

Community Dialogues:

Starting the Conversation about Multi-benefit Green Infrastructure Projects



Water resource challenges will impact communities throughout the LA region. The solutions to our shared water challenges can also meet the diverse needs and priorities of local communities. In 2016, to address these issues, the Council for Watershed Health (CWH), in collaboration with the State Coastal Conservancy and the Trust for Public Land, convened the South Gate Leadership Symposium on Green Infrastructure. From this convening, CWH and partners identified the need to engage a broader audience of stakeholders, beyond the traditional group of environmental non-profits and agencies, on water resource issues and the benefits water projects can provide to communities. The focus of Community Dialogues is to build community capacity by empowering residents to be environmental stewards through a series of small, targeted conversations about the importance of green infrastructure and multi-benefit projects.

PROJECT GOALS

- 1 Build a water education baseline in otherwise disconnected constituencies.
- 2 Support community-based organizations in understanding their role in the design, implementation, and maintenance of a multi-benefit project.
- 3 Identify local opportunities for green infrastructure investment and demonstrate how social and environmental benefits can be achieved.
- 4 Assess community priorities and develop key water communication messages so local water agencies and policymakers better understand local needs for scaling water projects.
- 5 Provide a platform for communities to voice their concerns, recommendations, and vision for their neighborhoods.

Community Stakeholders

CWH partnered with five community-based organizations (CBOs) across the City of Los Angeles: Koreatown Youth Community Center, Pacoima Beautiful, From Lot to Spot, TRUST South LA and Proyecto Pastoral.

Community Dialogues consisted of four parts:

- 1) initial meeting and training session with CBO leaders and their parent leaders;
- 2) larger community convening;
- 3) follow-up tour led by CWH and agency partners of The Elmer Avenue Neighborhood Retrofit Demonstration Project;
- 4) final tour of CBO's neighborhood, led by parent leaders.

Each dialogue featured an overview of green infrastructure and how communities can play a key role in the planning process and ensure projects incorporate active transportation, public safety and public health. The dialogues also included feedback sessions for community members to develop key messages for their priorities and needs. With the support of local agencies and policy makers, the dialogues provided a platform for inclusivity and tools for capacity building that encouraged communities to envision safer, cleaner and enhanced neighborhoods. This created opportunities for agencies to interface



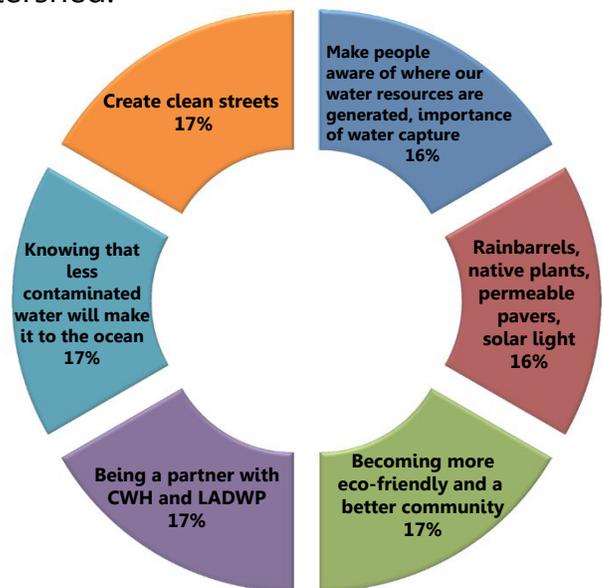
In addition to the larger convening, CWH led tours of Elmer Ave and Elmer Paseo Retrofit Project. These tours helped project partners and their parent leaders visualize and reimagine their own neighborhood as a water project.

with the people they serve, share resources and provide expertise on green infrastructure. By the end of the larger convening, it was clear that by participating in the conversation, communities started to feel empowered to take ownership and become stewards of their watershed.

