



# 2020 DACTI Virtual Summit Ensuring Equitable Involvement in Regional Water Planning

October 8, 13 & 14, 2020

“Those in power must recognize water users that haven’t had a voice in decision-making, take the time to learn their challenges, and work to build solutions that include them and address their concerns.”

– Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency





“The Summit provided an outstanding forum for community leaders and IRWM practitioners to share lessons learned by engaging both underrepresented communities and Tribal nations in integrated regional water management as well as discussing new strategies of engagement to apply across the state.”

– Rich Haller, General Manager,  
Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority

## Background and Purpose

The virtual Summit, “**Ensuring Equitable Involvement in Regional Water Planning**,” was held over three half-day sessions (October 8, 13, and 14, 2020) for attendees to share strategies for engaging Tribes and marginalized communities in regional water management, as learned through local implementation of the **Proposition 1 Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Disadvantaged Communities and Tribal Involvement (DACTI)** program.

The Summit was sponsored by the **Santa Ana Watershed Project Authority** and facilitated by **Local Government Commission**, with support from the **California Department of Water Resources** and the **IRWM Roundtable of Regions**. Community leaders, water experts, Tribal representatives, and government staff shared lessons learned from 10+ years of engaging marginalized groups in regional water planning, and participants strategized

how to apply these approaches and best practices within their regions and across other statewide water planning efforts.

Each day addressed a new theme:

- \* **Day 1** focused on setting the stage and reviewing lessons learned from 10+ years of the DACTI program;
- \* **Day 2** then took a deep dive into regional strategies for engaging marginalized communities and Tribes; and
- \* **Day 3** challenged presenters and participants to identify how IRWM efforts can inform other state water programs to collectively advance marginalized community and Tribal engagement. Each day included expert panels and interactive, small-group discussions to help participants coordinate and collaborate in real-time.

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For all Summit recordings, PowerPoints, resources, and materials: [lgc.org/summit](https://lgc.org/summit)  
Speaker biographies can be found at [lgc.org/summit-attendee-packet](https://lgc.org/summit-attendee-packet)

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# Emerging Themes

Below are important concepts that emerged throughout the three days of the Summit in breakout-group sessions and panel discussions.

**Our most entrenched water challenges have to do with people and relationships and cannot be solved solely through engineering and technology.**

Co-equal to technical expertise is on-the-ground cultural, historic, and ancestral knowledge. Water issues are deeper than infrastructure – social inequity and racial injustice play a major role in water access and affordability. Historic systems of oppression must be confronted as we seek equitable water management. We must honor truth in history.

**Overlooking the intrinsic connections between housing and water exacerbates inequities.**

- \* Renters lack decision-making power but often bear the burden of water rate increases, and face significant barriers

to accessing water quality information. Public agencies, water managers, elected officials, and communities all share concerns regarding how water users receive information and misinformation. Greater emphasis needs to be placed on communicating in culturally and linguistically sensitive ways.

- \* California has many initiatives and funding mechanisms for developing green-space and water-infrastructure projects, but these projects often fail to adequately consider community displacement and impacts to unhoused community members. Safeguards like rent control and public access to sanitation services should be implemented to protect and support unsheltered or housing-insecure communities before green-infrastructure projects move forward.



**“All of our restoration efforts begin with restoring the spirituality of Mother Earth. You don’t have to learn our songs, prayers, and ceremonies. What’s important is that you open your heart, and you take care of the four-legged, the winged, the finned, the water, and live your life in a way that is respecting Mother Earth. A lot of people in the environmental movement have good hearts and they want to do the good thing but they don’t know what they’re doing. They call stewardship acquiring land, putting a trail on it, and putting up a sign that says “be home by dark.” Where are those relationships? How are they taking care of the birds and the four-legged?”**

*– Chairman Valentin Lopez, Amah Mutsun Tribal Band*



**Public agencies pursuing “check-the-box engagement” rather than meaningful connections with marginalized communities and Tribes exacerbate feelings of mistrust.**

Decision-makers must go beyond the “checklist” outreach requirements and ensure community education and relationship-building are incorporated into engagement efforts. While opportunities to participate may be abundant, community members and Tribes often feel unheard or misunderstood. The technical language of science and policy can feel prohibitive to those outside of the water world. Public agencies should empower community members and Tribal representatives by giving them a seat at the decision-making table and addressing systemic barriers to participation.

**It is difficult but critical to “reverse the flow” of information by asking communities and Tribes about their needs prior to trying to meet those needs.**

This year’s COVID-19 pandemic, the state’s historic wildfires, and the broader movement for racial justice underscore the multitude of challenges facing communities. Water planning efforts cannot move forward if communities lack the time or ability to respond. The natural tendency is to focus on our separate, individual needs in response to COVID-19. Greater initiative is needed to ensure efforts are connective and engaged. Now more than ever, decision-making requires creative partnerships and patience. Public agencies should work collaboratively to address immediate community needs, such as childcare, healthcare, food security, and broadband access, in order to build long-term community capacity.

