



**SUMMARY OF PROCEEDINGS**  
**SUMMIT FOR EQUITY AND RESILIENCE IN WATER**  
March 26<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Alhambra, California

## Introduction and Background

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The Triennial Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement (DACTI) Lessons Learned Summit, titled The Summit for Equity and Resilience in Water, was held March 26 and 27, 2024 at Los Angeles County Public Works Headquarters in Alhambra, California. Hosting the event was the WaterTalks program, which serves the Los Angeles and Ventura County Regions for the Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Grant Program. WaterTalks is composed of multiple agencies, organizations, and consultants. Support was also provided by Planning Committee members from across the state, including the California Department of Water Resources (DWR). The Summit drew more than 200 participants; half in-person and half virtual. The entire event was experienced in both English and Spanish.

### Purpose

The purpose of the Summit was to showcase efforts across California to engage underserved and underrepresented communities in making key decisions that impact their access to safe and affordable water. It celebrated and examined the statewide Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program (DACTI) that is winding down this year. The DACTI Program was made possible through funding from the Proposition 1 IRWM Grant Program. The Summit shared and celebrated successes in this program, highlighted lessons learned, and explored next steps for ongoing engagement of underserved communities and California Tribes in water and climate resilience efforts.

### Background

In all, three DACTI Program Summits have been held. The **2018 Lessons Learned Summit** was in North Lake Tahoe, sponsored by the Sierra Water Work Group on behalf of the Mountain Counties Funding Area and supported by DWR. Participants represented California Tribes and IRWM Regions from across California. The event drew more than 100 people and took place over one and a half days. The **2020 DACTI Virtual Summit** (virtual due to the COVID-19 pandemic) was held over three days. This event was sponsored by the Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority on behalf of the Santa Ana Funding Area with support from the Local Government Commission (now called CivicSpark), DWR and the IRWM Roundtable of Regions. Reports and information from these events can be found at the following sites:

- 2018: [IRWM Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement “Lessons Learned” Summit, Executive Summary](#)
- 2020: [DACTI Virtual Summit – Ensuring Equitable Involvement in Regional Water Planning <https://www.legacy.civicwell.org/summit/>](#)

### Format

The format of this event was a series of panels and presenters highlighting the regional programs being implemented through the Proposition 1 DACTI Grant Program in the 12 Funding Areas across the state. The primary focus of each session was to share stories and outcomes related to the regional programs, including the role of local non-profit and community-based organizations, examples of program elements, integration with IRWM activities, innovative approaches to community outreach and engagement and best practices

for working with Tribal Governments. Local, state, and federal agencies presented information about resources – funding and technical support – to help regions succeed. Day 1 of the Summit looked at successes of and challenges to the DACTI Grant Program from the Tribal, community and implementer points of view. Day 2 considered policy and funding issues and looked to the future.

## Proceedings

The Summit brought together a diverse array of water equity advocates from across the state - representing Tribal, public, private, and frontline nonprofit entities. A breakdown of the Summit sessions is provided below, including the names and affiliations of the various speakers and facilitators. All sessions were recorded and can be accessed at the [Recordings - Google Drive](#) for a deeper exploration of Summit topics and discussions.

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# DAY 1

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## ORDER AND SUMMARIES OF INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

### DAY 1 - WELCOME

- **Adam Ariki**, Deputy Director, Los Angeles County Public Works
- Emcee **Peter Massey**, Water Equity Program Manager, TreePeople

#### Los Angeles County Public Works Department

To begin the 2024 Summit, Adam Ariki welcomed the assembly to the Summit, and shared Los Angeles County's Native American Land Acknowledgment:

*The County of Los Angeles recognizes that we occupy land originally and still inhabited and cared for by the Tongva, Tataviam, Serrano, Kizh, and Chumash Peoples. We honor and pay respect to their elders and descendants – past, present, and emerging – as they continue their stewardship of these lands and waters. We acknowledge that settler colonization resulted in land seizure, disease, subjugation, slavery, relocation, broken promises, genocide, and multigenerational trauma. This acknowledgment demonstrates our responsibility and commitment to truth, healing, and reconciliation and to elevating the stories, culture, and community of the original inhabitants of Los Angeles County. We are grateful to have the opportunity to live and work on these ancestral lands. We are dedicated to growing and sustaining relationships with Native peoples and local Tribal governments, including (in no particular order)*

*the Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians,  
Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council,  
Gabrieleno/Tongva San Gabriel Band of Mission Indians,  
Gabiroleño Band of Mission Indians - Kizh Nation,  
San Manuel Band of Mission Indians, and  
San Fernando Band of Mission Indians.*

Adam continued with summarizing the purpose and history of the DACTI Summits. His remarks then focused on multiple aspects of working toward equity and resilience in water:

- Taking a Community-Centric Approach: Community Empowerment, and Capacity Building and providing Consumer Confidence Reports
- Addressing the high cost of water
- The importance of Partnerships & Collaborations
- The importance of Tribal Knowledge
- Aspects of the Los Angeles County Water Plan & Equity
- The major community concerns voiced in the Los Angeles (LA)/Ventura County region including drinking water quality, the high cost of water, and trash and industrial contamination
- Looking ahead at new opportunities; in the LA Region this includes Water for LA, the County Water Plan, the Safe Clean Water Program, and Equity in Infrastructure.

