



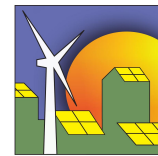
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January 23, 2023

Sent via email to CRC@sgc.ca.gov

Coral Abbott
Program Manager, Community Resilience Centers
California Strategic Growth Council
1400 Tenth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: SGC Community Resilience Centers Round 1 Draft Program Guidelines

Dear Ms. Abbott,

Thank you for the opportunity to help shape the draft California Strategic Growth Council (SGC) Community Resilience Centers (CRC) Program Round 1 Draft Guidelines. This program is critical because it will help build community resilience in our communities. We represent members and allies of the [Community Resilience Working Group](#), a formation focused on ensuring that California's state agency climate initiatives actively advance equity and holistic, community-led visions for climate resilience. Our combined experience organizing with low-income, environmental justice communities across the state and advancing policy advocacy rooted in racial and environmental equity prepares us to offer specific and meaningful input to improve the SGC CRC Program Round 1 Draft Guidelines.

First, we want to highlight several areas of the draft guidelines that we appreciate:

- The explicit mention of racial equity in the program vision (page 5)
- The centering of both physical and *social* infrastructure as well as climate and *community* resilience in the program approach (page 5)
- The clear emphasis on multi-stakeholder partnerships and robust community engagement throughout all phases of resilience center planning and implementation, and the requirement of a collaborative stakeholder structure (page 6)
- The attention toward developing holistic resilience centers by requiring that each implementation grant proposal meet at least four strategies (page 13)
- The prohibition of using resilience center funds on fossil fuel infrastructure (page 18)
- The comprehensive list of types of activities that SGC will offer technical assistance around (pages 55-56)

We also offer the following recommendations to ensure that the Community Resilience Centers Program prioritizes the needs and voices of frontline communities in the face of increasingly severe and compounding climate impacts:

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Prioritization:** Strengthen robust targeting for community outreach and project selection
2. **Costs:** Provide flexible cost categories to tailor individual projects to community needs
3. **Direct TA:** Clarify criteria used to evaluate pre-proposal technical assistance requests
4. **Advance Pay:** Increase advance pay coverage
5. **Reporting:** Streamline reporting requirements
6. **Eligibility Criteria:** Establish guardrails around private sector lead applicants and UC and CSU entities and allow for simultaneous application to planning and implementation grants
7. **Scoring and Evaluation:** Increase transparency and center equity

8. **Equitable Workforce Development:** Prioritize workforce development and labor standards in scoring
9. **Timeline for Service Provision:** Remove onerous timelines
10. **Tribal Sovereign Immunity:** Remove language giving SGC the right to sue Tribes
11. **Minimum Grant Amounts:** Lower the implementation grant minimum award threshold
12. **Required Facility Functions and Features:** Increase flexibility
13. **Resilient Mobility:** Support community mobility and zero-emission transportation options
14. **Definitions:** Enhance and clarify definitions

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS

Our 14 recommendations are as follows:

1. Prioritization: Ensure more robust targeting for community outreach and project prioritization

We are concerned that the current definition of “priority communities,” specifically with regards to the definition of “under-resourced communities,” is too broad to effectively target the communities most vulnerable to climate change and in need of resources. Additionally, the current definition is a bit confusing, as it seems to indicate that rural, unincorporated, and Tribal communities would only qualify if they are in census tracts that qualify as under-resourced. Instead, we propose prioritizing funding for this program for projects located in and directly benefiting disadvantaged communities (DACs), as defined by Section 39711 of the Health and Safety Code¹, and disadvantaged unincorporated communities (DUCs), as defined by Section 65302.10 of the Government Code.² Including DUCs will ensure that the CRC program will also prioritize low-income, high-pollution rural communities in large census tracts that are not included in the Section 39711 definition of DAC. We also recommend keeping rural communities as priority communities.

