

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Resilience Planning Processes for Urban Parklands Across the State

In 2020, Climate Resolve received grant funds to plan for enhanced resilience spaces and access improvements in the Baldwin Hills Parklands (Parklands), especially for residents of South Los Angeles. The Parklands are surrounded by areas with moderate, high, and very high park need, as well as low tree canopy and high pollution burdens. Many South LA residents are more vulnerable to extreme heat and face greater public health threats than populations in surrounding areas. While the Parklands offer a valuable green space to cool down and enjoy the outdoors in an otherwise highly urban environment, they remain hard to access and could be enhanced with additional services to increase resilience.

To address this challenge, Climate Resolve and partners embarked on an 18-month grassroots planning process. [The resulting Baldwin Hills Community Resilience and Access Plan](#), published in September 2022, summarizes and highlights the existing climate impacts in the area surrounding the Parklands, details our stakeholder engagement plan and approach, provides a design and transportation analysis for potential sites for resilience centers and spaces, and gives recommendations to move forward. Click [here](#) to read the full report, including our key takeaways and priority recommendations.

The plan grew out of the urgent need to build resilience to climate change and access to park space for people in urban areas. In addition to the plan's final recommendations, the team committed to sharing key lessons learned so that the iterative, multi-benefit, and community-driven planning process explored in the Baldwin Hills area could be available as a blueprint for resilience and access building in urban parks across California and beyond.

Below, Climate Resolve offers three lessons learned that we hope will help guide advocates, community organizations, government agencies, and others working to build resilience in urban parklands.

### 1 TAP INTO, ACKNOWLEDGE, AND BUILD ON CONCURRING EFFORTS

#### ▶ **Recommendation:**

*For those looking to begin new park resilience projects, we strongly recommend researching, building on, and when possible, coordinating with current partners and efforts in order to create the strongest and most needed outcomes for the communities the park serves.*

#### ▶ **What we did:**

- ▶ The project team was committed to complementing existing resilience and access efforts in the area, rather than overstepping current efforts or attempting to reinvent the wheel. The team designed the recommendations to integrate with current efforts as a way to enhance outcomes and close remaining gaps. This included:
  - Researching prior and existing planning efforts, like the La Brea Avenue and La Cienega Boulevard Greening Study, analyzing current usages of the sites in

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the Parklands, and coordinating with relevant agencies and stakeholders to understand ongoing strategic planning for the area.

- Acknowledging the importance of local artists for future infrastructure in the parks. [Destination Crenshaw](#), for example, is the largest Black public art project in the U.S., and runs alongside Crenshaw Blvd and the newly constructed Metro line. Moving forward, the project team is exploring how the Baldwin Hills project can tie into, or draw inspiration from, Destination Crenshaw, and include local art and artists in its designs.

### ► ***Barriers to achieving this and how we overcame:***

► Working within multi-jurisdictional boundaries can be challenging. The Parklands fall into jurisdictions managed by several agencies overseeing many separate projects. Siloed agencies, project budget limitations, and lack of clarity on which agencies were in charge of which park and transportation decisions slowed progress. To address this complex jurisdictional environment, understand decision-makers and advance project objectives, we tried different avenues of communication and briefings. These included:

- Meeting with agency contacts and community leaders, as well as people those contacts suggested.
- Attending convenings with relevant stakeholders (e.g. Metro's Transit to Parks Summit).

## 2 LISTEN TO, VALUE, AND COMPENSATE COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

### ► ***Recommendation:***

*We strongly recommend listening to, valuing and integrating input from community members and compensating community members for their contributions to resilience planning.*

### ► ***What we did:***

► We reviewed literature on equitable community engagement<sup>1</sup> as well as our own internal organizational principles and staff experience with community-driven planning. Then, to ensure community members were valued for their time, and it was as easy as possible for them to give feedback, we utilized the following strategies<sup>2</sup>:

1 [Regional Resilience Toolkit](#), U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Association of Bay Area Governments

[Guide to Equitable Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning](#), Raimi + Associates and Urban Sustainability Directors Network

[Making Equity Real in Climate Adaptation and Community Resilience Policies and Programs](#), The Greenlining Institute

[TIERS Public Engagement Framework](#), Institute for Local Government

[SB 1000 Toolkit](#), California Environmental Justice Alliance and PlaceWorks

2 For a more comprehensive summary of our stakeholder engagement approach in Baldwin Hills, see [P.11-18 of our final report](#).