Finally, the Deputy Director voiced special thanks for the dedicated WaterTalks partners representing the Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County, Upper Santa Clara River, and Greater LA County IRWM Regions; key partners including the California Department of Water Resource (DWR), the IRWM Roundtable of Regions, Statewide IRWM groups; and numerous non-governmental organization (NGO)/community-based organization (CBO) community partners for their unwavering commitment to community development and invaluable contributions to the summit's organization.

### Welcoming Remarks - CA Department of Water Resources (DWR)

- **Salomon Miranda**, Water Management Branch Manager for the Southern Region Office
- **Paul Gosselin**, Deputy Director of Sustainable Water Management
- **Bianca Sievers**, Deputy Director of Special Initiatives

Welcoming remarks and introductory comments were then provided by the CA Department of Water Resources:

- Salomon Miranda pointed out that, of the almost \$52 million that was invested in the Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement program, more than \$9 million helped build capacity in Los Angeles and Ventura counties to ensure more equitable outcomes for historically underserved communities. DWR is documenting the outcomes of the program to influence future success.
- Paul Gosselin shared evolving changes with DWR, including the creation of the Sustainable Water Management structure to more holistically address climate change impacts on water resources. Paul highlighted the video [Celebrating the 20th Anniversary of Integrated Regional Water Management in California](#), and shared that the \$52 million spent on the DACTI Program could be considered the most impactful use of funds in IRWM history. DWR will work to realign the IRWM program, building on its many successes to support current and future issues related to watershed resilience.

- Bianca Sievers acknowledged the many challenges that were overcome during the Proposition 1 (Prop 1) IRWM Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program, most notably the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts on communities' ability to conduct outreach, hold meetings, and ensure access to information. DWR afforded flexibility and approved amendments and extensions of grant agreements as a result. Bianca highlighted DWR's newly released [Strategic Plan](#); and specifically called attention to Goal 2 that seeks to build community capacity through authentic and meaningful engagement and bolster technical and financial assistance. She discussed some organizational changes in DWR's Executive Division to reflect this renewed commitment to supporting vulnerable communities. As of February 2024, DWR has established a Center of Excellence for Racial Equity, Tribal Affairs, and Water Justice to support embedding equity and environmental justice into every discipline within the department. Bianca hopes that the documented lessons learned from this DACTI Summit will help inform the implementation of DWR's Strategic Plan and help to provide safe, affordable, and accessible drinking water for all Californians.

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## DAY 1 SESSION 1 / TRIBAL VOICES: CELEBRATING SUCCESSES AND NAMING CHALLENGES

- Facilitator: **Anecita Agustinez**, Executive Manager, Office of Tribal Affairs Department of Water Resources Executive Division
- **John Flores**, Environmental Director & Water Manager, San Pasqual Band of Mission Indians
- **Samantha Morales-Johnson**, Land Return Coordinator, Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa Conservancy
- **Sherri Norris**, Executive Director of the California Indian Environmental Alliance

The Tribal Voices discussion suggested that the DACTI program provided a solid structure and has been impactful in many areas, including funding that has allowed Tribal partners to elect to utilize a state or federal pay scale, and created more ways for California Tribes to positively impact water related projects and programs. The program has been a step in the right direction in helping Tribal voices to be heard.

However, timing is everything; for some on the panel working on the DACTI program Needs Assessment came at just the right time and helped foster important project development. In another case, there is concern about Assessments being duplicative. If a California Tribe has already conducted planning with its leadership and members, it needs to be respected, in respect for Tribal sovereignty and be used by planning entities rather than ask that a new effort be conducted. An extension of this idea is that because a Tribe is a sovereign entity, Tribal Data sovereignty must also be considered. Additionally, planning entities, such as the state, should

respect needs assessments completed for federal partners, which have their own similar, but different processes, to avoid duplicating work.

The conversation also looked at creating native landscapes, and ways to improve current trends. This includes thinking beyond “drought management” goals -- working with local California Tribes to design native plant programs, using native plants that are local, that provide food and medicine, and are made accessible to traditional and ceremonial uses.

The audience was clearly moved when it was suggested by this discussion that California Tribes are “keystone communities” when it comes to resilience in water and the environment. A bridge or archway relies on the top keystone to hold the other stones in place; if it is removed, the structure collapses. So, too, as Tribal wisdom and traditional ecological knowledge has been ignored and systematically pulled from environmental science, it is brought a greater threat to ecosystem collapse.

It was discussed how there can be difficulties aligning needs of California Tribes and available Funding programs. Traditional sites and cultural species need to be protected and take precedence over the projects being done on the land. Getting Tribal cultural groups involved early in projects is critical because once the project has started, it can be difficult to alter project locations and specifics when following state processes. When California Tribes are put in management or co-management roles, it improves our relationship with nature.

Looking to the future, the panel felt water and environmental funding autonomy for California Tribes is important; public funds should be set aside for California Tribes, and they should collectively determine how this funding is spent. This would alleviate the current barriers caused by California Tribes competing with agencies who have professionals and the resources to put together better funding applications.

Finally, as has been heard throughout the DACTI Program, best engagement practices are key, especially the need to get California Tribal leaders and communities involved early and often on projects and water management decisions. The first contact should not be in the form of a formal consultation request; nor should it be a virtual meeting. Reaching out early and authentically is vital to building trust and long-term, beneficial relationships that can be relied on again and again.

