**SEAFARE**

Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources

# Table of Contents

# Executive Summary

This report is an outcome of a series of workshops conducted by the Nature Conservancy, Maryland/DC (TNC). The effort is named **SEAFARE** (Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources), and the Advisory Committee for SEAFARE convened throughout 2023. The SEAFARE Advisory Committee is composed of climate adaptation practitioners, environmental justice leaders, non-profit partners, residents of coastal Maryland, state and federal officials, and collaborative problem solvers. The SEAFARE Advisory Committee convened six times in 2023 to dive into the funding barriers that manifest at the federal, regional, and state levels that prevent coastal communities experiencing the first and most pressing impacts of climate change from accessing the funds they need to build resilience within their communities.

The toolkit presented in this report synthesizes the workshops' findings and discusses the funding barriers faced by communities in coastal Maryland, particularly along the Eastern Shore. The SEAFARE Advisory Committee believes that by reducing those barriers in the present—and eliminating them completely in the future—we can materially advance toward our vision of supporting the resilience of historically underserved and overburdened coastal communities in the face of climate change and other environmental challenges.

Accordingly, the primary audiences for this toolkit are the Maryland state-level government officials and policymakers that play important roles in the climate adaptation funding system.

We begin this toolkit by presenting the **Vision and Mission of SEAFARE**. In the **Introduction**, we summarize both the challenges that climate change poses for coastal Maryland communities and the historic opportunity that the federal Justice40 Initiative affords. We situate SEAFARE in that context.

Next, we focus on **Understanding Environmental Injustice in Maryland**. The climate crisis impacts currently being experienced by coastal Maryland communities are inextricably linked to historical legacies of environmental injustice in this region. To respond effectively to that crisis, our work must be grounded in an understanding of the past.

After setting out the **Terminology Used in the Toolkit**, we offer seven **Equity Principles** that can guide all policymaking, advocacy, and community engagement going forward—from the highest level strategic planning to the conduct of a single meeting.

The toolkit recognizes, of course, that equity principles are not self-executing. So, we turn to action. We summarize the **Barriers Within the Funding System** as a precursor to offering five **Recommendations for Decision-Makers**. Those recommendations fall into five categories, which each include specific suggestions:

1. **Start with Building Relationships of Trust:** Establish a trusting foundation and continuously build on it.
2. **Embrace a Shared Environmental Justice Vision for Maryland:** Join an existing environmental justice vision or, if more appropriate, co-create a new one.
3. **Align Effective Funding Strategies & Plans to the Vision:** Ensure that funding goes first to historically underserved and overburdened communities that are bearing the brunt of climate change.
4. **Actualize in Ways that Serve**: Adopt policies, procedures, and processes designed first to serve the interests of historically underserved and overburdened communities.
5. **Grow, Learn, and Adapt:** Take an approach of continuous learning, improvement, and systems change.

We conclude with **Next Steps for this Work**—and a call to action for government officials and policymakers to incorporate this toolkit's recommendations in creating equitable funding systems both within Maryland and across the nation.

# SEAFARE Vision, Mission, and History

**SEAFARE** (Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources) envisions a future Maryland where historically underserved and overburdened coastal communities stand resilient in the face of adverse impacts of climate change and have access to the funding and technical resources they need for building and sustaining vibrant communities where people and nature thrive.

SEAFARE's mission is to contribute to the advancement of the movement for equity within decision making and resource allocation processes in the state of Maryland, with the recognition that equitable access to climate adaption resources for coastal communities is a small piece within the much larger movement for environmental justice.

**The impacts of climate change are far-reaching and being felt across the globe. In the United States, these impacts are particularly acute in communities that have been historically underserved and overburdened by pollution, socio-economic inequities, under-investment by governing bodies, and systemic racism. With the Justice40 Initiative in place, we have a historic opportunity to right past wrongs and create solutions rooted in equity to help communities adapt to climate change.**

SEAFARE's work builds upon previous efforts by TNC in collaboration with coastal communities. In 2021, TNC hired Upwelling Consulting to review the life cycle of climate adaptation funding in five U.S. states including Maryland, California, Louisiana, New York, and North Carolina to identify inequities in laws, policies and programs, as well as opportunities for improvement to increase equitable access to, and distribution of, climate adaptation funding.

The cross-state analysis of climate adaptation programs revealed three general patterns, and while this analysis wasn't comprehensive of all the inequities that exist, it provided a starting point for our work in Maryland and led to the development of the SEAFARE effort. The following are key findings from this research:

- **Built-in Inequities:** The funding life cycle often includes embedded inequities at the legislative and grant program levels. Grant programs are often modeled to achieve the best return on investment through a scientific or financial lens. These programs are not informed by the priorities of communities most in need of climate adaptation funding.
- **Inconsistent Terminology:** States have different definitions for environmental justice and underserved and/or overburdened communities. There is a need to design and adopt more inclusive frameworks for identifying the most impacted and climate-vulnerable communities.
- **Dependence on Maladapted Legislation and/or Capital Budgets:** Practitioners rely upon maladapted legislation and capital budgets to address climate adaptation. There is a need for legislation to focus specifically on environmental justice communities and climate adaptation through the lens of community priorities.

# Introduction

## THE URGENT NEED FOR CLIMATE ACTION

Climate change is already impacting and will continue to modify every aspect of our lives. The year 2023 was the hottest year since global temperature records began in 1850. On the East Coast, wildfire smoke enveloped cities for days, and the hazy orange skies above our nation's capital were a warning bell for anyone willing to listen that the world is changing and we must adapt—swiftly and equitably.

Climate change is not being experienced uniformly by the planet or people. Just as rising emissions and a rapidly warming globe have varying effects on different ecosystems, the impacts felt by communities also differ across space.

**One thing is clear: climate change is an exacerbating force for the existing inequities of our world. When we look towards building resilience to climate change impacts across all geographic scales, the solutions must start with equity as the guiding principle.**

As we build climate adaptation pathways and ways to support communities on the frontlines of climate change, we need to acknowledge and understand that the crisis we are facing is not a nameless or blameless occurrence. It is a crisis fueled by the greed and misinformation campaigns waged by fossil fuel companies and upheld by elected leaders for decades. Our current crisis is made worse by slow, ineffective action to address fossil fuel emissions and biodiversity loss by those in positions of power.

