



**Informational Item**

December 9, 2025

Item 7a

**Information Item:**  
**OPC Equity Plan Assessment**

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

**Exhibits:**

Exhibit A: [OPC Equity Plan Assessment](#)

**Executive Summary:**

The Equity Plan Assessment (Assessment) evaluates progress made since adoption of the Ocean Protection Council's (OPC) [Equity Plan](#) in 2022. The Assessment summarizes key achievements, highlights progress to date, and identifies areas for continued improvement in advancing equity, environmental justice, and collaboration with California Native American tribes across the state's coastal and ocean policies and actions.

The Assessment serves as a tool for accountability and transparency in reporting on OPC's progress in meeting the goals outlined in the Equity Plan. It also provides a framework for future tracking and alignment with the 2026–2030 OPC Strategic Plan, keeping equity and maximizing community benefits central to OPC's mission, policies, and programs.

**Background**

In October 2022, OPC adopted its first [Equity Plan](#), a framework for embedding equity, environmental justice, and tribal priorities across California's coast and ocean policies and programs. The Equity Plan serves as a roadmap for integrating equity throughout OPC's work, from community engagement and public participation to grantmaking, workforce development,

and science-based decision-making. The Equity Plan is organized around four interconnected goals that define how OPC advances equity through its policies, funding, and programs:

- **Goal 1: Equitable Engagement, Outreach, and Funding** – Increase participation and funding for community-led projects that advance coastal and ocean resilience.
- **Goal 2: Building an Inclusive Workplace and Workforce** – Foster diverse career pathways, inclusive hiring, and staff capacity to sustain equity commitments.
- **Goal 3: Designing Equitable Coastal and Ocean Policy Making** – Ensure community and tribal perspectives and priorities inform state policy and Council processes.
- **Goal 4: Integrating Equity in Coastal and Ocean Science and Research** – Advance community-informed and tribally-led science that connects knowledge with state decision-making

Since its adoption, the Equity Plan has guided OPC’s efforts to expand access to state funding, strengthen partnerships with California Native American tribes and coastal communities, and foster a more inclusive ocean and coastal workforce.

## Assessment Approach

The Assessment represents OPC’s first formal evaluation of progress since adoption of the Equity Plan in 2022. It documents key outcomes, identifies areas for strengthened progress tracking, and lays the groundwork for ongoing implementation and evaluation. It relies primarily on data from 2023 and 2024 and incorporates insights from ongoing implementation and related efforts through 2025.

The Assessment was developed collaboratively by OPC and [Better World Group](#) (BWG), with valuable input and guidance from the [Environmental Justice Advisory Board for California’s Coast and Ocean](#) (EJ Advisory Board). The EJ Advisory Board participated in subgroup discussions by goal area, helped identify areas where baselines and both quantitative and qualitative metrics could be strengthened, and offered recommendations to improve how the Assessment communicates progress. Collectively, the EJ Advisory Group’s guidance informed considerations for future metrics to better track outcomes and benefits for communities and helped shape the Assessment into both a reflection of current progress and a future roadmap for embedding community and tribal perspectives across coastal and ocean programs.

The development process also drew on the expertise and contributions of OPC staff, grantees, and partners whose collective efforts have advanced equity and community benefits across California’s coastal and ocean programs, policies, and initiatives. Their insights, along with data from concurrent initiatives, including the [2026–2030 OPC Strategic Plan](#) update process, [OPC’s Engagement and Partnerships Survey](#) (2025; which received public input from nearly 150

respondents), informed the Assessment’s findings and helped identify key areas for continued improvement and future priorities. The final document serves as both a reflection and a roadmap, summarizing OPC’s progress to date and outlining a foundation for future reporting focused on lessons learned, collaboration, and accountability across all OPC programs.

## Equity Plan: Implementation Progress

The Assessment presents implementation progress by goal area, using a combination of quantitative data, qualitative outcomes, and examples of initiatives that advance OPC’s equity commitments. Each goal area is paired with indicators and metrics that reflect both progress and areas for continued improvement, as well as a section identifying future metrics for enhanced tracking.