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## DAY 1 SESSION 2 / COMMUNITY-LED PLANNING: TRANSLATING STRENGTHS AND NEEDS TO ACTION

- Facilitator: **Carlos Moran**, Senior Program Manager and Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP) Watershed Coordinator, Council for Watershed Health
- **Sergio Carranza**, Executive Director, Pueblo Unido Community Development Corporation

- **Francisco Romero**, Program Manager, Prevention Institute
- **Sonia Sanchez**, Manager of Community Engagement and Planning, Self-Help Enterprises

The panel shared several lessons and takeaways that have emerged through the DACTI Program and felt that the development and use of community-driven processes was a “win” for the DACTI Program. It created appreciation for authentic community engagement and awakened communities to multi-benefit projects, and the opportunity to work collectively to improve the environment for families. It also helped CBOs and community leaders better understand water providers and public institutions. Takeaways include the following:

- The best ideas come from the community. Examples were given including the Polanco Mobile Home Parks in the Eastern Coachella Valley, where farmworker residents identified drinking water challenges and helped shape ways to address the challenge in the near-term and long-term.
- Community leaders, including grassroots leaders, benefit from having water added to the broader range of community concerns, leading to the potential for multi-benefit projects that address multiple needs in one effort. An example is the LA/Ventura WaterTalks Strengths and Needs Assessment, among other pathways.
- A community moves like water; it shifts and changes organically, finding its own course. This may or may not fit easily with IRWM and other jurisdictional boundaries, goals, guidelines, and expectations. A community’s fluidity includes the ability to work both for and against a project or plan - with beneficial outcomes.
- Remember and make use of the political aspects of community driven design - the involvement of a community member on a local water district board in Eastern Coachella Valley led to a \$30M investment to consolidate and rehabilitate drinking water systems in mobile home parks, that otherwise would not have happened.
- It is important to understand the historical background of a region or district, such as whether a community used water for agriculture and had to begin supporting domestic water. This helps identify which communities should be involved in water dialogues.

The panel also shared valuable concepts to keep in mind when creating a successful community-driven planning and design process:

- Everyone comes to the table with knowledge and their own experience. To express this inherent equality, hold meetings where everyone sits in a circle.
- It takes time to build relationships, to move at the speed of trust.
- It also takes time to build capacity among community leaders. This includes gaining deep education to understand the history of a community, the history and intent of its water systems, and how that now relates to local culture. Another approach to education that’s critical is to start grassroots planning by gaining knowledge of land use, ownership, and management. Use knowledge to build power, to achieve community goals and desire.
- All resource agencies need to work together to support communities, for example, Urban Heat Islands present multiple challenges, such as concrete roads and sidewalks that melt shoes, power outages, lack of air conditioning, lack of natural cooling from

trees, and need for cooling centers. Improving the health of communities requires consideration of the solutions from multiple angles .

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## DAY 1 BREAKOUTS / STORIES FROM THE PROGRAM

In person and online participants broke into several small groups and self-organized for notetaking and timekeeping. They shared stories from the DACTI program, prompted by a series of questions. Overall, groups consistently elevated the topics of community-led planning and design, and effective and just engagement of California Tribes and Tribal communities. The following are some of the more common themes:

Summit: Participants came to the DACTI Summit to learn, learn, learn - especially about others' experience with community and California Tribal engagement.

DACTI Program: DACTI program participants emphasized the community-driven approach to project and program design, recognizing that communities initially identify needs and desires but then require institutional support for project development and implementation. While there was acknowledgement of the challenge in fully implementing a community-driven approach in some areas, the focus remained on empowering communities and fostering meaningful collaboration between communities and institutions. The more time taken to engage and build trust, the more successful the program outcomes. Moving toward cultural sensitivity, including "translating" technical and bureaucratic language into community-sensitive terms and ideas was also emphasized by participants. This includes being graceful when needing to say "no" to a community and being grateful when able to say "yes". The DACTI Program was also noted very positively for flexibility in funding and allowing different regions to influence how their funds should be spent.

Strategies: Key strategies were highlighted to facilitate proactive, authentic engagement. There were repeated conversations about Tribal engagement, and the need for time to build trust, sensitivity to culture and history, and the value of Traditional Ecological Knowledge. Multiple groups acknowledged the need to get comfortable with uncomfortable topics and conversations to be effective.

Timelines: Timelines had many challenges including:

- The conflict between deadlines and moving at the speed of trust, especially with Tribal and under-resourced communities that do not move at a common pace;
- When funding appears vs when it is needed;
- The need for complex amendments to funds that further complicate timelines;
- Staff turnover and other capacity issues at all levels of public institutions.



Although “partnerships” were meant to be the central theme of these sessions, only a few groups managed to delve into appropriate questions within the time allotted. Among those that did, they shared examples of successful partnerships in their regions, resulting in:

- a) Enhanced understanding and acknowledgement of different perspectives on water including technical, Tribal, cultural, and economic.
- b) A desire to move these relationships forward beyond DACTI and IRWM.

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## DAY 1 SESSION 3 / PARTNERSHIPS: FROM OUTREACH TO IMPLEMENTATION

- Facilitator: **Amanda Begley**, Watershed Senior Program Manager, TreePeople
- **James Muller**, Principal Environmental Planner, San Francisco Estuary Partnership
- **Roland Pacheco**, Ending Extractive Industries in the Homelands Program Director, Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples
- **Carlos Quiroz**, Principal, Quiroz Communications
- **Toby Roy**, Rural Development Specialist, Rural Community Assistance Corporation

Growing at the speed of trust was the theme of the Partnerships: From Outreach to Implementation panel.

