



**Informational Item**  
September 10, 2024

Item 7

*Corrected September 11, 2024*

## Environmental Justice Small Grants Program

Maria Rodriguez, Climate and Environmental Justice Program Manager

**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:** This program advances racial, social, and environmental justice and equity to create positive impacts in coastal and ocean conservation, including improving access to the coast for outdoor recreation, joy, healing, research, education, and collaborative community-based coastal ecosystem management projects. This funding specifically supports engagement with underserved communities and community-based organizations to provide direct benefits which include but are not limited to: ocean and coastal resiliency and access opportunities, local capacity-building, education and training, youth development, career pathways, and stewardship programs.

### Executive Summary:

The Environmental Justice (EJ) Small Grants Program ('program') is a strategic priority embedded in OPC's Equity Plan, aimed at supporting investments for organizations and communities to fulfill small and short-term projects across coastal regions that create positive impacts in California's EJ communities<sup>1</sup> (Equity Plan, Strategy 1.3.7). The purpose of the program is to implement more equitable and sustainable community engagement and funding methods to expand and enhance

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<sup>1</sup> OPC's Equity Plan defines EJ communities as: Communities that are environmentally- and economically-stressed that experience environmental health inequities which contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.

opportunities and partnerships with EJ communities to access OPC funding and address community-informed ocean and coastal resource priorities. In 2022, alongside the adoption of the Equity Plan, the Council approved \$1.3 million dollars to establish the pilot EJ Small Grants program, that would result in a partnership launched in 2023 between OPC and Justice Outside to co-develop program priorities and fund \$1 million dollars towards small grants in a two-year cycle. This year, through a competitive solicitation, a total of twenty-four (24) grantees were selected to receive funding through this program. Through Justice Outside’s guidance and administration of the program, the process has included extensive and nontraditional outreach to priority communities, an accessible application process, technical assistance and capacity building for awarded grantees, and opportunities to mobilize and join larger EJ networks in the state and across the country.

## Project Summary:

### Background:

In October 2022, OPC adopted its first ever Equity Plan and approved \$1.3 million dollars to establish a pilot EJ Small Grants Program, a direct strategic priority within the Plan, to further its commitments to enhance equitable funding methods and improve access OPC funds aimed at benefiting EJ communities. In 2023, this funding enabled a partnership with Justice Outside, an organization rooted in dismantling systemic racism to advance racial justice and equity in the outdoor and environmental movement, to lead the development of the program and administer \$1 million dollars in small grants for coast and ocean projects and programming through their [Liberated Paths Grantmaking Program](#). Concurrently, the State Coastal Conservancy (SCC) awarded Justice Outside \$100,000 through its [Explore the Coast Grant Program](#) to steward \$80,000 of those funds towards one-year small grants with the goal of facilitating and enhancing public opportunities to explore California’s spectacular coast. In total, Justice Outside was able to distribute \$1.1 million dollars of state funds to twenty-eight (28) grant recipients for up to two years. OPC’s allocation for the EJ Small Grants Program will support twenty-four (24) grantees across the state for projects and programming that engage people in ocean and coastal conservation and/or support equitable access to the California coast.

### Program Scope and Priorities

The purpose of the EJ Small Grants Program aligns with Goal of OPC’s Equity Plan to “establish and implement more equitable and sustainable community engagement and funding methods to expand and enhance opportunities for ocean and coastal projects, policies, and research.” The program is directly drawn from OPC’s Equity Plan (Strategy 1.3.7), which aims to support investments for organizations and communities to fulfill small and short-term projects across

coastal regions that create positive impacts in California’s EJ communities and advance coastal and ocean conservation priorities in OPC’s Strategic Plan. The intention through this program and partnership with Justice Outside is to remove traditional barriers and shift resources to build power with and center the voices and experiences of EJ communities and others who have or currently experience historic and/or systemic inequities. It aims to build relationships and opportunities for EJ communities to access OPC funding and address community-informed ocean and coastal resource priorities. The program prioritized:

- Organizations or projects that engage and benefit EJ communities
- People and projects rooted within their communities, with the lived experiences they need to understand what approaches will work best for the young people in their communities
- Organizations or projects with an annual budget of less than \$1 million dollars
- People or projects that have limited relationships with and/or funding streams from the larger philanthropic community

