



Staff Recommendation

April 24, 2023

Item 6

Action Item:

Consideration and Approval to Disburse Funds for OPC Equity Plan Implementation

Maria Rodriguez, Program Manager

Recommended Action: Authorization to disburse up to \$540,000 to Better World Group Advisors to support OPC Equity Plan implementation.

Location: Statewide

Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives: Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities.

Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits: Please see *Project Summary and Environmental Justice and Equity Benefits* section below.

Findings and Resolution:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report, OPC hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes of Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, the California Ocean Protection Act;
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Budget Act of 2022 which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems; and
3. The proposed projects are not ‘legal projects’ that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Public Resources Code section, section 15378.”

Staff further recommends that OPC adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 35500 *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“OPC hereby approves the disbursement of up to \$540,000 to Better World Group Advisors to support OPC Equity Plan implementation.

This authorization is subject to the condition that prior to disbursement of funds, Better World Group shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Director of the OPC detailed work plans, schedules, staff requirements, budgets, and the names of any contractors intended to be used to complete the projects, as well as discrete deliverables that can be produced in intervals to ensure the projects are on target for successful completion. All projects will be developed under a shared understanding of process, management and delivery.”

Executive Summary:

Staff recommends disbursement of up to \$540,000 to Better World Group Advisors to support [OPC Equity Plan](#) implementation. The OPC Equity Plan was collaboratively developed through a previous OPC grant with Better World Group Advisors and [recently adopted](#) at the October 6, 2022 Council meeting. Through this continued partnership, Better World Group Advisors and OPC will advance critical implementation priorities within the next three years to ensure OPC’s strategic initiatives on equity and environmental justice are sustained in a way that intentionally serves California communities. This project is focused on creating pathways to support local and regional community partners in active participation of ocean and coastal conservation, decision-making, and policy efforts to ensure OPC’s work is equitably informed by California communities, and providing meaningful benefits to them.

Project Summary:

Background:

In October 2022, OPC adopted its first Equity Plan (Plan). The Plan represents OPC’s comprehensive commitments to advancing equity across ocean and coastal policies and actions in California and strengthening internal efforts to create a more inclusive workplace at OPC. The Plan was developed collaboratively with OPC staff and leadership, Better World Group Advisors (BWG), the [OPC Environmental Justice Advisory Group](#), and feedback from the public and state agency partners. It reflects collective action by all relevant partners and contains four overarching goals focused on core areas (Engagement, Inclusive Workplace, Policy, and Science) with objectives, strategies, and actions that advance equity and justice within the state and the Council. The Plan is the outcome of OPC Strategic Plan Target 2.2.1: Ensure adoption of a collaboratively developed OPC Equity Plan that includes, but is not limited to, equitable, convenient, and affordable access to coastal natural resources and access to and engagement in coastal and marine policymaking.

Upon adoption of the Plan, OPC committed to work closely with agency and other partners to implement the Plan’s ambitious goals and strategies. Through implementation, OPC also committed to further refine performance measures, such as benchmarks and other metrics, to track progress and accountability, and inform future biennial Plan assessments. As a living and guiding document, the Plan is designed to set the foundation for existing and future equity needs with opportunities to evaluate progress, conduct reporting, and identify future updates through the biennial assessment.

Project Summary and Equity and Environmental Justice Benefits:

BWG will support OPC in the meaningful implementation and evaluation of the Equity Plan’s strategies to ensure California communities have equitable access and support to actively engage, inform, and benefit from coastal and ocean conservation and policy efforts. The primary goal for this grant-funded project is to provide support and capacity for local and regional community partners to participate in ocean and coastal conservation, decision-making, and policy, in a way that ensures OPC’s work is equitably informed by California communities, and providing meaningful benefits to them. This effort addresses Strategic Plan Goal 2: Advance Equity Across Ocean and Coastal Policies and Actions; Objective 2.2: Enhance Engagement with Underserved Communities. Through this partnership, BWG and OPC will focus on discrete implementation priorities that will inform a biennial assessment, and next steps to identify specific equity-related investments and provide recommendations to ensure ongoing and sustainable implementation occurs beyond 2024. This project aims to provide the capacity to collaborate and coordinate with equity and environmental justice partners statewide, as well as interagency partners identified within the Plan, to inform implementation of the select policy objectives and strategies. Specific Equity Plan implementation outcomes include, but are not limited to:

- Provide expertise on community engagement approaches for OPC projects.
- Review application evaluation criteria and scoring approaches for current and ongoing OPC funding opportunities, including updates to OPC’s Proposition 68 Guidelines, to prioritize and advance projects that provide meaningful benefits to communities.
- Cross-collaborate with OPC partners to inform development of OPC’s pilot environmental justice small grants program.
- Work closely with OPC staff and community partners to inform development of OPC’s environmental justice policy for California’s ocean and coasts.
- Provide timely updates, feedback, and/or analysis at OPC Council meetings to report on implementation progress.
- Create pathways for direct engagement with public members representing environmental justice and tribal communities that can provide recommendations to help OPC best implement the OPC Equity Plan.