Several of the panelists described their experience going into communities with assumptions and expectations and having to pivot their approach. This included Carlos Quiroz’s experience of realizing that community members in the Sacramento River Funding Area did not know who provided their water, so the first step became educating on watershed issues and water safety, including building water education into the local school curriculum. Carlos realized that many community members had the same experience as him, growing up in another country where tap water was not safe, so they had a natural distrust of tap water. Because of this, it was important to have community outreach to educate communities on the safety of tap water and create trust between Quiroz Communications, the communities water provider, and the communities they were serving.

James Muller added how important it is to keep communities engaged every step of the way, asking what they think the end point is, and working together to get there. This included asking communities who was missing from the conversation before a project was started, doing as much observing and listening as possible, and building projects based off community members lived experiences.

After COVID-19, Toby Roy noted that water projects and related costs doubled or tripled and resulted in the need to identify funding partners and provide funds up front. The shift to online meetings due to COVID-19 significantly impacted community engagement, highlighting the importance of returning to in-person interactions. It is critical to transition back to face-to-face meetings in communities to foster more meaningful engagement and trust.

The group discussed the significance of engaging with communities in a communicative way rather than an extractive one, and the importance of in-person meetings for building meaningful and productive relationships. Establishing meaningful community partnerships do not require perfection, what matters is the willingness to keep trying, being open to failure, and becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable.

Roland Pacheco connected the concepts of community input and timelines emphasizing that program and funding timelines should allow for flexibility, recognizing that these programs involve more than just funneling work and benefits into communities; they require the investment of time, input, and trust from community members. In addition to this, we must have agencies that reflect the communities they serve, and speak the same languages, as this allows for insights that may otherwise not be uncovered. In short, following the rules of settler society is not worth risking relationships with Tribal members and communities.

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## DAY 2

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### ORDER AND SUMMARIES OF INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS

#### DAY 2 SESSION 1 / BRIDGING COMMUNITY GOALS AND THE REGULATORY SYSTEM

- Facilitator: **Lynn Rodriguez**, Project Manager, Watersheds Coalition of Ventura County IRWM Program
- **Laurel Firestone**, Board Member, California State Water Resources Control Board
- **Norma Camacho**, Chair of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board

The speakers for this session represent two of the most important regulatory bodies, regionally and state-wide, related to water resources and water quality. Both provided detailed information on how these boards are working to build equity and inclusion into the regulatory system, and what that holds for the future.

#### California State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board)

Laurel Firestone shared three lessons that have emerged from her own experience in the regulatory space:

- Investments must be made beyond engineering and technology to effectively address sociological, economic, and institutional challenges facing disadvantaged communities. Prioritizing a holistic approach is essential to address inequities and resilience.
- The long-term development of IRWM and now the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) has helped foster greater inclusion of disadvantaged communities and Tribal involvement in water management and resilience.
- To achieve large-scale accomplishments, partnerships are vital. Examples include the successful passage of the Human Right to Water Act, and the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience (SAFER) program.

The State Water Board has multiple funding programs, but generally not for the early stages of development and design. This is where programs like DACTI and IRWM are critical in identifying, conceptualizing and moving equitable and inclusive projects forward.

The State Water Board has three overarching initiatives to fundamentally change its policies, programs, and practices to address meaningful engagement and disparities:

- The Racial Equity Resolution and Action Plan recognizes the historic harms and disparities that the Board has been involved in. They address this by changing internal policies, creating and maintaining inclusive spaces within the board and staff, activating community wisdom by removing barriers for participation, and openly measuring and monitoring their progress.

- The Tribal Consultation and Engagement Policy continues to build out the Board’s Office of Tribal Affairs and integrate meaningful Tribal engagement into the work of the State Water Board.
- AB2108 provides statutory requirements to engage disadvantaged communities and California Tribes in water quality regulatory programs.

Finally, Laurel offered three examples of programs that the State Water Board will use to implement the equity and justice efforts within their spheres of influence:

- The SAFER Program, which serves disinvested communities to address and improve unsafe water issues through a combination of funding, technical assistance, and other implementation tools to help advance and accelerate solutions. To date, more than 200 such water systems statewide have been returned to compliance serving over 1.3 million people.
- Tribal Engagement and Beneficial Use designation establishes protected beneficial uses of water for California Tribes and Tribal communities as part of water quality management <sup>1</sup>.
- Build an equity lens into all State Water Board programs including prioritizing disadvantaged and Tribal community projects for toxic cleanup projects and assuring that SGMA regional plans are inclusive of disadvantaged and Tribal communities.

#### Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board)

In her introductory remarks, Norma Camacho provided examples from her own experience of how IRWM has allowed jurisdictions to work together toward creating and implementing new technologies that are vital to a resilient future for water in California.

The State establishes policies, but it comes down to the Regional Board to implement the Racial Equity Resolution and Action Plan at the local level. Steps toward implementing the plan include; the restructuring of internal committees last year, internal initiatives aimed at increasing diversity among staff and the board, and a commitment to holding Regional Board meetings in communities most impacted by water quality issues, which was curtailed by the pandemic. Such meetings are seen as critical to building trust and awareness among communities, especially before major issues occur.