This pilot round of EJ small grants focused funds at the intersection of racial justice, ocean, and coastal issues including advocacy, research, conservation, education, awareness, equitable access and more. This could include various projects, programs, and activities such as research into emerging ocean conservation solutions, collaborative/community-based coastal ecosystem management projects (e.g. tidal marshes, bays, deltas, estuaries, etc), blue technology (marine debris intervention tools and innovative monitoring devices, etc), environmental justice advocacy/policy campaigns (excluding lobbying), climate and ocean resiliency, recreation and experiential programs, cultural and ancestral practice preservation, public health, healing and joy through equitable access initiatives and much more. Funds through this program provide flexibility for grantees to use for 1) general operating support to make the project or program run effectively; 2) capacity-building, such as training and learning that provides support for building organizational infrastructure and works to ensure the longevity of a project or program, and 3) project-specific needs and implementation support.

Furthermore, the program’s priorities were informed by Justice Outside’s extensive network of partners through a hosted series of community-building webinars around the outdoors, race, and philanthropy and their connection to ocean and coastal resources, including climate change impacts. Additionally, the program included extensive and nontraditional outreach to priority communities, an accessible application process (applications were accepted through video interviews and written formats), technical assistance and capacity building for grantee partners, and opportunities to mobilize and join larger EJ networks in the state and across the country.

## Application Submission and Review Process

In February 2024, Justice Outside publicly announced the EJ small grants opportunity, including offering four informational webinars to give interested applicants an opportunity to meet Justice Outside staff, to learn about their relationship-driven/trust-based approach to grantmaking, and to learn about eligibility details and application process for the grant program. The four webinars combined received over one hundred (100) participants, indicating successful outreach, interest and need for this program. Grant applications were accepted between March and April to fund projects and programming that engage people in ocean and coastal conservation at the intersection of racial justice, including addressing ocean and coastal issues, advocacy, research, education, awareness, equitable access to the California coast, and more. The maximum grant amount was \$25,000 for one year or \$50,000 for two years. A total of ninety-nine (99) applications were submitted totaling approximately \$4.6 million dollars requested, over four times the amount of funding available for this pilot round.

During the application process, Justice Outside staff provided technical assistance support, such as hosting office hours, and accepting applications in written, oral, and video formats to accommodate the needs of applicants. A scoring rubric was applied that reflected a commitment to EJ communities, demonstrated authentic community connection, engagement, and a process that included multiple rounds of staff review by Justice Outside and collaboration with OPC staff and leadership to ensure alignment with program priorities. In addition to scoring and evaluation of applications, Justice Outside conducted due diligence and follow-up when needed to further assess applicants and ensure alignment with the requirements and priorities of the program.

In July 2024, the selection committee finalized their review and approval process and determined a final cohort of twenty-four (24) grant awardees to receive \$1 million dollars total for projects/programming over a two-year period. The final selected grantees' efforts range from art as a tool for environmental advocacy and climate communication, to ocean conservation and research, and entry into aquatic sports. Although their efforts may range, their positive impacts across California communities are undeniable. Through these investments, the program aims to provide equitable opportunities and benefits to EJ communities to help advance ocean and coastal conservation priorities.

## Awarded Grantees:

This pilot EJ Small Grants Program will award \$1 million in funding to benefit twenty-four (24) small and short-term projects across coastal regions that create positive impacts in California's EJ communities and advance coastal and ocean conservation priorities in alignment with OPC's Strategic Plan and Equity Plan. Justice Outside will execute grant agreements with selected

grantees and provide ongoing technical assistance opportunities through capacity and community-building approaches throughout the two-year grant cycle. Justice Outside will coordinate closely with grantees to conduct project reporting and solicit grantee input through an annual survey to analyze program outcomes and impact. A ‘Year One’ Report will be developed in Fall 2025 that details project and programming updates, including implementation outcomes, achievements and lessons learned. Below are the final grantees selected for funding.

**DiverSeaFy** was founded on the idea that if people from different backgrounds had the opportunity to immerse themselves in the underwater world, they would experience an ideological transformation with a heightened awareness and responsibility for conservation. A transformation that benefits the planet and enhances the lives of those working to protect it. DiverSeaFy offers scuba certification and ocean conservation courses to high school students of color.

*Location: Santa Monica (Los Angeles County)*

*Activities: Aquatic skill-building and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Black Star Polo** creates a foundation of aquatic skills among Black youth at the Jackie Robinson Family YMCA. By developing a love for water sports, Black Star Polo opens up a world of possibilities for San Diego’s Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) youth and quite literally connects them with young water polo players around the world!