Additionally, we recommend expanding the definition of Tribal communities that are included as priority communities. Tribal communities, regardless of state or federal recognition status, must receive priority funding. The state does not have any regulatory jurisdiction over tribal lands. Because no specific state tools include tribal data, Tribes should be allowed to submit their own data for any known environmental and health statistics on tribal lands or within tribal boundaries.

While we think that the “priority communities” should be more targeted, we support the current method of assigning extra points to priority communities in the project scoring process. Assigning extra points to rural communities is especially useful as a way to meet statutory requirements around geographic diversity. We also urge that application technical assistance be prioritized for applications led by priority communities.

2. Costs: Provide flexibility to tailor individual projects to community needs

We urge that there be as much flexibility as possible in allocating certain percentages of the total grant award to specific cost categories. This will allow the necessary flexibility to tailor individual projects to community needs. As such, we support the ability to request more than the allotted 10% for community engagement and suggest allowing awardees to request deviations from all of the allotted cost category

¹ [Section 39711 Health of Safety Code](#) (2014)

² [Cal. Gov. Code 65302.10](#) (2022)

amounts (i.e. community resilience services and programs, indirect costs, etc.), subject to approval by SGC staff on a case-by-case basis.

Additionally, we recommend raising the maximum allowance of 12% for administrative costs to allow for more flexibility. Similarly, we are concerned that the 10% maximum for pre-development processes may be insufficient to cover the costs of developing all of the required plans. Between the partnership agreement, the CRC emergency plan, the year-round CRC plans, and more, the proposed maximum amount of funding may not cover these required expenses.

3. Direct TA: Provide more clarity on criteria used to evaluate pre-proposal TA requests

We recommend that the final guidelines provide more clarity on the criteria used to evaluate pre-proposal technical assistance (TA) requests and match applicants to TA providers. More transparency on this process can help us offer input on criteria that should be considered, such as matching applicants in unincorporated areas with TA providers with extensive experience working in these areas.

Additionally, we recommend that the program provide TA during the grant period to help projects secure funding in order to continue to operate after the grant period ends. These investments are intended to fund resilience centers that will operate sustainably after the grant term. Still, lower-capacity organizations may lack the expertise or resources to find a sustainable funding source. Especially given the longevity requirements, we recommend there be robust TA throughout the grant period to ensure that projects can access funds and other resources to continue to serve impacted communities. SGC staff or third-party TA providers should work with each grantee to develop a strategy for continuing operations in the medium-term and long-term.

4. Advance Pay: Increase flexibility in advance payment

We recommend that the CRC program offer 100% advance payments on a continuing basis to ensure that all communities can access the program, regardless of their ability to pay upfront.

We are glad that CRC includes an advance payment for up to 25% of the community resilience center grant award. However, while we recognize that SGC is bound by statute, we would like to increase this percentage to the total grant amount (100%) to increase program accessibility. Communities with fewer resources face tight margins and lack adequate reserve cash to pay for project costs upfront. For instance, applicants to the Transformative Climate Communities program expressed frustration and discouragement when navigating the burdensome reimbursement model.³ The reimbursement model places small organizations' financial health at risk and could negatively impact project performance.

To address this barrier, SGC should offer a replenishing or rolling advance pay model in which awardees can receive the total grant award in regular installments paid in advance throughout the grant period. For instance, the CARB Sustainable Transportation Equity Program (STEP)⁴ uses an advance pay regulation to grant the majority of funds⁵ as part of both the planning and implementation grants. Allowing rolling

³ [Fighting Redlining and Climate Change with Transformative Climate Communities](#) (2021)

⁴ Sustainable Transportation Equity Program [guidelines](#) (2020)

⁵ [California Air Resources Board Advance Pay Regulation](#) (2019)

advance pay as part of the Community Resilience Centers program would afford small, lower-resourced organizations that serve communities with the greatest need the opportunity to apply for funds that could increase climate resilience and benefit their communities.

Additionally, not including “federally-recognized California Native American Tribes” in the advance payment is inconsistent with the use of advanced payment as a “strategy to increase access to funding for lower-resourced organizations and communities including California Native American Tribes.”⁶

Finally, we have concerns over the additional administrative burdens posed by the advance pay reporting, as this could be prohibitive for lower-capacity or lower-resourced organizations. We recommend more flexibility and streamlined tracking for advance pay recipients.