The Regional Board is also using funding for the Supplemental Environmental Projects (SEP) program to prioritize DAC and Tribal areas, especially those directly impacted by water polluters whose levied fines fund the SEP program. To this end, the Regional Board is looking at LA County’s Safe Clean Water Program (SCWP) as a source of appropriate projects in the region.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurel provided documents related to Tribal Engagement and Beneficial Use. Links to these include the Racial Equity Action Plan: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1YY0BYIOOdqeGx0xiB6NUGk3ilwjb-6Pa/view> and a Helpful links document: <https://docs.google.com/document/d/14mlrH9W29evso9aTUlclTUH54V5i5IOT/edit>

The Regional Board has also adopted three Tribal Engagement and Beneficial Use designations and is now focusing on how to apply them to water bodies in the LA Region. Outreach has already begun with local California Tribes on early stages of specific projects.

### Passing the Torch

Both Laurel and Norma provided thoughts on where we go from here and how the Boards will be involved. Takeaways and recommendations include the following:

- There is a strong need to maintain relationships and structures that come from IRWM and DACTI to provide the partnerships that are vital to get projects developed, funded, and implemented. At the same time, the State Water Board recognizes a big lack of funding for participation and capacity building efforts and is trying to address this through efforts such as the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) Environmental Action grants and a call for private and public resources.
- Regulatory alignment is needed to expedite multi-benefit projects. The Bay Area efforts to align multiple entities into a regulatory integration team is a good example.
- It would be very beneficial to provide regulatory discussions early in project development (including the involvement of Tribal voices) to understand permitting and take this into consideration in the development process.
- Among IRWM and DACTI groups and organizations, there is a need TODAY to begin the transfer of knowledge from these programs to a new generation of programs and leaders.

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## DAY 2 KEYNOTE / CELEBRATING A MILESTONE

### **Anthony Rendon, Speaker Emeritus of the California State Assembly**

A special message was provided by CA State Assembly Speaker Emeritus Anthony Rendon. Speaker Emeritus Rendon shared perspectives on the story of bringing the \$7.1B Proposition 1 Water Bond forward; its passage by voters in 2014 provided \$510M for IRWM and paid for the entire Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Program. As the author of Prop 1, Speaker Emeritus Rendon built several firsts into the structure; there were requirements for setting funds aside for disadvantaged communities but also allowed those communities to compete for general implementation funds. Requirements to involve communities directly in the process of designing and prioritizing water infrastructure projects was also a first. These kinds of requirements have since become standard in more recent bond efforts.

At the same time, Speaker Emeritus Rendon shared concerns about a changing and challenged economy in the state, and whether we'll revert to "the old way" of doing things, where high-capacity agencies access whatever funds are available. His message to the Summit: powerful agencies are asking the legislature for funding every day. We, who represent disadvantaged communities, can and should do the same thing to whatever extent possible.

## DAY 2 SESSION 2 / LESSONS LEARNED FROM 20 YEARS OF IRWM ENGAGEMENT: REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- Facilitator: **Soua Lee**, Supervisor of Water Resources, Kings River Conservation District
- **Maggie Dutton**, Senior Engineer, Contra Costa Water District
- **JoAnna Lessard**, Watershed Manager, Yuba Water Agency
- **Rachael Gray**, Water Resources & Planning Manager, Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority
- **Katherine Gledhill**, Owner, West Coast Watershed

Facilitator Lee began this session by sharing a map of IRWM Regions and Funding Areas, to give context to the conversation and how the IRWM and DACTI programs are organized statewide. Funding Areas generally encompass multiple IRWM hydrologic regions. The subsequent discussion on Regional Perspectives of 20 years of IRWM focused on the benefits and challenges of the IRWM and DACTI programs, strategies used to implement the DACTI program, and recommendations for the future.

### IRWM and DACTI Benefits:

- Flexibility of funding: funding for IRWM and the DACTI program has been unique in many ways. All speakers acknowledged the unique *flexibility* of the DACTI funding, that allowed areas to partner together across multiple communities and often spanning several IRWM Regions. This allowed small rural communities that often did not receive funding, both a voice in the planning process and money for projects.
- Partnerships: Funding created new structures to define and support partnerships. The *flexibility and longevity of funding*, created partnerships between agencies - and then between agencies and communities - because of the time provided to establish the trust needed for ongoing working relationships. Flexible funding motivated partnerships, requiring people to come together to determine how funds would be spent, another key benefit of flexibility. One area took 3 years to complete their funding agreement with DWR, taking time to build enough trust to determine funding allocation across major program activities (needs assessment, engagement, technical assistance, project implementation) and IRWM Regions.
- Leveraging partnerships: Working relationships in turn led to several successes both within and beyond the program. In one Funding Area, their partnership created the Sustainable Groundwater Management Plan, in another, additional funds have been obtained for strategic planning.
- Cooperation over competition: A repeated and significant benefit of partnership building was the ability to move past traditional challenges of regions competing against each other for IRWM funds - leading to winners and losers - and instead work together to allocate resources so vital needs are being met across the Funding Area.