**“There’s no denying that we have to plan for long-term, but we also must understand that there are issues taking place on a daily basis at the local level that impede our participation and thoughtful opinions. Issues that over the years have evolved from individual trauma to community trauma. Making sure those issues are heard and acknowledged are key to building trust.”**

*– Miguel Angel Luna, Principal, DakeLuna Consultants*

Collaborative convenings such as this Summit are critical for reflecting on our collective successes and challenges to help chart the course forward.

Decision-makers, communities, and Tribes need to engage in cross-regional dialogue to learn and share new approaches for addressing complex water challenges. Decision-makers should create space for reflection and listening, foregrounding Tribal and community voices.

**It takes time to understand the community’s relationships, histories, and connections to a place.**

A key part of relationship-building and a necessary component of building trust is first understanding and acknowledging local issues, including individual and community trauma, however uncomfortable.

# Key Recommendations

The following recommendations were derived from a holistic review of the content presented and notes from participant discussions throughout the course of the Summit. These recommendations are directed toward local, regional, and state governments as top priorities to continue advancing underrepresented community and Tribal involvement in regional water planning.

In Fall 2020, DWR completed its multi-year evaluation of the DACTI program's impact. The Interim Needs Assessment identified five key findings, of which two were Summit attendees' top priorities of "improving interagency coordination" and "considering alternative criteria for the allocation of state and local funding."

## Improving Interagency Coordination

**1. Collaboration among state agencies is paramount.** Tribes and communities are spread across multiple watersheds and are expected to engage with multiple regional, state, and federal agencies. Public agencies have the greatest impact when they coordinate efforts and assist communities, and Tribes identify potential funding and project support across state programs. It will be critical for IRWM to coordinate with the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the Safe and Affordable Funding for Equity and Resilience Program (SAFER), and the Governor's Water Resilience Portfolio.

The Governor's Office and the legislature should prioritize efficiency through alignment by directing state agencies to coordinate across programs, and granting them the resources and authority necessary to do so. An interagency community and Tribal engagement unit, for example, could provide communities a central point of contact for project support across all agency programming.

## Considering Alternative Criteria for Funding Allocation

**2. The state should reassess how funding is allocated.** Median household income (MHI) is limited in its ability to characterize under-resourced communities. The scale of income survey efforts



"What's needed to address our water challenges in this state...are human solutions... and those solutions require just as real an investment. Fundamentally the solutions start with creating a table that's truly inclusive and representative of all communities that are impacted by water management and water decision-making...As they say, if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go together. Our state will not get far if we're each going at it alone."

— *Laurel Firestone, Boardmember,  
California State Water Resources Control Board*

such as the U.S. Census tend to mask smaller underserved communities and MHI is provided at the household level, regardless of the number of household members who are dependent on the income. Other considerations in determining where funding should be directed include environmental burdens, traditionally underfunded communities, geography (prioritizing headwaters and environmental uses), and the age or reliability of water infrastructure. Such considerations and new mapping tools that address these elements could better address the needs of all Californians.

***The remaining six recommendations, while aligned with the DACTI Interim Needs Assessment, emerged organically from the Summit presentations and discussions.***

**3. Government agencies must be deliberate about dismantling systemic racism.** The systems that are in place that suppress participation in decision-making processes need to be addressed across the public landscape.

Dismantling systemic racism will take internal and external reflection. Internal reflection, including cultural competency and equity training for staff and reassessing hiring practices, is important for bringing racial justice into government work, and creating a culture of equity and justice within the workforce. External reflection requires examining the impact of state and local government

decisions and the disparities created by these decisions. Public agencies should follow the Guidelines for Equitable Engagement in Coordinated Planning to ensure marginalized communities are centered in owning and shaping environmental solutions.

Decision-making bodies should include Tribal members and community representatives. There must be a shift from just “giving input” to communities shaping decisions; develop a structure in which communities have a clear role in decision-making.

**4. The state legislature should amend rules governing how grant and bond money is spent** so that agencies can compensate community members for public meeting attendance (e.g., stipends and transportation allowances) and use grant dollars to provide refreshments, translation, childcare, and other supplies that support engagement. Unlike public agencies and consultants who get paid to attend meetings, community residents and Tribes do not get compensated for their time. Many volunteer their time, but have the burden of expense.

State agencies should streamline invoicing and payment processes to decrease the turnaround time for reimbursement. Delays in payments impact smaller local organizations the hardest, who lack the financial resources to maintain operations without reimbursement. Funding should also be prioritized for hiring community-based and Tribal-led organizations to lead engagement instead of outside consultants.

**“In these unprecedented times, some things have not changed. People of color are a group that are highly impacted by COVID-19 and water contamination. We need to acknowledge that we need to change our systems, not just our water systems, but our systems of racism and oppression.”**

***– Martha Camacho-Rodriguez,  
Director, Central Basin Water District and  
Grassroot Organizer, Social Eco Education***





“The consultation policies say nothing about recognizing our truth and our history and the impact of that history on our culture, our people, and our spirituality...if the State can talk to us in a sincere way and work with us to protect our sacred sites and our cultural sites, that’s what we need and that’s what we’d like to have.”