For a long time, communities that have been historically underserved and overburdened have fought for their rights to breathe clean air, drink clean water, and access healthful food and green spaces among other rights. Our elected leaders and corporations elevate and center narratives that are often contrary to collective advocacy efforts or lead individuals to feel despair and hopelessness. Yet we also have incredible stories of perseverance and tenacity to draw upon. Environmental justice advocates all over the nation are collaborating, advocating, and rising against false narratives that would have us believe that climate action is too expensive or too complicated to undertake.

The State of Maryland has begun to incorporate equity in climate mitigation and adaptation. This has included the passage of the Maryland Climate Solutions Now Act in 2022, which calls for greenhouse gas emissions reductions and green

infrastructure development among other provisions. Additionally, the Maryland 2030 Climate Goals underscore Governor Wes Moore's commitment to prioritizing environmental justice and inclusion in his administration's approach to climate resilience.

NOAA administrator Dr. Rick Spinrad connected the dots between the past, present, and future simply: "*If we hope to have a prosperous society and economy tomorrow, it must begin with climate action and adaptation plans made today.*"

## CLIMATE VULNERABILITY IN COASTAL MARYLAND

The meandering coastline of Maryland touches the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean and spans over 7719 miles (this includes the Chesapeake Bay, its tributaries, the coastal bays, and the Atlantic coast). This vibrant coastline is linked to the lives and livelihoods of Marylanders and is home to 70 percent of the state's residents (about 4.3 million people based on 2020 census data) who live in 16 coastal counties and the City of Baltimore. In addition to being tied to a rich cultural history, the productive estuarine ecosystems of the Chesapeake Bay and adjoining tidal wetlands are vital habitats for thousands of species of plants and birds combined.

The 2023 Maryland Sea Level Rise Projections, prepared by the University of Maryland Center for Environmental Sciences, finds that by 2050, Maryland will experience 1–1.5 feet of sea level rise measured from a 2000 baseline. This is twice the amount of sea level rise experienced in the previous century. By 2100, the state is expected to experience three feet of sea level rise.

The vibrant coastline of Maryland is already experiencing impacts of climate change in the form of increased flooding events, storm surge, erosion, loss of forest and wetlands, and salt water-compromised drinking water and agricultural land. Rising sea levels contribute to increased flood events even in the absence of storms. Maryland's low-lying coastal areas are particularly vulnerable to high tide flooding events that can range in severity from minor (disruptive or nuisance flooding leading to road closures and disrupting access to certain parts of town, often recurring), moderate (damaging), or major (destructive) for communities, residences, and infrastructure.

The 2022 NOAA Sea Level Rise Technical Report provides updated projections through 2150 for all U.S. coastal waters. The report finds that sea level rise will exacerbate coastal flooding over the next 30 years by increasing tide and storm surge heights and causing them to reach further inland. **Moderate (damaging) flooding is expected to occur, on average, more than ten times as often as it does today by 2050.**

If the world continues to fail to curb its carbon emissions, Maryland will experience even higher rates of sea level rise. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report (Assessment Report 6) highlights that the world is not on track to meet the goals of the 2015 Paris Agreement to limit warming to 1.5 °C or 2.8 °F.

The state of Maryland, particularly its coastal residents, are vulnerable to impacts of global climate change caused by factors often outside of the state's direct control. While Maryland invests in and explores measures for decarbonization and a clean energy economy, investments in climate adaptation measures are critical to protect Maryland's communities and natural resources.

The 2023 Maryland Sea Level Rise Projections Report recommends that, "*Sea-level rise projections should be incorporated broadly into planning, regulatory, and site-specific projects, and into community planning. This should consider a wide range of impacts on the communities and seek to incorporate diverse and representative stakeholder perspectives when planning for these impacts*".

**The burdens of climate change and historical pollution are not equitably distributed among all Marylanders. Often the communities most at risk from impacts of climate change—such as extreme weather events, flooding, heatwaves, and droughts—are the communities that have faced systemic barriers to accessing funding sources. Climate adaptation laws and policies do not yet center climate justice goals. Legislative frameworks, solicitation language, and funding criteria are restricting community access to nature-based climate adaptation funding. These aspects of federal and state funding systems manifest in climate adaptation programs that perpetuate and even exacerbate systemic inequities.**

## THE JUSTICE40 INITIATIVE & SEAFARE

To begin addressing historical injustices, there is an unprecedented opportunity given the Biden/Harris Administration's stated intention to [Revitalize the Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All](#).

> *"We must advance environmental justice for all by implementing and enforcing the Nation's environmental and civil rights laws, preventing pollution, addressing climate change and its effects, and working to clean up legacy pollution that is harming human health and the environment...Pursuing these and other objectives integral to advancing environmental justice can successfully occur only through meaningful engagement and collaboration with underserved and overburdened communities to address the adverse conditions they experience and ensure they do not face additional disproportionate burdens or underinvestment."*

For the first time in our history, the U.S. Federal Government has acknowledged the impact of centuries of racism and marginalization that have led to inequitable distribution of resources. Through the [Justice40 Initiative](#), the U.S. Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are underserved and overburdened.

This is an important first step toward redistributing resources more equitably to communities that are most impacted by systemic inequality and therefore most vulnerable to climate change. The [Executive Order](#) of February 16, 2023 charged the Federal Government with advancing racial equity and providing support to the communities in the United States that have been underserved, discriminated against, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality. To fulfill this federal mandate, we need to prioritize the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities to advance equity and justice for them.

As these advancements are being made at the federal level, it is critical to integrate key equity principles into state-level funding decisions and to determine if the commitments are achieving their intended community climate equity goals.

Environmental justice and equity are frequently acknowledged as important considerations for allocation of climate adaptation resources. However, equity-based criteria are inconsistently applied across federal and state grant programs, which do not meet the urgent and unique needs of communities facing the first and most extreme impacts of climate change.

In order to take advantage of the historic Justice40 funding opportunities, TNC embarked on the Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources (SEAFARE) project. The objective of SEAFARE is to identify ways to more equitably and justly allocate coastal climate adaptation funding to historically underserved and overburdened communities.

Through SEAFARE, we convened an Advisory Committee of community leaders, environmental justice advocates, policy professionals, and government officials in Maryland to collaboratively identify and address inequities in federal and state funding systems.

Throughout 2023, the advisory committee members met and discussed the multi-layered barriers across the funding pipeline that coastal communities in Maryland face in trying to access funds for climate adaptation. Through our work, a toolkit emerged with guidance for decision makers on how to center equity in funding decisions. While this project was convened with a focus on Maryland, we believe the guidance included within this resource is widely applicable to decision-makers across the country.