- Innovative programs and processes: The DACTI program allowed Funding Areas to test new approaches and programs and achieve outcomes that would not have otherwise been possible. These included:
  - Innovative methods to engage with DACTI communities, to gather data, and take different approaches to technical assistance.
  - Capacity-enhancement tools; creating a pipeline of projects and programs with an equity / justice lens, with measurable outcomes and monitoring.
  - Understanding community needs in a tangible way.
  - In one area, multiple properties on wells were consolidated into a system. Because of multiple jurisdictional and regulatory issues, it was a complicated, long process that created barriers to completion in the past. The flexibility and longevity of DACTI funds made implementation possible.
  - In another area, a program was designed to help consolidate technical *services* in rural areas where it was not feasible to connect *systems*. While this was, unfortunately, curtailed due to the pandemic, it still exists as a program design that can be moved forward with future funding.
  - In many regions, special attention was paid to unhoused community members and their unique challenges and needs. Programs addressing these needs considered drinking water quality and availability, hygiene stations (showers and restrooms), potential housing alternatives and best practices for minimizing the impacts of water quality related to trash and other activities at encampments.

IRWM and DACTI Challenges: Challenges cited were tied to the benefits of the program. These included the geographic dispersion of IRWM regions within a Funding Area, disadvantaged community locations, Tribal community boundaries, or all three. Partnerships across multiple sectors and jurisdiction take time to develop and are challenging to maintain across multiple grant cycles. Working with many project sponsors revealed varying levels of capacity among them, creating a need for varying levels of support. Staff turnover at all levels is an ongoing challenge, which creates time lags and the need to constantly bring people up to speed.

DACTI Implementation Strategies: Facilitator Lee acknowledged that IRWM has been at work since 2002, but when the DACTI program funding became available in 2016, it caused many regions to pivot based on this new opportunity. To implement the DACTI Program, Funding Areas organized projects in different ways. Some took a phased approach, first focusing on a Needs Assessment and designing next steps based on the Assessment. One area first examined place-based technical needs in rural areas that could be addressed in the near term, and then broader community needs in each IRWM region, identifying major trends to address through projects and programs. Education was important at all levels: communities, agencies, and elected officials. In at least one area, an ethnographic approach was taken, viewing community members as experts in local issues and framing program development from that lens. There was also a balance between spending funds collaboratively, and independently among IRWM regions within a Funding Area.

Recommendations for the future: besides recognizing the need for funding - especially to support partnerships - there were thoughtful recommendations for this and similar programs in the future.

- Partnerships take an enthusiastic committed leader to handle grant management and administration, for consistency and sustainability. If the role is passed around, continuity of relationships can be lost. Additional benefits should be provided to entities willing and able to take on leadership roles.
- Agency funding is usually based on service to paying customers, so serving outside partnerships needs dedicated funding streams.
- Funding that is impacted by jurisdictional boundaries needs to be simplified. This is especially important to serve California Tribes whose ancestral lands and areas of geographic concern cross over these boundaries.
- Having Tribal engagement expertise as well as water system contractor expertise is essential to be successful.

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## DAY 2 BREAKOUTS / PASSING THE TORCH

As on Day 1, in person and online participants broke into several small groups, and self-organized for notetaking and timekeeping. They shared thoughts related to the next steps in the water equity journey, both personally and institutionally, again prompted by a series of questions. Overall, groups looked at funding and fiscal management issues, and how to make authentic community and Tribal engagement systemic. Following are highlights of the discussions:

Summit: Participants came to Day 2 of the DACTI Summit to learn from others' experiences, and about the myriad of water issues presented. Comments suggested there was a notable presence of water agency staff eager to learn from the diverse body of participants.

Passing the Torch: Participants considered ways they could individually plan to apply themselves to the next steps beyond the DACTI Program, and collective action efforts.

Observations included:

- Everyone is a water leader. We all drink water and should care about water. It is very challenging to get people involved in the conversation about water in their communities.
- Unlearn some of the assumptions we made early on in this program and in our work.
- While we seek to empower others, their stories and experiences can empower us in turn.
- We can pass the torch to the next generation, but let us also ensure we “re-ember” and keep our light alive.

Collective actions: Discussions pointed to the IRWM Roundtable of Regions as an example of working together to advocate for supportive state funding and legislation. Inspired by



comments from Speaker Emeritus Rendon, there was interest in connecting with elected offices and requesting funds for disadvantaged communities and California Tribes.

Systemic Structural Changes: As to what institutional and structural changes are needed to provide support to communities and Tribal groups, discussions looked at funding and engagement practices:

- Addressing fiscal challenges is going to be very important to make water equity programs work for community and Tribal partners. This includes cash flow issues and the need for advanced funding or faster reimbursement. One group observed that setting funds aside for California Tribes, and letting them determine how it is spent, is an active way to honor sovereignty.
- Multiple groups recognized the need for education about water related issues, including K-12 programs, but also supporting CBO coalitions with professional training and capacity building.
- Continuous communication and working to understand roles and limitations is important.
- Work proactively to inform legislation so that DWR is provided the tools and flexibility to make funding programs work for communities and California Tribes.
- Finally, discussions included engagement themes that have been repeated throughout the Summit and the DACTI Program:
  - Provide funding for community participation, childcare, transportation, and food. If basic social needs are not addressed, it is hard for disadvantaged communities to focus on water discussions.
  - Meet the community where they regularly meet. It is important to house discussions in gathering spaces that community members, including Tribal communities, are familiar with.
  - Take time to build trusting relationships. Tribal communities need to be reached out to, early and often.