– *Chairman Valentin Lopez,  
Amah Mutsun Tribal Band*

**5. Governments must recognize the sovereign status of federally and non-federally recognized Tribes that require unique engagement and support.** Government staff should complete cultural-competency training prior to engaging with Tribes. Tribal land acknowledgements are important, but agencies must go beyond this and understand their role in protecting sacred and cultural resources. Governments should explore how traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) can be prioritized in natural resource management, and honor Tribal songs and language and indigenous approaches to relationship-building and consensus.

**6. Public agencies should partner with and fund community and Tribal-led organizations to ensure that public meetings are accessible and inclusive.** Local and Tribal groups should be compensated for their time in supporting outreach and engagement. Governments must provide multiple avenues for communities to engage in public meetings and identify how public input will be incorporated into the planning process. Due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions, many agencies are now transitioning to virtual or small-scale engagement. Staff should work with local and Tribal leaders to address any known barriers to engagement.

**7. Governments must dedicate recurring public funding for engagement in watershed planning, and partner with philanthropy to create more stable funding for this work.** Relying on short-term funding – such as state bonds – for underrepresented community engagement is an untenable long-term solution that jeopardizes decades of planning meant to connect people, build trust, and fund needed projects.

**8. Governments must address both the immediate need of unhoused communities who lack access to sanitation, and the long-term need to better identify, document, and integrate unsheltered communities in watershed planning.** Current funding for state water programs does not adequately address the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Governments should prioritize flexible short-term funding to pilot unconventional strategies that address the needs of unhoused communities. Small-scale and pilot efforts with potential scalability can yield multiple benefits for watershed health. Pilot grants should maintain simplicity in measurements of success.

“By not acknowledging the cultural and intellectual assets that exist in these communities, we miss out on opportunities for critical partnerships, particularly at a time when so many of us in the public sector may be dealing with budget cuts as a result of COVID-19...Partnerships during this time are so critical, not only with communities but also with each other, across governments.”

– *Yana Garica, Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice, Tribal Affairs and Border Relations, California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)*

# Opportunities to Get Involved

- \* Participate in the IRWM Roundtable of Regions and the IRWM Disadvantaged Community and Tribal Involvement Workgroup. Email Jodie Monaghan at [jodie@jmconsultants.net](mailto:jodie@jmconsultants.net)
- \* Attend one of the quarterly webinars in the “Collaborating between IRWM and SGMA” series, hosted by Local Government Commission, the IRWM Roundtable of Regions, Maven’s Notebook, and DWR.
- \* Fall 2020: Successful collaboration between IRWM and SGMA.
- \* Future webinar announcements coming soon!
- \* Sign up to receive LGC updates.
- \* Sign up to receive IRWM Roundtable of Region updates.
- \* Sign up to receive Maven’s Notebook updates.
- \* Take DWR’s Tribal cultural-competency training for public agencies upon request. Email DWR’s Tribal Policy Advisor, Anecita Agustinez, for more information at [anecita.agustinez@water.ca.gov](mailto:anecita.agustinez@water.ca.gov)



## Resources

### Resources for Tribal engagement:

- \* Native American Heritage Commission
- \* Digital Atlas
- \* Factsheet: How Tribes Can Engage in IRWM
- \* Map: IRWM Regions and California Tribal Lands
- \* IRWM-Funded Tribal Projects
- \* Tribal Mapping Tool
- \* Examples of IRWM-Funded Tribal Projects (Prop 84)
- \* Guidance Document for Sustainable Management of Groundwater Engagement with Tribal Governments
- \* Tribal Collaboration in IRWM: Challenges, Solutions and Recommendations
- \* Previous Tribal Water Summits and May 2020 Tribal Water Proceedings
- \* US Forest Service - Tribal Relations

### State resources on equitable water management:

- \* Governor’s Executive Order N-82-20
- \* Governor’s Water Resilience Portfolio
- \* Stakeholder Perspectives: Recommendations for Sustaining and Strengthening Integrated Regional Water Management
- \* Report: Equitable Integration of Water and Land Use
- \* Guidelines for Equitable Engagement in Coordinated Planning
- \* Educational Video: Integrated Regional Water Management (IRWM) Program
- \* Educational Video: IRWM: Addressing Regional Water Challenges

### State agency resources on racial equity:

- \* California Air Resources Board (CARB) Racial Equity Resolution
- \* California Strategic Growth Council’s Racial Equity Resolution
- \* California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) Race and Equity Action Plan
- \* GARE - Government Alliance on Race and Equity Curriculum

# Advisory Committee and Staff

***Many thanks to the Summit Advisory Committee and Summit Staff for your time and dedication to making this event a success!***

## Summit Advisory Committee

- \* Anne Bremer, The Watershed Project
- \* Emily Ontiveros, CivicSpark / Department of Water Resources
- \* Holly Alpert, California Rural Water Association
- \* Jackie McCloud, City of Watsonville
- \* Jodie Monaghan, IRWM Roundtable of Regions
- \* Mark Stadler, IRWM Roundtable of Regions
- \* Martha Camacho Rodriguez, Social Eco Education-Los Angeles
- \* Mike Antos, Stantec and UC Irvine
- \* Regina Houchin, Ag-Center
- \* Sonia Sanchez, Self-Help Enterprises

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