*Location: Coronado (San Diego County)*

*Activities: Coastal recreation through aquatic sports*

*Awarded: \$50,000*

**Earth Equity** engages folks at the intersection of ecological restoration and decarceration throughout California’s North Coast. Through collaboration with incarcerated EJ practitioners, they have created relevant curriculum regarding prison food systems/food justice, coastal ecologies, and EJ activism. Outside of prison, they collaborate with formerly incarcerated and system-impacted folks to consider the efficacy of a reentry support and ocean care cooperative in Humboldt County. Through this work, EE hopes to support incarcerated people in directing EJ work at San Quentin, connecting to a network of EJ beyond prison, building content knowledge, and adding to professional skills for reentry.

*Location: Eureka/Arcata (Humboldt County) and Marin County; specific work with San Quentin State Prison*

*Activities: Coastal ecology research, health/wellness, advocacy*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Insight Garden Program** (IGP) will bring 168 formerly incarcerated individuals (84 per year) on 8 coastal trips as an addition to IGP's Reentry, Restore, and Reconnect Excursions, a part of IGP's reentry programming. Participants gain critical reentry readiness skills while practicing mindfulness and learning about ecology, conservation, permaculture, and landscape design. IGP Reentry, Restore, and Reconnect Excursions are specifically designed to provide enjoyable and healing experiences at the coast, recognizing the unique challenges faced by participants during their reentry period.

*Location: Berkeley (Alameda County); participants parole to many counties throughout California*

*Activities: Coastal ecology research, health/wellness, and advocacy*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Salted Roots** serves communities of color who have been historically disenfranchised and have traditionally lacked access to the coast. Their focus is on renewing these communities' access to the coast through their programming to address how barriers such as finances, lack of self-confidence, and discrimination have played a role keeping the communities they serve from accessing and enjoying the coast specifically through surfing, research and advocacy.

*Location: Oakland (Alameda County)*

*Activities: Coastal recreation, coastal ecology research, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Save California Salmon** (SCS) is a Native-led organization that serves all people but centers Native youth and families both on and off reservations. The tribes and communities have been long-time stewards of the land and many still rely on Traditional food and materials, such as salmon, eels (lamprey), sturgeon, acorns, mussels, seaweed, and other river and forest-based foods and basketry materials. The community is heavily engaged in restorative activities like bringing good fire to the landscape, dam removal, and habitat restoration. SCS also creates free curricula on Water Protection and Advocacy, as well as Traditional Knowledge, Science, and Management.

*Location: Siskiyou, Del Norte, Trinity, Mendocino, Shasta, Yolo, and Humboldt Counties, specific work in Scott River and Shasta River*

*Activities: Traditional Indigenous coastal ecology*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Un Mar de Colores** connects youth to the transformative, nurturing, and healing powers of the ocean as a step towards a more equitable world and coastal community. Through deep relationships with community school districts, state parks, and the local surfing community, Un Mar de Colores delivers an intentional and culturally-responsive curriculum that has shaped the lives of more than 200 participants via surf therapy, eco-field trips, and 1-1 mentorship.

*Location: Encinitas (Northern San Diego); specific work in the Tijuana estuary and other waterways in the region*

*Activities: Ocean protection, education, and advocacy*

*Awarded: \$50,000*

**The Sea League** aims to restore the relationship between youth 6-14 years old and the ocean. Mindful of the history of denied access to the outdoors that BIPOC communities have faced, The Sea League believes that the underrepresentation of communities of color in coastal communities is connected to fear, generational trauma and is reinforced by the lack of representation. As such, a priority of the program is to facilitate outings to the ocean that feel safe for communities of color. This program was birthed indirectly from a George Floyd paddle out and it seeks to continue cultivating an inviting culture for BIPOC communities to enjoy the outdoors and to become primed as environmental leaders of the future through water play.

*Location: Santa Barbara County; specific work in Goleta at Campus Point and Carpinteria*

*Activities: Coastal recreation and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Native Like Water**, for the past 20 years, has been committed to re-engaging the tribal youth of Southern California with the ancestral relationship that was once an everyday part of coastal indigenous lifeways. Their programs seek to improve physical, emotional, and spiritual health of Indigenous youth through the implementation of water sports, marine science education and habitat restoration activity. By re-engaging Indigenous youth in coastal re-creation, literal creation and reimagining of modern indigenous practices in addition to their education in current scientific knowledge and habitat restoration efforts, Native Like Water is implementing revolutionary tactics in counteracting the effects of climate change and foster health promoting behaviors that will continue for generations to come.