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## DAY 2 SESSION 3 / THE FUTURE OF FUNDING: VISIONS OF LONG-TERM SUCCESS

- Facilitator: **Mike Antos**, Principal, Stantec
- **Carmel Kinsella Brown**, Financial Assistance Branch Manager, Division of Regional Assistance, California Department of Water Resources
- **Jennifer Clary**, California Director, Clean Water Action
- **Jack Simes**, Area Manager, Bureau of Reclamation Southern California Area
- **Lynn Von Koch-Liebert**, Executive Director, California Strategic Growth Council

*Note: During the panel discussion, the venue's WiFi was temporarily interrupted. During this time, virtual panelists continued discussion while in-person panelists took audience questions.*

In this panel, speakers acknowledged the challenges that lay ahead for available future funding and underscored the importance of sustaining relationships with communities despite interruptions in funding. Learnings were shared about how various funding programs have played out, while considering areas for further improvement to address ongoing community needs. Panelists and audience members discussed pathways for agencies to further improve engagement mechanisms and future program design structures to be more responsive to ongoing community needs. There is still work to be done with funding programs so that they are more aligned across the different levels of government and more inclusive of the communities they serve.

Carmel Kinsella Brown noted that DWR has no funding remaining for grants at this time, following delivery of all the Prop 1 IRWM, Drought Relief and Sustainable Groundwater Management grants over the last few years. She directed listeners to look for other state funding opportunities via the [State Library's Grants portal](#) and the [Federal Grants portal](#).

Lynn von Koch-Liebert stated while SGC also has limited funding opportunities right now, the investment approach they employ may serve as a model for funders. She shared SGC's ability to meet communities where they are in terms of public infrastructure investments, their ability to provide technical assistance to grantees, and the benefits of awarding grants in rounds to seek and implement feedback. Lynn advised listeners not to be shy about sharing examples of problems/challenges, and case studies with Agency staff, because it gives them the information they need to report back to the legislature on what is, and is not, working. It is also useful for agency staff to hear directly from communities when thinking through bill analyses and proposals for legislative updates.

Jack Simes recommended participants look to the Bureau of Reclamation website, which includes current funding opportunities, but to be cognizant that some programs have disbursed large portions of available funds or might otherwise be closing soon. Jack did note there are a lot of other funding opportunities available but that it's important to understand the criteria requirements. He mentioned the importance of connecting with grant management specialists to receive additional insight on federal rates and grant structures. Jack highlighted that the legislative process at the state level is the same at the federal level, which is why it is important to engage with elected officials in order to get a message across.

Jennifer Clary stressed the need for funding agencies to offer greater timeline flexibility, remembering that some aspects of the federal grant programs implemented through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act offered only three weeks to submit applications, which was not realistic for the communities that would have benefited the most. Jennifer encouraged people to make sure their legislators know what they are working on and what they need. She stated that legislative funding has been important in jump starting programs and it's a logical source from which future funding should be sought. Jennifer also

noted an opportunity for legislative and administrative branches to more closely collaborate to overcome barriers presented by statutes as currently written.

Lynn added to Jennifer's remarks and advised the group to track potential points of intervention, or public participation opportunities, that are required as part of statutory processes. Providing comment and input can help shape both the item that is on-the-table, as well as future items and related efforts. Although the statute is already drafted, agencies have the opportunity to leverage public input to create more helpful guidance documents. Lynn is looking forward to continuing to receive feedback that reveals the obstacles communities still face in accessing resources so that it can better inform priorities that resolve them.

The panelists discussed leveraging federal dollars and provided references to the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Inflation Reduction Act and Justice40 Initiative and upcoming federal grants. Lynn highlighted the US [EPA Community Change Grants](#) Program, which is accepting applications for one year until November 2024. This grant exemplifies the federal government's responsiveness to lessons learned by extending the application period and expanding eligibility requirements. Lynn also discussed the Tribal Capacity Program Awards in April 2024 and the Community Resiliency Center in April 2024. Additionally, she mentioned the SGC Connecting Communities Program where SGC will look at applications from previous submitters, help applicants learn about federal grants, and translate existing SGC applications into federal applications. This is a new trajectory to assist grant seekers in need of Technical Assistance to USEPA Environmental Finance Centers to support funding proposals.

Carmel discussed the opportunity for greater alignment between State and Federal programs, citing the potential to streamline various online grant portals that are used. Alignment is critical at a few levels: alignment of funding programs within the State and between State and Federal agencies, regulatory alignment as discussed in the previous panel moderated by Lynn Rodriguez, and alignment of terminology and definitions. DWR has been working to improve terminology alignment, and in July 2022 it published a white paper: [Disadvantaged Communities Nomenclature Within the State of California: Findings and Conclusions](#) to highlight the issues with nomenclature and definitions. This document has been shared with other State agencies to promote consistency and shared understanding in the future. We still have progress to make, however; for example, EPA's Justice40 initiative still uses the "DAC - disadvantaged communities" terminology.

