to finish, to the extent feasible, and where not already required by law, that the process and information necessary for public and stakeholder engagement on issues before the Council will be prompt, clear, and available to all.
- Evaluating the most current best practices in public engagement and work to continually innovate its public participation program to be accessible to a broad range of audiences.
- Valuing and promoting accessibility, equity, inclusion, and diversity in the development and implementation of the Council's public engagement processes.

Since the adoption of the Plan in June 2020, the Council has implemented many of its key goals, including:

- **From the beginning of projects, collaborating more closely with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) to better understand community needs and enhance outreach efforts.** This includes contacting more than 40 CBOs to raise awareness of the Delta Adapts project and ground-truth data we planned to utilize in the study. Council staff has also collaborated with CBOs from the Stockton and West Sacramento regions on three CBO-led region-specific Delta Adapts workshops on February 4, April 20, and May 3, 2021. These workshops communicated the results of Vulnerability Assessment and commenced kick off of the Adaptation Strategy.
- **Expanding the use of advisory groups on crucial projects.** The most recent example includes current work to form an Environmental Justice (EJ) Expert Group, made up of CBOs, Native American Tribes, and other local EJ experts, to guide the development of the EJ Issue Paper.
- **Utilizing and exploring means and opportunities for compensating community partners for their time and effort in collaborating with the Council.** For example, the Council entered into agreements with CBOs for developing and leading the workshops in Stockton mentioned above and is currently offered to organizations involved with the EJ Expert Group.
- **Implementing EJ and community outreach training for Council staff.** The first of a multi-part EJ training is currently underway under

the leadership of Social Science Extension Specialist Dr. Jessica Rudnick through guided discussions as part of the Council's internal Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (JEDI) initiative. Additional external training opportunities are actively being explored.

- **Analyzing past public comments and engagement to assess trends and identify needs.** For the EJ Issue Paper and Council-wide use, Council California Sea Grant Fellows have analyzed over 200 written comments received to date to assess trends regarding environmental justice concerns and other issues surrounding the Delta Plan. This helps the Council track opinion over time and evaluate where and how the Council has responded to past public input to inform institutional knowledge. This work is ongoing.
- **Adaptively managing Council opportunities for participation as a result of the COVID-19 emergency.** Remote participation opportunities have been provided at all Council public meetings and events since March 2020. The Council also created a direct engagement email for the submission of public comments, other correspondence, and troubleshooting (engage@deltacouncil.ca.gov).

2021 at a Glance

With the increased availability of online meeting statistics, the Council has been able to track meeting and event statistics more closely and assess trends. The

Since endorsement of the Plan in June 2020, the Council has averaged 73 participants per event, including:

- Holding 13 Council meetings and supported 15 Delta Independent Science Board and four Delta Plan Interagency Implementation Committee meetings (**averaging 51 participants across all three types of meetings**), including two certification of consistency appeals hearings (**averaging 119 participants**).
- Holding seven Council workshops or informational meetings for the 2021 Proposal Solicitation Notice, Delta Adapts Vulnerability Assessment and Adaptation Strategy, and the EJ Issue Paper (**averaging 41 participants**).
- Holding nine Delta Science Program workshops or symposiums, including the Science Needs Assessment Discussion Series and Workshop, the Chinook Salmon Workshop, Zooplankton Symposium, Adaptive

Management Forum, Steelhead Workshop, and two Science Action Agenda Workshops (**averaging 122 participants per day of each workshop**).

- The Adaptive Management Forum also included smaller afternoon training sessions separate from the main plenary (**averaging 45 participants each**).
- Holding the four-day 11th Biennial Bay-Delta Science Conference (**averaging 672 participants per day**).

Of note:

- Attendance between morning (**averaging 78 participants**) and afternoon meetings (**averaging 71 participants**), seems to be higher than evening meetings/events (**averaging 37 participants**).
- While we cannot currently compare in-person attendance against virtual attendance due to inconsistent tracking, Council staff intends to evaluate this information in the future.

Public Participation Survey

On July 19, the Council undertook a survey to evaluate attitudes regarding the Council's public participation efforts one year after the Public Participation Plan's endorsement. The survey results will be compared to the 2019 survey the Council released during the development of the Public Participation Plan. The survey was disbursed through the Council's email list (over 2,500 recipients), Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram (approximately 5,200 followers among these platforms), and directly to those who have participated in Council meetings or events in the past (over 450 recipients). The survey received 95 responses, compared to 86 responses to the 2019 survey.

While 95 participants do not constitute a reliable sample to draw representative or broad conclusions about all possible participants to Council activities, the survey results do provide feedback on virtual participation efforts and can be compared to the 2019 survey results to assess change over time:

- 47 percent rated themselves as "Very Involved" or "Involved." Participants ranged from Northern California, outside the Delta (49 percent), the Delta (26 percent), the Central Valley (19 percent), and Southern California (4

- percent). A large proportion distinguish themselves as private individuals (38 percent) or part of a CBO or non-profit (21 percent).
- 67 percent rate the Council’s public participation efforts as “Excellent” or “Good,” compared to 50 percent in 2019.
 - 32 percent say that they have noticed a positive difference in the Council’s public participation efforts since the Public Participation Plan’s endorsement. This percentage is driven largely by those “very involved” or “involved” in Council activities.
 - 26 percent say they attend more Council activities since the Council went to fully remote events. Conversely, 15 percent say they attend fewer events.
 - Participants identified barriers that they feel prevent them from engaging with the Council. This includes awareness of Council events or issues (46 percent), opinions regarding the overall value of participating (36 percent), and opinions regarding whether the Council addresses what they are concerned about (36 percent).
 - Participants say that Delta Adapts (46 percent), Environmental Justice (46 percent), and the Delta Levees Investment Strategy (43 percent) are the Council activities that could use more improved public engagement.
 - Overall, participants say that the Council does well communicating, is friendly, and is showing improvement in working with local groups to address concerns.
 - The Council could improve listening to all constituencies, having all information available online, and continuing to engage early in the process for projects.
 - When/if in-person meetings resume, 69 percent say they would still prefer to primarily participate in meetings online.

FUTURE ENDEAVORS

Council staff is currently considering initiatives to further strengthen public participation in Council decision-making as it continues to implement the Plan, particularly in light of the COVID-19 emergency.

For instance, when safe to do so, the Council will include hybrid (in-person and virtual) ways to participate in meetings and other events. This could be through the use of remote meeting software or via phone. The Council will also strive to meet another goal of the Plan, using meeting locations close to projects (i.e., certification of consistency appeals hearings close to project site when feasible) when possible, in order to improve physical accessibility of certain meetings to members of the public who may have a direct interest in the subject matter.

The Council is also working to improve collaboration on public events and opportunities with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta Conservancy and Delta Protection Commission and continue to expand opportunities for EJ and outreach training to Council staff. The Council will continue to evaluate approaches and trends to improve stakeholder and community organization participation, and actively seek input from these parties.

FISCAL INFORMATION

Not applicable

LIST OF ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Public Participation Plan

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