# Understanding Environmental Injustice in Maryland

In discussing climate change's differential impacts on Maryland communities, it is crucial to consider how climate vulnerability interacts with and is exacerbated by other forms of environmental injustice in the state. For decades, communities of color and historically underserved and overburdened groups have experienced health and economic burdens resulting from discriminatory housing policies, increased exposure to polluting industries, and underinvestment. While this history of injustice is not unique to Maryland, we have a responsibility and opportunity to address past injustices and prevent further harm through strong environmental health and equity policies passed through the state legislature. This section of the report seeks to introduce a few key instances of environmental injustice in Maryland, and briefly share the progress made towards environmental justice goals, recognizing that environmental injustice is intertwined with the state's history of institutionalized racism. This section is not a comprehensive literature review; it is meant to share background information that will help the SEAFARE audiences place the recommendations of this report within the wider context of the movement for environmental justice in Maryland.

## REDLINING IN BALTIMORE

In the early twentieth century, Maryland, like other U.S. states, leveraged a range of mechanisms to exclude African Americans, Jewish people, and Catholics from amenity-rich, less dense communities. For example, beginning in 1910, Ordinance 610 prohibited African American residents from moving to majority white blocks. In the mid-1930s, the Homeowners' Loan Corporation (HOLC) codified these exclusionary practices by classifying neighborhoods of 239 US cities, including Baltimore, by "loan risk" or investment grade. "Redlining" was the practice of labeling areas as least fit for real estate investment due to their large proportions of Black residents. Consequently, residents in redlined areas were denied access to mortgage loans, even when they personally qualified for them.

While the 1968 Fair Housing Act banned racially motivated redlining, institutionalized racism in housing has persisted in

other ways, and the legacy of redlining is still visible in the spatial patterns of race in U.S. cities as well as in trends in social and economic well-being and health of residents of formerly redlined neighborhoods. A 2022 study found that in Baltimore areas designated as red ("hazardous") in HOLC maps were associated with a 5.23 year reduction in life expectancy, and areas marked as yellow ("definitely declining") were associated with a 4.93 year reduction, when controlling for median household income and proportion of African American residents.

Moreover, residents of historically redlined neighborhoods in Baltimore are exposed to greater heat stress. Yellow areas are 1.3 degrees hotter than the city average, and red areas are 5.7 degrees hotter. One factor that contributes to this difference is disparities in the distribution of tree canopy which helps to reduce the urban heat island effect. In general, Baltimore communities with higher poverty rates have lower tree cover. A 2023 study reported that formerly redlined neighborhoods are nine times less likely to have large trees occupying a viable planting site. However, data also reflect recent investment in planting trees in areas with low tree canopy which is illustrative of the potential for community interventions to begin to address the legacy of redlining and other racist city planning practices.

## EXPOSURE TO POLLUTING INDUSTRIES, AND FLOOD PRONE LANDS

Maryland's African American Communities, particularly on the Eastern Shore, are extremely vulnerable to sea level rise and other impacts of climate change due to institutional racism. After emancipation, newly freed Black families and individuals were faced with the problem of earning a living without having any land, training, or tools at their disposal. These communities faced persistent racism, were denied full rights of citizenship, and had to operate within a system that perpetuated oppressive labor practices. Maryland's history of racial segregation and systemic discrimination compelled many African Americans to build their life and homes on the flood-prone lands of the Eastern Shore.

Increased flooding due to climate change is an urgent challenge for Eastern Shore communities. As flooding in the state worsens, we also need to factor in other aspects of environmental injustice that are exacerbated by climate change. A defining dimension of environmental injustice is the disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards that people of color and low-income people experience. Locally unwanted land uses (LULUs) presenting environmental hazards are more likely to

be located in low-income and non-white communities. LULUs include toxic release inventory (TRI) facilities, landfills, incinerators, hazardous waste sites, sewer and water treatment plants, coal-fired plants, industrial animal operations, and Superfund sites. Communities that are already facing socio-economic challenges are therefore also burdened by the physical and mental health impacts of proximity to LULUs. A 2014 study found that census tracts with higher proportions of non-white residents, people living in poverty, and people with less than a high school education were more likely to contain or be close to TRI facilities. Tracts with these characteristics were also more likely to be considered Health Professional Shortage Areas (HPSAs), which is a metric used to measure access to healthcare infrastructure at the census tract level.

A 2021 study documented that, within the state of Maryland, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) are disproportionately located in low-income counties and meat processing facilities are disproportionately near poor communities of color. CAFOs increased in Maryland by 282%—from 150 to 573 operations—between 2011 and 2018. The bulk of CAFOs are located on the Eastern Shore, and meat processing facilities are mostly found in urban areas including in and around Baltimore. CAFOs in particular are associated with adverse health impacts due to their emissions of volatile organic compounds and other forms of air pollution and their production of runoff waste that can enter groundwater and surface water.

In providing examples of redlining, exposure to polluting industries, and locally unwanted land uses, we want to highlight the cumulative effects of unjust policies. The systemic nature of non-climate injustices contributes to the present climate vulnerability of Maryland's coastal communities, recognizing that these injustices and risks are linked is a key first step in climate change mitigation and adaptation planning efforts.

Pursuing community resilience and well-being through the lens of climate justice and equity allows us to highlight the interconnectedness of these problems and ultimately create transformative solutions. Maryland recognizes that the pursuit of environmental justice is a long-term goal that requires input from multiple state agencies and non-government stakeholders.

The Maryland Advisory Council on Environmental Justice (MACEJ) was created in 1997 to examine and make recommendations to the state's governing bodies on issues and policies relating to environmental justice. MACEJ's charge was to study environmental justice issues in Maryland and to recommend environmental justice solutions to the Governor and General Assembly. In 1999, MACEJ published a report of its findings

and recommendations; a key recommendation was to create an Office of Environmental Justice housed in the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) and the establishment of a standing environmental justice commission.

Following the report from MACEJ, the Maryland Commission On Environmental Justice & Sustainable Communities (CEJSC) was established in 2001. The goal of the commission is to review and analyze the impact of State laws, regulations, and policy on the equitable treatment and protection of communities threatened by development or environmental pollution. The commission determines what areas in the State need immediate attention.