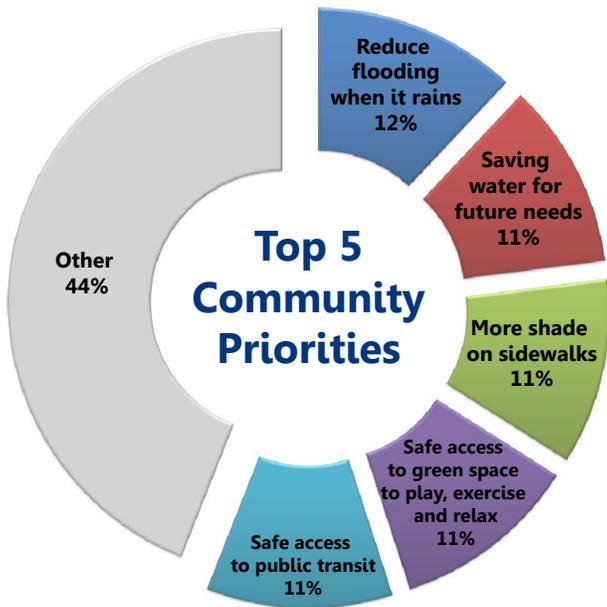
What was your favorite part of the Elmer Avenue tour?

"Learning that so many agencies and partners are working towards projects like Elmer Ave, and knowing the impact this effort will have on future efforts to conserve water makes me happy for my community."

- Parent leader from Proyecto Pastoral



If a project like the one at Elmer Avenue came to your neighborhood, what (benefit) are you most excited about?



CWH highlighted the types of benefits that can be achieved through green infrastructure and asked participants to rank them in order of importance. The results show that every issue was of equal importance to residents with flooding being the most important across all groups.

Results

To evaluate community partners' understanding of green infrastructure concepts and neighborhood priorities, CWH developed a survey. The survey highlighted educational opportunities and gaps in understanding of concepts related to safe drinking water, water quality and supply, and green infrastructure. Based on the results, it was clear that the five communities developed a comprehensive understanding of how multi-benefit projects will lead to social and environmental benefits. Their enthusiasm to learn and participate in constructive discussion sessions also demonstrated the success of the Community Dialogues model in addressing community needs and interests.

COMMUNITY WATER SURVEY

Are you interested in learning how children and youth can use science in their schools and community to save water and keep it safe?

Would you like to learn how nature-- parks, trails, streams, trees, gardens--can help improve our water quality and water supplies?

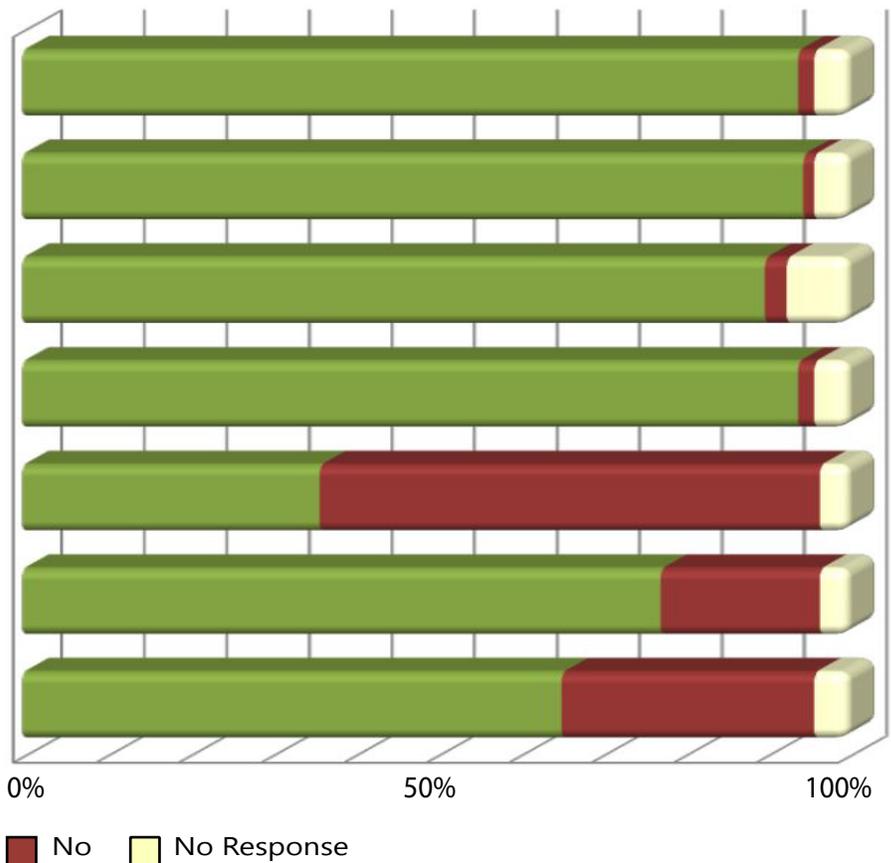
Would you like to learn how water projects in your community can help impact other social benefits in your neighborhood?