5. Reporting Requirements: Streamline reporting requirements

The current reporting requirements are very burdensome and could be prohibitive for prospective lower-capacity applicants. If applicants are successful in garnering planning or implementation funds, the standards are so onerous that a non-profit lead would have to hire a full-time staffer just to meet the reporting deliverables of this grant program. As CRCs should be community-driven, we believe that the grant program must be accessible to lower-capacity organizations. Reporting requirements should not act as barriers to non-profits or community-based organizations.

It would be challenging for lower-capacity organizations to comply with bi-monthly reporting requirements. Instead, we recommend that a quarterly reporting system similar to the one in place for the [Transformative Climate Communities](#) program (page 72 of the linked document) be instituted. We recommend consolidating reporting requirements where feasible to reduce the amount of required reporting.

Finally, we recommend utilizing the Independent Evaluator to help reduce the burden on grantees by having them take on additional reporting responsibilities and administrative paperwork. The Independent Evaluator could also alleviate some pressure by providing the required project-related data (a vital but burdensome necessity). Increasing the Independent Evaluator’s scope of work would also ensure that project data requirements could be met without detracting from the CRC’s ability to provide services during emergencies.

6. Eligibility Criteria: Establish guardrails around private sector lead applicants and University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) entities and allow for simultaneous application to planning and implementation grants

Guardrails for Certain Lead Applicants

While we understand the need for specific projects to have private sector for-profit entities as the Lead

⁶ See Press Release. Governor Signs Advanced Pay Pilot Legislation to Support Equitable Access to State Funding. October 11, 2022. <https://sgc.ca.gov/news/2022/10-11.html>

Applicant, we want to ensure that there are clear guardrails to ensure that private sector entities are indeed meeting community needs. As a result, to ensure that projects led by private sector actors center communities' priorities, we recommend requiring clear guardrails for all private sector entities applying as a Lead Applicant. This includes private sector consultants, private philanthropic organizations, foundations, and other for-profit entities. Additionally, these guardrails should apply to University of California (UC) and California State University (CSU) entities if they apply to be Lead Applicants in a project.

In order to cultivate climate resilience and trusted resilience centers, there must be deeply rooted community connections with a legacy and practice of community decision-making. In general, we have seen such practices from non-profit community-based organizations (CBOs), as well as Tribal CBOs and Tribal-led non-profit organizations because many have personal connections that uphold a level of accountability to that community. These organizations are thus the most appropriate entities to site and run a resilience center.

Nonetheless, some CBOs may face financial, technical, or staffing limitations and may need to partner with private sector entities that can fill resource gaps. To allow for the inclusion of such situations, but still protect the equity goals of this program, we recommend the following guardrails for all eligible private sector, consultants, for-profit entities, as well as UC and CSU entities:

- must partner with a CBO and/or Tribe that advances climate, racial, economic, or health justice and works with the community that the CRC is trying to serve, with a preference for those that are also physically located in that community and are community-led;
- must submit a letter of recommendation from the CBO detailing their past history of interaction, collaboration, and outcomes; and
- must demonstrate how the CRC will center community decision-making and community leadership through all phases of the project.

Allow Simultaneous Applications for Planning and Implementation Grants

To ensure that planning grants are later implemented, we urge the guidelines to allow simultaneous application and award of planning and implementation grants. This will allow communities to seamlessly move from planning to implementation in a timely manner. In regions where communities have to advocate for local government or other actors to apply on their behalf, it will help ease and facilitate the application process.

7. Scoring and Evaluation: Increase transparency and center equity

Increase transparency in grant scoring process

The SGC Community Resilience Centers draft guidelines should take a more transparent, more nuanced approach to score applications. Currently, the scoring section allocates a significant point value (as high as 65 points) per criteria and offers full or zero points per category without detailing how an applicant can receive partial points in each category. This approach means that SGC may fail to appropriately

distinguish between applicants who make some progress in a given category from those that make none at all.