In 2024, Maryland Department of the Environment appointed its First Assistant Secretary for Environmental Justice, as well as an environmental justice coordinator and a community liaison responsible for helping communities obtain resources and stay informed.

Achieving environmental justice in Maryland will require new legislation to be passed and new funding streams to be created. The suite of bills presented to the Maryland General Assembly during the 2024 legislative session represent the concerted and unified efforts of advocates, communities, academics, and policymakers to make significant progress towards these environmental justice goals. The equity recommendations presented in this resource can serve as guidelines for future equity based policy-making efforts.

# Terminology Used in this Toolkit

To build a shared understanding of the problems and potential solutions for removing barriers to accessing climate adaptation funding, it is important to first establish a shared understanding of several terms used within this resource, below is a list of how various terms were used by members of the SEAFARE advisory committee during the creation of this report

**Community/Public Science, or Resident Science, as opposed to Citizen Science**
Science that is equitable and collaborative and aimed at outcomes for the benefit of communities.

**Communities/Stakeholders/Interested Parties**
Individuals, groups, or organizations that stand to be impacted—positively or negatively—by the outcome of a project. It differs from right-holders. When working with Indigenous groups, do not use stakeholders. Given our history of U.S. federally recognized indigenous tribes struggling to have their rights protected, use right-holders or title-holders (with sovereignty over research for example).

**Cumulative Impacts**
The impacts (past, present, and future; positive or negative; direct and indirect; long-term and short-term) arising from a range of industrial activities—ranging from transportation, infrastructure, extraction, etc.—throughout an area or region, where each individual effect may not be significant if taken in isolation.

**Decision-makers**
Policy makers, elected representatives, program managers—anyone in a position of power to make changes along the funding pipeline. (Feel free to suggest alternatives to language around "decision-makers").

**Diversity**
The practice of including the many communities, identities, races, ethnicities, backgrounds, abilities, cultures, and beliefs of the American people, including underserved communities.

**Environmental Justice**
Equal protection from environmental and public health hazards for all people regardless of race, income, culture, and social status.

**Equity**
The consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals, including individuals who belong to underserved communities that have been denied such treatment.

**Expertise**
High level of knowledge or skill in a particular area.

**Historically Underserved and Overburdened Communities**
Communities that have been historically underserved and adversely affected socially and economically by persistent poverty and inequality. The State of Maryland defines an "overburdened" community as one that includes any census tract for which 3 or more of 21 selected environmental and health indicators are above the 75th percentile statewide. It defines an "underserved" community as one that includes any census tract as determined in accordance with the most recent United States census, in which:

1. At least 25 percent of the residents qualify as low-income; or
2. At least 50 percent of the residents identify as non-white; or
3. At least 20 percent of the residents have limited English proficiency.

The Maryland Department of Environment's Environmental Justice Screening Tool can be used to identify the state's underserved and overburdened communities

**Inclusion**
The value of an individual, or group, is leveraged meaningfully in service of shared goals.

## Justice

Justice has three legs:

- **Distributive:** Who bears the risks and who benefits from equitable distribution of burdens and benefits?
- **Procedural:** Does the decision-making process invite all interested parties to participate with equal voice and equal power?
- **Recognitional:** Is everyone recognized in their cultural and social differences and all their humanity? Are they seen as equals, deserving?

## RFP (Request for Proposals)

Document that an organization (often a government agency or large enterprise) posts to elicit a proposal. The RFP specifies what the organization is looking for and describes each evaluation criterion on which a proposal will be assessed.

## Transformative work

Work that leaves a community in better conditions than it found it. Transformative work explores systems level change, dedicates resources and time to co-creating strategies for collaboration, and does not shy away from diving into the complexities of each community's lived experiences.

## Toolkit

Collection of accurate, reliable, useful, and adaptable resources that enables users to learn about an issue and identify approaches for addressing them.
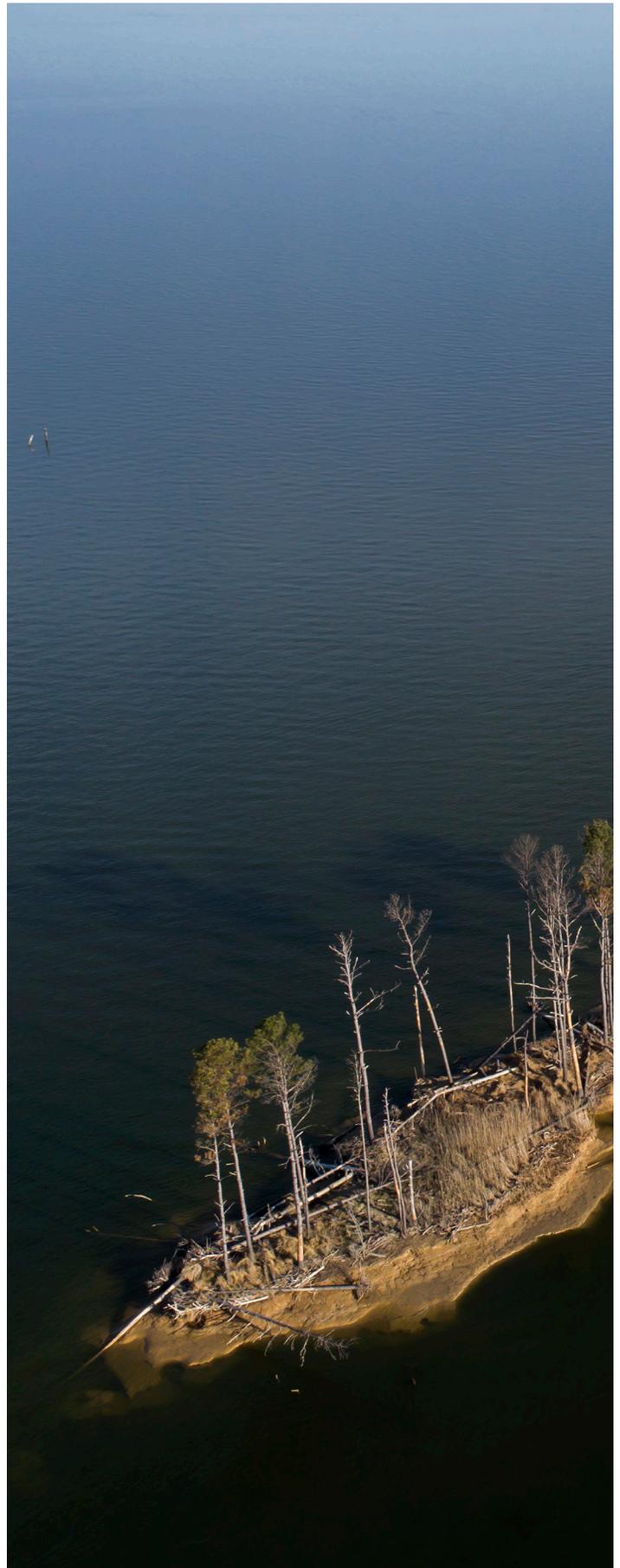
# Barriers Within the Funding System

Within the climate adaptation funding system, a wide variety of barriers prevent funds from reaching historically underserved and overburdened communities. Some barriers are deep and systemic while others are superficial and technical; some may have emerged recently while others have developed over hundreds of years.