- Establish partnerships with environmental justice communities and California Native American tribes to identify regional priorities and provide OPC recommendations on how best to implement actions that address the impacts of climate change.
- Provide OPC capacity and support to implement [California’s “30x30” Initiative](#), to advance equity, opportunity, and improve human health in the context of conserving ocean biodiversity.
- Provide equity and environmental justice expertise, alongside community partners, in scoping science and research projects to inform research questions.
- In partnership with OPC’s Science Advisory Team (SAT) and community partners, co-develop region-specific metrics and equity indicators for community health and resilience to inform OPC’s Annual Coast and Ocean Report.
- Help OPC develop metrics to evaluate Equity Plan implementation progress and reporting approaches.
- Develop a final biennial assessment that highlights Equity Plan implementation progress, accepts accountability for existing gaps, and identifies resource needs.

This project anticipates leveraging input gathered across these selective strategies to inform best practices, lessons learned, and other recommendations to improve embedding equity throughout OPC’s work and future Equity Plan updates. There will be opportunities to cross-collaborate with staff, Council, OPC’s Science Advisory Team, and other partners to provide equity and environmental justice expertise on specific OPC priorities, such as: equity indicators for OPC’s Annual Coast and Ocean Report, engagement and representation in ocean and coastal policy and decision-making, including Marine Protected Areas (MPAs), and improving coastal public access. As mentioned above, this project also includes refining metrics, evaluation, and reporting processes, as well as highlighting key implementation outcomes, gaps, and accountability through the biennial assessment.

About the Grantee:

BWG helps clients analyze power, identify and undo bias, and maintain accountability within their organizations, departments, and programs so that they can successfully enact anti-racist and equitable policies and programs. BWG brings a deep understanding of the opportunities and challenges unique to building community consensus on priorities and recommendations, and to translating these needs into actionable policies at the state. The grantee will apply this expertise to ensure that the diversity of perspectives and needs of California’s communities can be effectively and meaningfully implemented across OPC’s strategic equity initiatives.

BWG’s principled focus on equity, proven success engaging diverse stakeholders, and penchant for finding pragmatic solutions to achieve shared objectives constitute the grantee’s distinguishing

skillsets. BWG supported OPC in the development of the Equity Plan, including the facilitation of OPC’s Environmental Justice Advisory Group. BWG has also supported various CNRA departments and initiatives, including Outdoors for All and the California Coastal Conservancy’s JEDI Guidelines, and partnered with various levels of organizations statewide to support development of community-driven frameworks, policies, and programs.

Project Timeline:

BWG will support OPC in the implementation and evaluation of selective Equity Plan strategies for approximately three years, from 2023 to 2026.

Project Financing:

Staff recommends that the Ocean Protection Council (OPC) authorize encumbrance of up to \$540,000 to Better World Group Advisors to support OPC Equity Plan Implementation.

OPC's General Fund (Budget Act of 2022- Resilience Funds)	\$540,000
TOTAL	\$540,000

The anticipated source of funds will be from the Budget Act of 2022, which included a \$50 million General Fund appropriation to OPC for grants or expenditures for resilience projects that conserve, protect, and restore marine wildlife and healthy ocean and coastal ecosystems. The proposed disbursement is an appropriate use of this General Fund appropriation because this project will provide information needed to increase the State’s understanding and inform investments towards effectively addressing climate impacts on California communities, specifically environmental justice communities. This investment supports OPC’s commitment to actively implement strategic equity and environmental justice initiatives through meaningful engagement and collaborative opportunities. Allocating funding to prioritize such investments is critical to provide capacity and sustain Equity Plan implementation.

Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:

The proposed project is consistent with the Ocean Protection Act, Division 26.5 of the Public Resources Code, because it is consistent with trust-fund allowable projects, defined in Public Resources Code Section 35650(b)(2) as projects which:

- Eliminate or reduce threats to coastal and ocean ecosystems, habitats, and species.

- Improve the management of fisheries and/or foster sustainable fisheries.
- Improve coastal water quality.
- Allow for increased public access to, and enjoyment of, ocean and coastal resources, consistent with sustainable, long-term protection and conservation of those resources.
- Improve management, conservation, and protection of coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Provide monitoring and scientific data to improve state efforts to protect and conserve ocean resources.
- Protect, conserve, and restore coastal waters and ocean ecosystems.
- Address coastal water contamination from biological pathogens.
- Provide funding for adaptive management, planning coordination, monitoring, research, and other necessary activities to minimize the adverse impacts of climate change on California's ocean ecosystem.

Compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA):

The various proposed projects are not considered 'legal projects' that trigger the California Environmental Quality Act ("CEQA") pursuant to Public Resources Code section 21068 and Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, section 15378. If any were determined to be a 'legal project' under CEQA, the proposed project(s) are categorically exempt from review under CEQA pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15306 because the projects involve information collection, consisting of data collection, research, and resource evaluation activities that will not result in a serious or major disturbance to an environmental resource. Staff will file a Notice of Exemption upon approval by OPC.