Therefore, to give credit for incremental efforts and offer both applicants and reviewers sufficient clarity on obtaining a strong score, SGC should explicitly break down each scoring criterion into smaller components and add greater detail about what they are looking for in an application. For instance, SGC might consider modeling its scoring based on the Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities (AHSC) program guidelines, which split each scoring element into increments as small as 1 point⁷ and use precise rubrics that offer examples of how an applicant can fully maximize the number of points in a given section.⁸

Center equity in program evaluation

We appreciate that grantees will have an opportunity to work with an Independent Evaluator to develop indicators and that program evaluation will examine both impacts on climate and community resilience (page 40). However, we encourage SGC to require that program evaluation explicitly assesses equity in each project's process and outcomes. This should include the extent to which grantees engage priority communities in program design; how well resilience centers meet the needs of and are actively used by priority communities; and how vulnerable populations are protected from climate impacts such as flooding, extreme heat, and drought.

8. Equitable Workforce Development: Prioritize workforce development and labor standards in scoring

Community resilience centers provide crucial, multi-faceted opportunities to advance high-quality careers and equitable workforce development, from building retrofits and solar installation to service provision and operations.⁹ As a key program objective, the current draft guidelines highlight workforce development and "preparing community members for high-quality career pathway jobs" (page 9). However, we encourage SGC to further embed this priority throughout the guidelines to ensure that workers meaningfully benefit from the program.

In addition to integrating labor and workforce development priorities into the stakeholder engagement requirements, we also recommend incentivizing high-road labor standards and equitable workforce development through the application scoring criteria. In particular, the "project impact" section of the scoring criteria for both the implementation (page 31) and planning (page 49) grants should offer additional points to proposals that achieve the following:

- Incorporation of a suite of high road labor standards such as prevailing wage, Community Benefits Agreements, Community Workforce Agreements, and/or Project Labor Agreements.
- Inclusion of strategies that aim to meaningfully advance local and targeted hire to increase job access for workers who face barriers to employment, including low-income workers, BIPOC, and/or based in priority communities.

⁷ See Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities [Round 6 Guidelines](#) (pages 28 - 42)

⁸ See Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities [Round 6 Narrative Rubric](#)

⁹ See [Resilience Before Disaster](#) (pages 21 - 23) for more examples of resilience center workforce needs.

- Development of a comprehensive workforce development plan that advances high-road career pathways for historically underrepresented workers and is informed by diverse labor stakeholders, including frontline workers.

9. Timeline for Service Provision: Remove onerous timelines

The draft guidelines require that CRC projects provide services for a minimum of 10 years and remain open as a CRC for a minimum of 30 years. While we want to ensure longevity and sustainability for CRC investments, we believe that these timelines could be prohibitive for lower-capacity organizations. This is especially true regarding the 30 year timeline, which requires 30-year lease agreements for locations that do not own their own buildings or land and is an onerous requirement for the application stage. As statute only requires a minimum for programs and services, we recommend that the final guidelines remove the requirement for the CRC to remain open for 30 years. Instead, one of the application questions should ask about a plan for long-term sustainability to ensure that applicants are considering how to provide services in the medium- and long-term. SGC should provide technical assistance throughout the grant period to ensure that projects can operate sustainably past the grant completion.

Additionally, it could also be difficult for low-capacity community based organizations to demonstrate that they will provide services for 10 years. We recommend lowering this threshold to 5 years (the duration of the grant period) and including a plan for the long-term sustainability of programming as a part of the technical assistance offered to awardees throughout the grant period.

10. Tribal Sovereign Immunity: Remove language giving SGC the right to sue Tribes

The “right to sue” in the CRC guidelines on page 13, “Grant agreements for all CRC Projects where the Lead Applicant is a Federally recognized Native American Tribe will include language giving SGC **a right to sue** the Tribe for breach of the grant agreement in California state courts,” will be an obstacle for Tribal applicants. This will prevent Tribal applicants from applying to the CRC program regardless of Tribal Target Funding. We strongly recommend that SGC remove this language from the guidelines to ensure that Tribal applicants are not dissuaded from applying for funding.