In this section, we categorize and summarize barriers identified by the SEAFARE Advisory Committee. This is by no means intended to be a definitive categorization or an exhaustive list (as specific barriers overlap with one another and fall into multiple categories).

## A. LACK OF TRUSTING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES AND FUNDERS.

Trusting relationships make systems function more efficiently and effectively. The absence of trust slows a system down—potentially even bringing it to a halt. A higher level of trust within the climate adaptation funding system will benefit all involved.

This barrier manifests itself in ways such as:

- **Communication breakdowns:** Views of historically underserved and overburdened communities are not solicited or their voices are not heard within the climate adaptation funding system; potential grant seekers may not even hear about funding opportunities; and there is an inability to disclose problems or have candid conversations with funders. The current system rewards good planning, pilot projects, and established priorities while less money is available for the thinking, figuring out, and planning stages.
- **Chilling effects:** Grant seekers who have been rejected multiple times without adequate explanation stop applying for grants. Without believing they have allies or an "inside" person "in their corner," historically underserved and overburdened communities may refrain from attempting to engage with funders.
- **Inability to solve problems and make improvements:** The parties cannot engage in joint problem solving when problems arise. There is no co-creation of improved programs or innovation that a trusting environment helps facilitate. From this, barriers are not eliminated.

## B. FUNDING PROGRAMS ARE NOT DESIGNED WITH THE NEEDS OF HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES FRONT AND CENTER.

Climate adaptation programs can fail historically underserved and overburdened communities strategically (what is getting funded?) and tactically (how is funding being deployed procedurally?). Both failures occur when the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities are not placed at the forefront. The latter failure is addressed in greater detail further below.

This barrier manifests itself in ways such as:

- **There's no holistic approach:** Funding isn't adequately available for climate adaptation projects that cut across issues and prioritize community resilience; there is no cross-issue collaboration, access to healthcare, economic development, safe living spaces, education, etc. Funding programs rely on proof of concept, but each community is affected by climate change differently since one proof does not necessarily apply to another community.
- **People become secondary:** Ecosystem benefits are often prioritized over community benefits. Financial and scientific considerations outweigh social considerations.
- **Tools do not reflect or help communities in need:** Screening and tracking tools used to identify historically underserved and overburdened communities and determining how benefits flow to those communities are often inadequate and inconsistently used. Tools become a burden for proving how "disadvantaged" you are to qualify and can be a way to further exacerbate inequity.

## C. FUNDING POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND PROCESSES DO NOT SERVE HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES WELL ENOUGH.

Even if climate adaptation funds are available, current funding policies, procedures, and processes keep those funds from being deployed to historically underserved and overburdened communities.

This barrier manifests itself in ways such as:

- **Inadequate qualification approaches:** Inconsistent terminology is often used across and within states, causing confusion, and frameworks are ineffective for identifying the most impacted and climate vulnerable communities. Screening and tracking tools used to identify historically underserved and overburdened communities and determine how benefits flow to those communities are often inadequate and inconsistently applied.
- **Burdensome Request for Proposal (RFP) processes:** From beginning to end, the RFP and solicitation process can be too costly and burdensome for many historically underserved and overburdened communities, and requirements like matching often disqualify grant seekers from the outset. The current system rewards established priorities while limiting the space available for planning stages. RFP requirements (evaluation criteria and make up of review panels) may not consider realities on the ground.
- **Burdensome grant administration processes:** The administration of climate adaptation funds can also be too costly and burdensome. Reporting, auditing, and other such requirements often do not consider the realities faced by communities bearing the brunt of climate change.



### Case Study

Research by TNC revealed that, often, grant programs weigh inequitable criteria higher than social benefit. Criteria analyzed often included: application quality, readiness and expertise, budget and match, innovation and scientific merit, program and local planning priority, climate risk and adaptive management, ecological benefit, public benefit and support, and social benefit. A synthesis of these criteria across various NBS/climate adaptation grant programs found that the resource-heavy criteria on average were given twice as many points as social benefit. For example, application quality, readiness/expertise, and budget/match may be worth 40 points, whereas public benefit/support and social benefit may have only been worth 20 points. When criteria weighting does not meaningfully reflect need, proposal criteria are left to interpretation and proposal selection is based on highest earned points, versus greatest impact or need.

## D. ALL PARTIES INVOLVED IN CLIMATE ADAPTATION FUNDING LACK SUFFICIENT CAPACITY AND NEED TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE.

There is a need for additional capacity across all levels of the funding system.

- **Funders are under-resourced and overwhelmed:** Federal and State agencies must get funds out the door, and the process is often so fast it doesn't leave enough time for meaningful cross-agency collaborations to tackle multi-faceted climate change issues.

- **Historically underserved and overburdened communities are also under-resourced and overwhelmed:** Communities are often unable to access funding due to lack of staff capacity and do not have access to the technical knowledge and support needed to put together an adequate proposal.

- **Technical expertise is in short supply:** It's not enough to just make funding available—decision-makers also need to make guidance available. Communities often don't know who to turn to for help, and all parties involved need assistance in interpreting and applying multiple screening tools. Unclear or excess guidance can create an overwhelming amount of complexity that often leads to inaction.