*Location: Imperial Beach (San Diego County); specific work in Kumeyaay and Payómkawichum / Luiseno Territory*

*Activities: Coastal recreation, cultural preservation, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Black Surf Santa Cruz** focuses on supporting BIPOC communities to gain access, familiarity and joy from surfing and outings to the beach. Their curation of safe spaces for BIPOC communities to enjoy the ocean and surfing is in response to the often-siloed experience of BIPOC individuals of living in Santa Cruz, California and the lack of access to public spaces. In collaboration with local youth leaders, community members and a local Indigenous surf group, they also engage in local surf-permit access advocacy efforts.

*Location: Santa Cruz County*

*Activities: Coastal conservation and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*



**Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous People** is an Indigenous-led, community-based organization that works towards environmental, social and cultural justice by building the capacity of Native Nations and Indigenous Peoples. Through collaborations with local Elders, traditional cultural practitioners, Indigenous organizations, youth and more they contribute to policy, research and leadership development in support of protecting sacred places and critical environments. They lead a variety of programs including the Indigenous Waters Program, the Indigenous Coastal Advocacy and Marine Preservation Project, and the Gathering of Coastal Native Nations in California convening.

*Location: Venice (Los Angeles County)*

*Activities: Cultural preservation, advocacy, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Nature For All** is an environmental and social justice organization that works to ensure that everyone in the Los Angeles area, especially underserved and park-poor communities, have equitable access to nature. Through their Water Los Angeles Coalition, Nature for All has worked to oversee Measure W projects and advocate for projects that plan to implement Nature-Based Solutions, have a high level of community engagement and that will support disadvantaged communities.

*Location: Monterey Park (Los Angeles County)*

*Activities: Advocacy and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Reel Guppy Outdoors** works with Black, Latinx, Filipinx and migrant farmworker families in the Santa Barbara and Los Angeles County area through fishing outings and education. As part of their approach, they work with families to demystify any fear of water/aquatic activities they may have, through guided fishing outings. Participation and equipment access are free of charge to families, and they are provided the opportunity to fish and build an understanding of what sustainable, responsible fishing looks like. Participants typically leave with an urge to get back on the water and with an understanding of practices like returning small fish back to the water as means of protecting fish into the future.

*Location: Port Hueneme (Ventura)*

*Activities: Education, aquatic skill-building, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Coastal Defenders** mission is to advance racial equity in aquatic activities by supporting BIPOC youth in learning how to swim to support them in ultimately pursuing aquatic, Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and/or environmental protection careers. Because BIPOC communities were systematically denied access to aquatic opportunities for so many years, Coastal Defenders believes intentional work must be done to shore up the loss in



intergenerational knowledge. Their goal is to reunite generations through restorative practices which include the 5 R's: relationship, respect, responsibility, repair and reintegration through love, honor, gratitude and community.

*Location: San Diego County*

*Activities: Advocacy, education, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Auguste Research Group** looks to work with young adults from Black, Indigenous and Latinx communities in the North San Diego county area who are passionate about being outdoors and who are interested in a technology-based career. The program provides training toward a career in ocean-based drone piloting and data science. Led by Dr. Auguste, a Black engineer and data scientist, who sees the potential in analytics data that drone sensors and cameras collect from the ocean in terms of strong businesses that benefit the ocean ecosystems. Dr. Auguste argues that engineers create sensors based on their lived experiences and this program would provide the prime opportunity for knowledge and practices from BIPOC epistemologies to become front and center in the future of sensor data and the ocean.

*Location: Oceanside (San Diego County)*

*Activities: Restoration and aquatic skill-building*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Art and Wilderness Institute Community** (AWI) organizes programs involving multicultural cohorts of children and parents engaging in watershed education and ocean recreation as a means of creating supplementary curriculum based in marine ecosystems. AWI's programming provide a variety of projects and leadership opportunities for young children, youth, adults, and seniors. The organization collaborates with numerous partners to offer educational programs through a multidisciplinary lens focused on nature exploration, youth development, art, and mentorship.