11. Minimum Grant Amounts: Lower the implementation grant minimum award threshold

The current implementation grant award range’s \$5 million lower threshold is too high. Given that project needs and sizes vary across the state, we urge SGC to adopt increased flexibility here to support greater diversity in applications. This will go a long way in eliminating barriers for 1) smaller organizations who may not have the capacity to manage a project of that size but that nonetheless have urgent needs and the ability to implement a community resilience center responsive to community needs, and 2) organizations that would primarily be seeking resources for the retrofitting of already-existing facilities—all while continuing to honor the goal of investing deeply into sites to become robust resilience centers.

12. Required Facility Functions and Features: Increase flexibility

Given that needs and conditions vary across the state, project requirements must allow a high degree of flexibility while ensuring that community resilience centers can truly provide communities with holistic

resilience services year-round. The list of facility functions and features currently required, however, is too stringent and could pose serious barriers, especially for applicants that are smaller community organizations serving disadvantaged and/or rural communities.

Required Functions

In particular, requiring that community resilience centers be able to be activated 24/7 in an emergency may be onerous for facilities that are unable to maintain full-time staff. This could also pose an unnecessary requirement for situations that are technically emergencies but don't require 24/7 access (for example, evening hours during a declared extreme heat state of emergency where temperatures have dropped and it is safe for community members to be elsewhere). Each community should determine what constitutes an "emergency" and the appropriate protocol in order for the resilience center to adequately meet the needs of community members during those acute times of crisis. Additionally, requiring that community resilience centers must have infrastructure to meet all six roles listed on page 19 could preclude many projects that could still go a long way in building community resilience. We would advise against an all-or-nothing approach. Instead of requiring a checklist of required functions, we recommend providing a list of example functions that each applicant should strive to meet. SGC should also pair this with extensive TA and a directive for applicants to focus on identifying relevant and needed functions for the community resilience center during robust community engagement processes. This approach would greatly increase flexibility while still ensuring that community resilience centers offer what is most needed by their communities.

Required Features

A number of the features listed (page 20) could pose an undue burden. For example, backup water may not be something that applicants in rural communities more heavily impacted by drought conditions can provide. In some regions, certain features would require conditional use permits for community resilience centers in commercial zones, including places for people to sleep during emergencies, laundry, and showers. We are concerned that, should a project be unable to get a conditional use permit, it may pose additional challenges and have the unintended consequence of forcing a project to change its site location, potentially moving a project to a site less accessible to the community. Similar to our recommendation for Required Functions, we urge SGC to provide a list of example features rather than required features (with the exception of "ADA-compliant facilities," which should remain a required feature). Again, the agency should pair this list of example features with a directive for applicants to focus on identifying relevant and needed features for the community resilience center during robust community engagement processes. SGC should offer robust TA to support applicants in identifying and implementing these features.

13. Resilient Mobility¹⁰: Support community mobility and zero-emission transportation options

Community resilience center applicants must ensure that transit-dependent and vulnerable communities can affordably, safely, and reliably access community resilience centers in times of climate emergency

¹⁰ For more guidance on how to advance equitable resilient mobility in conjunction with resilience center design, please see the Greenlining's [Principles for Equitable and Resilient Mobility](#).

and year-round. The draft guidelines require the CRC Emergency Plan to include a “mobility plan to transport vulnerable community members to and from the CRC Facility” (page 21). SGC should incorporate a set of metrics and suggested mapping tools that applicants can use to evaluate and prioritize the types of transit routes and mobility options that will best meet the needs of vulnerable communities. Technical assistance providers should be available to work with applicants using these tools during the application process. We also encourage SGC to give applicants the option to incorporate a mobility plan in the *year-round* community resilience plans, not just the emergency plan, to increase facility usage, especially for community members in access and functional needs communities who face mobility constraints in non-emergency times. Requiring a mobility plan could be prohibitive for applicants in rural areas, where there is limited access to transit and limited transportation resources.