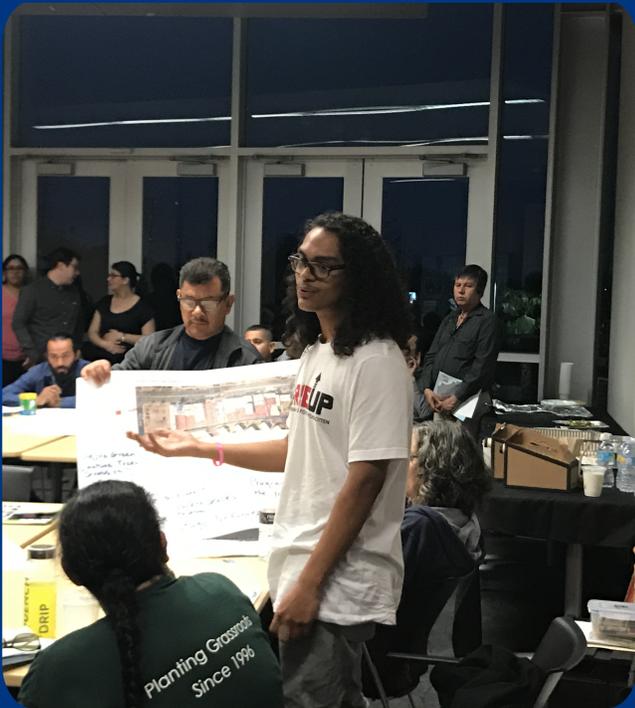
Would you like to learn about ways you and your family can help save water at home and in your community?

Have you heard of the phrase "Green Infrastructure"?

Can you describe how water is used in your community?

Can you describe where the water you drink and use every day comes from?





Through education and engagement, CWH was able to unite water agencies and community-based stakeholders through the common goals of creating resilient neighborhoods with green infrastructure.

Looking Forward

We know that when participants are engaged and brought into the planning process, future water projects will have a greater chance for success, and a greater chance to achieve social impact within the community. Community Dialogues have been a starting point for underserved communities to join the conversation about multi-benefit green infrastructure projects.

CWH and agency partners understand the constraints and technical capacity gaps their community partners face. CWH envisions the next phase of the “Community Dialogues” partnership as filling capacity gaps with technical assistance. Technical assistance will connect local partners with available resources that help bring multi-benefit projects to their neighborhoods. While ongoing successes were mentioned among community members (i.e. Rail to River, Measure A), residents are asking for more from local decision makers. Not only do they need safer, cleaner streets and access to green space, but they also expressed the need for better communication strategies that can transcend language and capacity barriers. Community partners recommended more workshops, community meetings and increased collaboration opportunities. With ongoing support toward achieving common goals, we can continue to work with our partners in creating healthier communities for a healthier watershed. ■

What will you do now, after this community meeting, to better your neighborhood?

"Share the information we have learned today with our community and family and participate in projects that help us and obtain green areas and (the power) to recycle water."

-Parent leader, Koreatown Youth + Community Center