## CURRENT FUNDING SYSTEM



**FEDERAL** FUNDING SOURCES

EPA Funding $$$

NOAA Funding $$$

FEMA Funding $$$

⚠ SYSTEM BARRIERS

**STATE** FUNDING SOURCES

$$$  $$$  $$$

⚠ SYSTEM BARRIERS

$

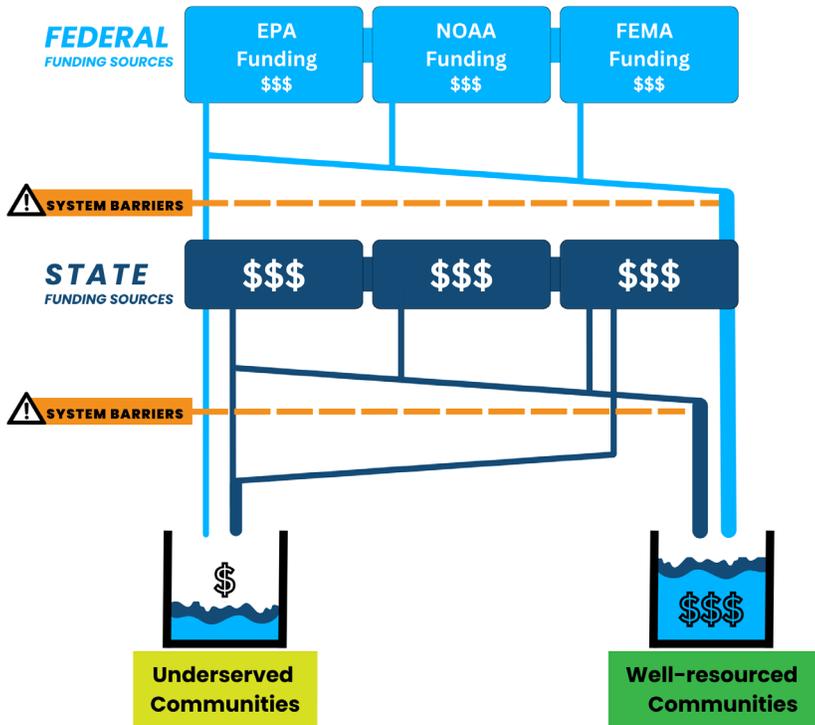Underserved Communities

$$$

Well-resourced Communities

**Figure 1:** In our current funding system for climate adaptation, systemic barriers such as complicated legislative frameworks, complex and alienating solicitation language, restrictive funding criteria, capacity limitations within agencies and local governments, matching fund requirements, lack of authentic public engagement (among others) all keep underserved and overburdened communities from accessing the funds they need to successfully adapt to climate change. These barriers manifest at both the state and federal levels, resulting in new climate funding flowing towards already well-resourced communities.

## IMPROVED FUNDING SYSTEM



**FEDERAL** FUNDING SOURCES

EPA Funding $$$

NOAA Funding $$$

FEMA Funding $$$

**STATE** FUNDING SOURCES

$$$  $$$  $$$

$$$

Underserved Communities

$$$

Well-resourced Communities

**Figure 2:** An improved funding system would find ways to eliminate the systemic barriers that currently exist, and take into consideration the unique needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities. With the Justice 40 Initiative at the federal level, we have an opportunity to tackle funding barriers across all level of the government. An improved funding system would have equity principles at its core to ensure legislative language, proposal review criteria, technical knowledge, and capacity improvements are centering the needs of communities facing the first and worst impacts of climate change.
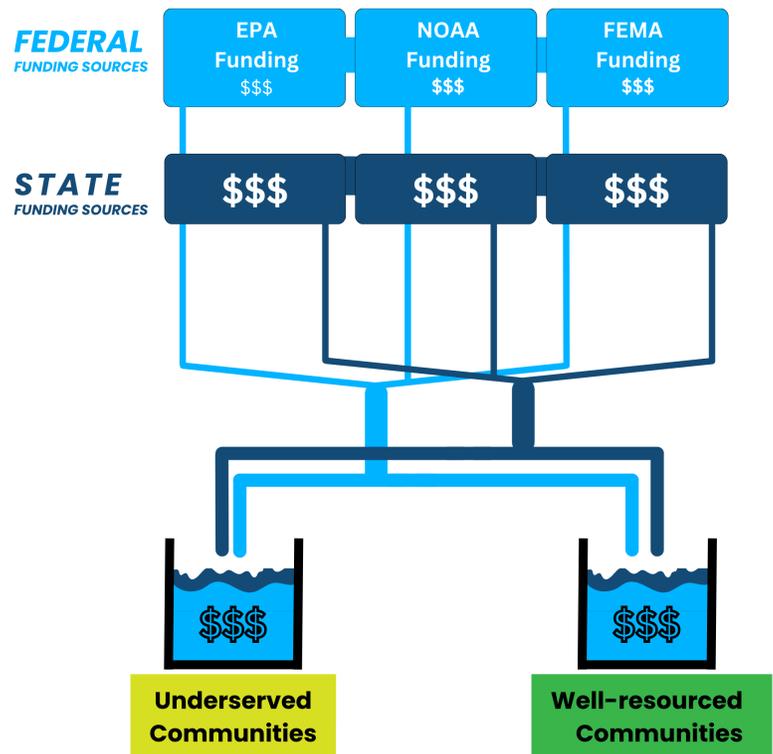
# Equity Principles

> "For far too long, communities across our country have faced environmental injustices, bearing the brunt of toxic pollution, enduring underinvestment in infrastructure and critical services, and suffering disproportionate impacts from climate change."
>
> —Joe Biden, 2022

Within an environmental context, **Equity** is defined as removing the historical, systemic, and in many cases, government-erected barriers that prevent communities from accessing a clean and safe environment. Equity is also about creating opportunities for citizen participation in the decision-making about policies, priorities and investment that will directly impact these communities. Achieving equity means that all people, regardless of their race, color, gender, age, sexuality, national origin, ability, or income can live in safe, healthy, fair communities.

Through a series of community discussions occurring in coastal Maryland in 2023, the SEAFARE Advisory Committee identified seven equity principles (**Figure 3**) that, when applied across funding systems, can help break down the barriers to accessing climate adaptation funding that coastal communities in Maryland face. We begin by offering an explanation and additional learning resources for each equity principle before presenting recommendations for their practical application in order to create a more just climate adaptation funding system.



## SEAFARE Equity Principles

1. Understand the historical and present, social and political conditions and decision-making processes that have contributed to community injustices.

2. Build community trust and relationships.

3. Leverage community knowledge and experience in solution finding.

4. Strive for coalition work and consensus in strategy and action creation to foster reciprocity and co-creation across communities.