One issue raised by the audience is that overhead and indirect costs aren't always eligible to be covered by grants which places a financial burden on small organizations. Lynn mentioned that it's important to share examples of these issues that come up during the implementation phase so agencies can understand the impact of the programs being administered on those they are trying to benefit. The topic of advanced pay also came up, as many community-based organizations are unable to front the costs involved in implementation of large grants. One attendee elaborated on this point by adding that people often assume there is overhead

available for California Tribes to protect cultural resources, but this is rarely the case, underscoring the critical importance of advanced payment structures. This attendee also noted a key opportunity for agencies to rethink how they can better come to the circle to meet tribal communities where they are. Tribal communities don't follow the capitalistic and transactive approach commonly seen in society, so agencies should be mindful of how their engagement approach is structured. This issue extends to disadvantaged communities where outside organizations or agencies constantly approach them to request feedback and push for their engagement without sufficient compensation or financial relief up front. Anecita Agustinez added that agency knowledge has not accurately reflected indigenous knowledge, but there is growing acknowledgement among agency leadership that best available science equates to indigenous knowledge. Commodification of water in the past has continued to influence the disconnect agencies must navigate today.

Additionally, the terms "disadvantaged community" and "stakeholder" were critiqued, as the first unnecessarily characterizes a community based on systemic hardship, and the second is rooted in settler-language, and both are divisive. The need to reflect on how historically excluded and underserved individuals are characterized is very important and was also brought up in the 2018 Summit. On a related note, tribal engagement was explained as requiring an understanding of the language of culture and the language of language. It is critical to decolonize the language around water. We all need to ask the question of how we show up within the NGOs and tribal spaces we work within.

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## DAY 2 CLOSING / BUILDING FROM HERE: REFLECTIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

- **Matt Frary**, Principal Engineer, Los Angeles County Public Works
- **Anecita Agustinez**, Executive Manager, Office of Tribal Affairs Department of Water Resources Executive Division

Closing out the Summit included a Call to Action from Matt Frary, and reflections by Anecita Agustinez.

Matt Frary spoke of his own experience and gratitude for his involvement in IRWM and this Summit, emphasizing the value of hearing diverse perspectives that he does not hear often, and some for the first time. He highlighted the commitment of Summit attendees to move forward together advancing the successes of IRWM and DACTI.

Expressing gratitude on the part of LA County Public Works for being able to host the event, he pointed out how IRWM and DACTI have helped the LA region create a path forward. This includes the LA County Water Plan designed to be in alignment with the California Water Plan 2023, providing a significant platform for building a resilient water future for the region. IRWM and DACTI Programs have also influenced the development and implementation of the County's Safe, Clean Water Program, which to date has committed funding for 126 water projects, representing a regional investment of \$1.4 billion dollars.

Matt provided the IRWM community with a Call to Action, honoring the *philosophy of IRWM* and embracing the inherent value of sustained, inclusive relationships. Funding streams to support IRWM and related programs may come and go, but those who embrace the *vision of IRWM* will stay the course. Building off comments from speakers on both days, Matt asked that we value everyone's contribution and "not leave each other's capital on the table" - and that regardless of when and where funding is available, we need to be ready, we need to keep talking, and we must move forward together.

Anecita Agustinez first thanked LA County Public Works for hosting, expressing special appreciation for launching the event with a living Tribal land acknowledgement read by Public Works' Adam Ariki, and remarked on the inclusive energy of the Public Works facility and staff.

Thanks and praise was then offered to all the Day 1 speakers and presenters for the rich and meaningful concepts of inclusion shared:

- *Tribal communities are a Keystone Species in water resilience.*
- *Make a commitment to healing.*
- *Recognize the strength of community, the fight for land; the fight for water; and the fight for justice.*
- *Honor and learn from community.*
- *Be comfortable with being uncomfortable; be comfortable with long pauses in a conversation.*
- *Work at the pace of the community and not the cadence of deadlines.*
- *Mutual respect builds trust.*
- *Culture is power.*
- *Water is personal.*

Anecita offered an observation that the Summit was very unique - and perhaps a first – in that Tribal involvement was present throughout the event, in every session and conversation.

She also observed the powerful role women have played and will continue to play in IRWM and water equity. This was inspired by the start of Day 2, led by Laurel Firestone and Norma Camacho, two very influential women in water, that came after a full month of national celebration, honoring Women's History Month. Anecita acknowledged with gratitude the State Water Board and Regional Board efforts, as they stress the need for equity and inclusion is achieving water resilience, honor the human right to water, and understand that regulatory entities must be *in* the community and *look like* the community.

Honoring Speaker Emeritus Anthony Rendon and his profound contribution to IRWM and DACTI through authorship of Proposition 1, Anecita reminded the audience that 2014 was historic in California water with passage of Prop 1, amendments to the California Environmental Quality Act, and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act. She reiterated the Speaker Emeritus' call that, in the face of slowing economics, we must not go back to the non-inclusive "old way" of managing water funding and resources in California.

Finally, Anecita offered a few closing thoughts -

- By bringing such a diverse audience together to connect, share and learn, the Summit itself has helped the process of passing the torch to a new generation of water leaders.
- IRWM Regional leaders have carried out the hard work of building partnerships and managing funding across jurisdictions. They have made IRWM and DACTI successful as a consequence.
- Communication is essential to the work of IRWM and DACTI and must start with respectful language of inclusion. A standout example is replacing the word “stakeholder” with “people or interested parties” in all our work, due to the historic harm it represents, especially in California.

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- Greater Los Angeles County Integrated Regional Water Management

Roundtable of Regions DACTI Workgroup

Los Angeles County Public Works / Water for LA County

State of California Department of Water Resources

Prop 1 Water Bond 2014

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