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- Partnered with a grassroots South-LA organization ([SLATE-Z](#)) to co-lead the stakeholder engagement process, including creating a 13-member Resident Advisory Committee (RAC), whom we compensated for their time and participation with stipends.
- Held public meetings in the evenings so community members who worked 9-5 jobs could still participate.
- Based project recommendations on community feedback and showed community members how their feedback was being integrated. For example, our transportation and design consultants created their draft resilience designs and access recommendations based on feedback received through RAC meetings, community work group meetings and a survey, then updated their materials after each community meeting to integrate further feedback.
- Ruffled \$25 gift cards for filling out the survey, and conducted additional raffles as a participation incentive in the community work group meetings.
- Translated project materials into Spanish, and offered live Spanish translation during community meetings and events.
- Chartered an electric bus to provide transportation for RAC members to attend a field trip to the Parklands. The bus picked up RAC members at the nearest public transit stop, took them around the park sites, and returned them to the transit stop.
- Hired RAC members' local businesses for events (e.g. for catering for the field trip) and promoted RAC social events or community updates with our networks.
- Shifted to mostly virtual engagement due to the onset of COVID-19. This included:
  - Offering the survey online, adjusting to virtual community meetings, enabling live transcript for closed captioning during Zoom meetings, providing technical support to folks struggling to adjust to the virtual format, and leveraging social media and digital tools like Mentimeter to boost participation.

### **Barriers to achieving this and how we overcame:**

- ▶ One challenge that arose was administering stipends to pay community members for their participation. Sometimes, government grants don't easily allow funds to be used for direct stipends to community members. To overcome this, Climate Resolve worked with SLATE-Z to write a scope of work and milestones for RAC members that made sense for the grant agreement. We encourage project teams to work creatively through grant contracts, and with organizations who can administer stipend or incentive payments. If that is not possible, find alternative ways to value community members' time, whether through raffling gift cards or sharing network resources. See strategies and resources listed in footnotes for ideas.

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### 3 SEEK CREATIVE, INNOVATIVE PROJECT TEAM MEMBERS AND PARTNERS, AND INVEST TIME IN TEAM BUILDING

#### ▶ **Recommendation:**

*We strongly recommend assembling diverse, multi-sector project teams that bring critical skill sets and perspectives to the table, including partners who are interested in thinking outside the box and are receptive to community needs. Invest in those inter-project team relationships to build synergy and advance the best possible outcomes.*

#### ▶ **What we did:**

- ▶ Climate Resolve applied for grant funding by the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, and reached out to three other project team members local to the Los Angeles region: South Los Angeles Transit Empowerment Zone (SLATE-Z), Sumire Gant Consulting, and Adam Wheeler Design. Each partner/subcontractor was able to bring their unique expertise. For example, it was very helpful to have both a community-based organization who had direct ties to residents and a consultant who knew the multi-jurisdictional nature of transit agencies.
- ▶ During initial meetings, we co-developed a group agreement document with project team members. The agreements included expectations around project communication and deadlines, meetings/time commitments, iterative evaluation, and transparency regarding budget and capacity. We referenced this during every partner meeting, making sure to update as needed with new contacts or procedures.
- ▶ Throughout the planning process, we were able to deepen our relationship and strengthen the coalition of partners driving this sort of work in the South LA region. In addition, we strengthened regional coordination on resilience, which allowed us to share other potential grant opportunities and projects.

#### ▶ **Barriers to achieving this and how we overcame:**

- ▶ Working on large state grants can be very administratively challenging for nonprofits and community organizations due to different factors like burdensome reporting, reimbursement-based financing, and match fund requirements. That being said, having an interdisciplinary project team that met regularly with the grantor allowed us to communicate those challenges, advocate for augmented budgets where possible, receive reporting guidance, and better understand the ins and outs of state grants.