5. Contextualize decisions and strategies through the lens of local histories and cultures.

6. Emphasize the transformation of communities, and avoid transactional projects.

7. Understand the power dynamics within partner communities.

**Figure 3.** The seven equity principles for approaching climate adaptation funding.

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 1

For equity and justice to be possible we need to **understand the historical and present, social and political conditions and decision-making processes that have contributed to community injustices** and the current state of inequity. Work devoid of this context tends towards victim-blaming rather than facilitating transformation.

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- Have we made efforts to understand the processes, policies, and decision-making that have historically stereotyped, disenfranchised, and overburdened communities with an overabundance of climate change driven hazards?
- Have we done the work to understand the inequitable political, social and economic contexts within which we are currently operating?
- Have we done the work to understand who are the people that have lived in and have had a relationship with the land in the past, present, and future?
- Have we done the work to understand how systems, structures, and ultimately people, have positioned these communities as "other" and have failed in their charge to protect them?
- Are we opening up inclusive and equitable processes to ensure community leaders and residents are involved with and/or co-designing funding programs?
- Are processes and methods intentionally designed to correct, not reinforce, historical patterns of discriminatory practices that resulted in inequity and exclusion?

The gap in the knowledge and understanding of this history and its ongoing and disastrous impacts frequently manifests in bias: the assumption that poverty is the result of those communities' shortcomings and choices, not of the intentional and sustained policies that deprived BIPOC communities of opportunities such as education or wealth creation.



### Case Study for Equity Principle 1

One recent example is the release of the Lung Association's identification of counties in the state of MD with Good air vs. Bad air. The reason: the poorest counties in the Eastern Shore enduring air pollution from long and sustained violations by industry—Somerset and Wicomico—did not appear on these lists.

*"If organizations like the Lung Association whose mission it is to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease are not building awareness of historical and present abuses that have placed historically underserved and overburdened communities in harm's way. Who can these communities count on to be included in the development of equitable and just policies?"*

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 2

Work that focuses on equity and justice requires that we **build community trust and relationships in historically underserved and overburdened communities**. Trust is built through transparency, listening, dialogue, reliability and engagement that assumes all parties are entitled to equal access and opportunity. The approach is one of learning from and with, not about the communities and people impacted.

Below are key questions to consider when applying this equity principle in the design of climate adaptation funding programs:

- Have we taken steps to visit the communities we serve, organize events where people can get to know one another, and provide input on the decision making that will impact them?
- Have we built project values (i.e., transparency, reciprocity, accountability, tending to intent and impact, etc.) that allow all to participate openly, fully, and equitably?
- Have we taken steps to build the conditions for psychological safety, deep dialogue and difficult conversations? Do we go straight to a task, or do we tend to the relationships in a group that is coming together to complete a task?
- Have we done the work to understand how bias gets in the way of equity, reciprocity, and justice and build skills to mitigate its effects? Do we see the other as equally capable and equally deserving?
- Have we created spaces at the table for and enabled the participation of all members of the community to contribute and bring their expertise, traditional knowledge, and leadership to influence the decisions that impact their localities?



## Case Study for Equity Principle 2

An example identified by the Advisory Committee was a situation where listening, dialogue, transparency, and engagement were not part of the process.

The Blue and Green Infrastructure Commission seeks to streamline the permitting processes to accelerate the scale and pace of implementation of green and blue infrastructure projects in the state of Maryland.

Sometimes, however, given the urgency and pace of the projects, the communities impacted are not included in the decision-making process. One Advisory Committee member remarked, "*People in the community find out about a stream restoration project, for example, when a contractor is already cutting up trees.*" Final reports of the Commission are not shared as widely and effectively as they could be.

This lack of transparency and reliability leave communities feeling excluded and disrespected and leads to their perspectives being overlooked and disregarded.

On the other hand, the Baltimore City's Community Resiliency Hub Program is an innovative initiative aiming to enhance community resilience in the face of natural disasters and emergencies. Through partnerships with service-based community organizations, the program connects vital resources and support to under-resourced neighborhoods and fostering improved emergency response and recovery services. The Resiliency Hubs, composed of trusted non-profit organizations, act as crucial community anchors during crises by providing spaces for gathering, reliable power, essential supplies, and serving as staging areas for emergency personnel.

The program embodies principles of trust and relationship-building. By engaging with frontline community organizations, the initiative emphasizes transparency, listening, and collaboration. The Community Resiliency Hubs operate on a learning 'from' and 'with' approach, recognizing the knowledge within the communities. The support provided by the local government ensures the growth of this community-centered work, reflecting a commitment to justice and inclusivity in disaster preparedness and response efforts.

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 3

The people living with the failures of systems have indispensable expertise about how to best address and fix those failures. We must **leverage community knowledge and experience in solution finding**. By failures we mean the inequity and injustice caused by historical government-sanctioned discrimination and racism that built barriers to access, participation and opportunities, created detrimental policies, and supported intentional underinvestment in historically underserved and overburdened communities. Seeing and respecting local leaders and understanding that they know best for what they need in order for the community to thrive is essential. This means inviting and enabling their equal participation at all steps of the decision making process.

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- Do we assume we know more than the communities experiencing the brunt of climate change on the ground?
- Do we value experiential knowledge and lived experiences as much as we value our institutional or scientific knowledge?
- Have we designed processes and methods that remove barriers to participation?
- How are we reaching out to include trusted leaders, bridge-builders, and cultural translators and communicating the value they bring to our projects?
- How are we uplifting and growing sustainable community leadership, as opposed to positioning ourselves as being the leaders?

### Case Study for Equity Principle 3

The Bay Journal of October 12, 2021 reported the grievances of EJ advocates who have said that the Maryland Department of the Environment, the logical epicenter of the effort, posted an EJ "policy and implementation plan" last December, but didn't seek public comment before doing so. "*I felt like they went into a room and shut the door and came up with a plan they felt was right instead of meeting with stakeholders*," said Darya Minovi, former policy analyst with the Center for Progressive Reform and currently senior research analyst at UCS.

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 4

Driving more effective climate adaptation strategies and actions requires that we **strive for coalition work and consensus in strategy creation to foster reciprocity and co-creation across communities**.