Additionally, resilience centers can play a critical role in promoting electric mobility options that can simultaneously reduce greenhouse gases that contribute to climate events and enhance energy resilience. The mobility plan for the year-round community resilience plan should encourage electric and other low-carbon or active mobility options (biking, public transit, etc.) where possible. We also recommend including adequate, community-owned charging infrastructure for a wide range of mobility options, including electric vehicles, school or transit buses, and micro-mobility (e-bikes or scooters) as optional features at resilience centers (page 20). Lastly, the guidelines should highlight under “Strategy 6: Mobility & Access” (page 15) the potential benefits of using electric vehicles and buses for vehicle-to-grid or vehicle-to-building capabilities to increase renewable energy storage and access to a backup power supply during climate emergencies.

14. Definitions

Community Resilience

We appreciate that the draft CRC guidelines focus on advancing community resilience and climate resilience. We recommend that SGC include a definition of community resilience in the appendix to clarify this focus and objective. We offer two definitions for SGC’s consideration:

- *From Resilience Before Disaster, 2020:*

"Community Resilience is the ability of communities to withstand, recover, and learn from climate impacts to strengthen future response and recovery efforts. Importantly, resilience is not just about responding to disasters and major shocks; it also addresses the daily stressors that are exacerbated by a disaster event. Resilience requires strengthening communities before, during, and after an event so that communities do not merely recover from climate shocks, but have opportunities to grow and thrive in the transition."¹¹

- *From Mapping Resilience, 2019:*

¹¹ Lou, Z., A. Raval, M. Young, and S. Appel. 2020. [Resilience Before Disaster: The Need to Build Equitable, Community-Driven Social Infrastructure](#). Asian Pacific Environmental Network, SEIU California, SEIU 2015, and Blue Green Alliance.

"Community resilience is the ability of communities to withstand, recover, and learn from past disasters, and to learn from past disasters to strengthen future response and recovery efforts. This can include physical and psychological health of the population; social and economic equity and well-being of the community; effective risk communication; integration of organizations (governmental and nongovernmental) in planning, response, and recovery; and social connectedness for resource exchange, cohesion, response, and recovery.

- Facets of a community that can be integrated toward the goal of enhancing disaster resilience include infrastructure, governance structures, economy, natural resources and attributes, demographic character, and social interactions.
- In its original ecological context, the notion of bouncing back defined resilience, but in the disaster context, this has been expanded to include bouncing forward, not merely just bouncing back.

[Definition adapted from Cutter et al. (2014)]^{12,13}

Disadvantaged Unincorporated Communities

Additionally, we encourage OPR to replace the definition of disadvantaged unincorporated communities cited in the draft guidelines with the definition in Section 65302.10 of the California Government Code: “*fringe, island, or legacy community in which the median household income is 80 percent or less than the statewide median household income*” given that the current cited definition may exclude communities with undocumented residents or non-registered voters.¹⁴

CONCLUSION

Thank you for considering our input on the draft SGC 2022 Community Resilience Centers Round 1 Draft Program Guidelines. We look forward to continuing to work with SGC to strengthen the program for impacted communities. Please feel free to contact Olivia Seideman: oseideman@leadershipcounsel.org and Terilyn Chen: terilyn@apen4ej.org if we can elaborate further on our comments.

Sincerely,

The Community Resilience Working Group (CRWG)

Terilyn Chen, *Resilience Policy Coordinator*
Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN)

¹² Raval, A., T. Chen, and P. Shah. 2019. [Mapping Resilience: A Blueprint for Thriving in the Face of Climate Disaster](#). Asian Pacific Environmental Network.

¹³ Cutter, S.L., K. Ash, and C. Emrich. 2014. The geographies of community disaster resilience. *Global Environmental Change* 29: 65–77.

¹⁴ [Authority for and Scope of General Plans. Cal. Government Code § 65302.10.](#)

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