A few key progress highlights from the Assessment between 2022 through 2025 include:

- **Goal 1 – Equitable Engagement, Outreach, and Funding:** Between 2022 and 2024, OPC administered approximately \$100 million in grants to advance strategic priorities across climate resilience, biodiversity, equity, and a sustainable blue economy through a range of competitive grant programs, direct partnerships, and other key initiatives. Approximately 45% of OPC-awarded funds directly benefited California Native American tribes, environmental justice communities,<sup>1</sup> and other priority populations. For example, OPC launched the [Environmental Justice Small Grants Program](#), [SB 1 Technical Assistance Program](#), and [updated Proposition 68 Grant Guidelines](#) and [General Grant Guidelines](#) to reduce barriers and improve access to state funding for tribal and community-based organizations.
- **Goal 2 – Building an Inclusive Workplace and Workforce:** Since 2022, OPC has strengthened its internal capacity to meet emerging needs and better support equity, environmental justice, and community engagement across all program areas and has continue to expand access to early ocean careers. OPC expanded internship and fellowship opportunities (e.g., [OPC Summer Internship Program](#)) to strengthen coastal career pathways, and increased staff training on equity, cultural humility, and tribal engagement.

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

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The agency also continued building internal capacity by dedicating positions to advance equity and tribal engagement across programs.

- **Goal 3 – Designing Equitable Coastal and Ocean Policy Making:** OPC continues to improve how community perspectives are reflected in Council discussions and decisions. OPC launched the EJ Advisory Board and embedded equity considerations into all staff recommendations presented to the Council. This section of the Assessment also highlights OPC’s efforts to make Council participation more accessible, including hybrid meetings and outreach strategies to sustain public engagement.
- **Goal 4 – Integrating Equity in Coastal and Ocean Science and Research:** OPC invested in initiatives that elevate diverse knowledge types and advance collaborative science. Examples include OPC’s \$3.6 million investment to expand and continue the work of the [Tribal Marine Stewards Network](#), which now includes six coastal tribes, five of which currently receive OPC funding. OPC also [contributed \\$1 million to CNRA’s Tribal Nature-Based Solutions Program](#) to support tribally-led research and restoration projects that restore culturally important habitats, enhance coastal access for tribes, and strengthen coastal resilience. Cross-program collaborations, including the Ocean Corps Pilot Program, also strengthen community-based stewardship and workforce development.

For further detail of implementation progress, indicators, and project examples, refer to the [Assessment \(Exhibit A\)](#).

## Future Metrics for Consideration

This Assessment demonstrated that while OPC has made meaningful progress, there are still gaps in quantitative data and measurable indicators across goal areas. Strengthening tracking and project reporting systems is an important next step to improve how OPC measures, evaluates, and shares progress in a clear and meaningful way. The *Future Metrics for Consideration* sections of the Assessment outline opportunities to enhance data collection and evaluation, including tracking funding distribution and reach, workforce and community benefits, and post-project outcomes. These efforts aim to build a stronger foundation for transparent reporting, accountability, and data-informed decision-making to integrate equity across OPC’s work.

## Looking Ahead

The Assessment marks an important milestone in OPC’s ongoing commitment to advancing equity across California’s coast and ocean. Building on the lessons from this first Assessment, OPC will continue to strengthen how progress is tracked and reported in alignment with its 2026–2030 Strategic Plan. Future Equity Plan priorities will guide OPC’s work over the next two to five years,

focusing on expanding equitable access to funding and technical assistance, advancing inclusive workforce development and staff capacity, strengthening accountability through improved tracking and reporting, and supporting tribally-led and community-driven science and stewardship.

Implementation of these priorities will be closely informed by ongoing collaboration with the EJ Advisory Board, California Native American tribes, and community partners. Their engagement will help inform statewide coastal and ocean priorities, strengthen how OPC tracks and reports progress, and advise on ongoing policy evaluation. Moving forward, OPC will focus on sustaining progress, strengthening partnerships, and applying lessons learned to drive measurable and lasting change across California's coast and ocean.