*Location: Orange, San Diego, Riverside, and Los Angeles counties*

*Activities: Youth education and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Black Image Center** works with emerging, young, Black, image makers in the greater Los Angeles area. Their programming addresses the needs of members of their community who are passionate about the intersection between nature/outdoor photography, and environmental activism. To address the historic exclusion of Black communities from coastal spaces in the LA area, Black Image Center will build a cohort of "climate communicators" or people who use various methods to invite the larger public to engage in conversations about climate change. The program is expanding from curriculum from Heal The Bay's Speakers Bureau Training program to specifically cater to Black Image Center's community of Black photographers. The training includes expert-led presentations on topics such as ocean pollution, climate reality, sacred water, contaminated fish

and sites, stormwater, and more. This program will provide access to quality equipment and training that will elevate participants' ability to create nature-centric images of the coastline and ocean, expand coastal experiences, and enable the use of photography as a medium for climate communication.

*Location: Los Angeles County*

*Activities: Artivism, climate communication, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Alliance for Felix Cove** organizes ocean recreation programming to encourage indigenous cultural healing, and protection and restoration of the only remaining 19<sup>th</sup> century Tomalko (Coast Miwok Tomales Bay)-built home at Point Reyes National Seashore. For example, the Alliance for Felix Cove was previously funded to implement a Tamal-Liwa Indigenous Kayak program. By developing a variety of impactful cultural programs and workshops, the Alliance for Felix Cove is creating opportunities for community members, especially children and youth, to deeply engage with Támaraal-ko history and culture.

*Location: Marin County, specifically West Marin*

*Activities: Cultural healing and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$50,000*

**Black Girl Blue Heart** will offer BIPOC folks constrained by limited access to the California coast scuba diving lessons paired with ocean conservation principles in hopes of creating a fleet of community marine researchers and advocates. Many people in inland communities have never seen the ocean and through Black Girl Blue Heart, a community service initiative, will offer the opportunity for participants to foster discovery, love and care for marine ecologies.

*Location: Lancaster (Northern Los Angeles County); specific work in Avalon/Catalina island*

*Activities: Aquatic skill-building and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$50,000*

**Daybreak Beach Club** will engage people of color in the outdoors to weave the restorative power of nature into everyday life. Daybreak's mission is to provide community, safety, and fun experiences for kids and adults through various programs, integrating surfing, yogic principles, environmental stewardship, and mental wellness practices. The organization focuses on immersive surf and yoga programs that can guide people through emotional healing and gain connection with nature to foster environmental stewardship.

*Location: Encinitas (Northern San Diego)*

*Activities: Coastal recreation and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**PUENTES** provides culturally relevant aquatic skills, outdoor access and conservation through the PUENTES Nature Cohort program. The organization is structured in a way where participants become cohort leaders and solidify the connection between outdoor education and outdoor employment. PUENTES programs attempt to decrease physical and social barriers that prevent BIPOC communities from engaging with the natural world while creating a space for joy, growth, and exploration.

*Location: Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Contra Costa, Alameda Counties*

*Activities: Cultural healing, coastal recreation, and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Enriching STEM Society** provides young BIPOC students with a shining example of the possibilities available in the environmental sciences. By connecting youth directly to STEM professionals, educators and organizers, Enriching STEM, in addition to outdoor education, seeks to widen the future available for California’s Black, Brown and Indigenous youth.

*Location: Paso Robles (San Luis Obispo County)*

*Activities: STEM education and ocean access*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Black In Marine Science** will host an annual BIMS Week Professional Wellness Retreat which creates an immersive experience for their West Coast members in CA. Participants engage in beach clean-ups, bio blitzes research missions and other forms of experiential learning that provide meaningful ways to connect with marine environments and concerted conservation efforts. This approach deepens members' engagement with critical environmental issues, fostering a sense of community and shared purpose.

*Location: National Organization based in Coral Springs, Florida; specific work and programming in California to take place in San Diego County*

*Activities: Advocacy and community coastal ecology research*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

**Black Tech Link** (BTL) supports Black and other underrepresented college students pursuing STEM majors. Through their pipeline initiative, BTL encourages youth to continue pursuing STEM education by recruiting and retaining Black talent in science and technical careers and fostering a sense of belonging among students and professionals in the STEM industry. BTL endeavors to create a supportive ecosystem where Black individuals can thrive and excel. Their students often express a strong desire to actively engage with the outdoors, the environment, and the ocean/coast specifically. Many are passionate about studying the impacts of climate change on marine ecosystems and are eager to participate in structured ocean excursions and field research opportunities.

*Location: National City (San Diego County) and Orange County*

*Activities: Education, conservation, and advocacy*

*Awarded: \$40,000*

### **Consistency with California Ocean Protection Act:**

The proposed projects are 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 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.
- 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 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) may be 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.