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- Have we done the work to reach out to community members? Have strategies, actions, and success been co-created and collectively defined through open lines of communication?
- Do all interested parties see and value each other as equals?
- Is the language being used a shared language? Do interested parties agree on definitions for standard terms such as equity, justice, and belonging?
- Do we know our common purpose and have we taken the time to understand where we disagree?
- Do we include a diversity of voices to understand the complexity of the issues? What are the consequences—intended and unintended—of our actions?
- Can we all assume the role of teachers and learners, and establish a two-way knowledge sharing system?

### Case Study for Equity Principle 4

The CEJST Tool and its use of census tracts have been criticized for being incomplete and inadequate for serving the long-neglected needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities.

Supplementing these data with local input from directly impacted communities can help prioritize those communities that have historically disproportionately borne the cumulative impacts from industry violations, discrimination, or neglect. Trusting the knowledge communities have about what they need to thrive is critical in collecting more accurate and complete data. This, in turn, allows resources to get to where they are needed most first.

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 5

For strategies and decisions to be equitable and just, we must **contextualize decisions and strategies through the lens of local histories, cultures, and worldviews**.

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- Are the assumptions you bring into the project embedded in a worldview that reflects the impacts of historical and structural factors that created the current conditions being experienced?
- Are the assumptions you bring into the project embedded in a worldview that is appreciated or resented by other interested parties?
- Does the strategy and accompanying work promote equity, justice, and the well-being of the communities impacted?
- Do the goals and outcomes of funding programs prioritize the stated needs and desires of the impacted communities?
- Do we know what outcomes for the community would make this project worthwhile?

## Case Study for Equity Principle 5

The Advisory Committee reflected on the state government's pledge last year that, to fight the projected ravages of climate change, it would plant 5 million trees across Maryland by 2031. However, the Committee questioned whether communities were included and consulted to ensure capacity, buy-in, and resources would be provided so impacted communities could indeed care for such a large number of trees.

In her 2021 paper published in the Environmental Research Letters, Rachel Lamb, a state senior environmental advisor wrote, "*Using NASA's remote sensing data, we were able to identify places where it's a win-win for the environment, the climate, and for farmers financially to grow trees instead of crops*". Lamb found that about 23 percent of Maryland's cropland would be more profitable growing trees than crops. The estimate was based on a carbon price of $20 per ton and a land-use commitment of 20 years.

Those calculations, however, were made in the absence of input from impacted communities. The project, according to Laura Pleasanton, the state outreach coordinator with Farm Service Agency, would require significant assistance from the state agriculture community. About 4.5 million of those native trees will be planted on rural land where, in many cases, farmers may be required to forego profits over the short term. She also added, "*In Maryland we tend to ask a lot of the same producers over and over. It's just a really big balancing act of supporting the farming community while also getting conservation on the ground.*"

## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 6

Just and equitable projects are transformational and not transactional. We must **emphasize the transformation of communities, and avoid transactional projects**. At the conclusion of transformational work, communities are far better off than at the beginning of the process.

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- How are we prioritizing the well-being of communities and people who have been historically underserved and overburdened and who hold less resources, privilege and power?
- How are we defining "benefits" and does the community agree with that definition?
- Does the community agree that the potential benefits to their well-being outweigh the potential risk?
- Are historically underserved and overburdened communities satisfied with the way we have distributed resources, benefits, risks?

## Example for Equity Principle 6

In this article from October of 2023 titled "A University of Maryland Center Just Gave Most State Agencies Ds and Fs on an Environmental Justice 'Scorecard,'" the grading found inconsistencies in the agencies' pursuit of equity and justice, and the center's director says the governor must act to make fighting environmental racism a priority.
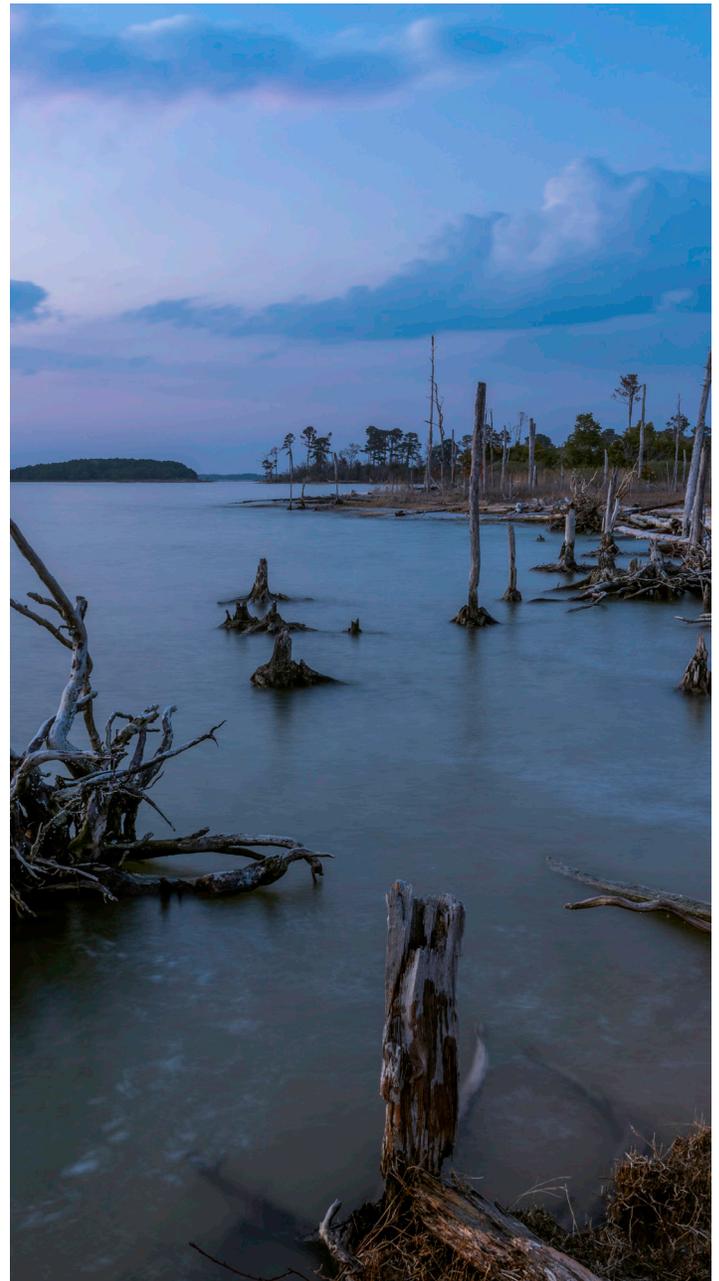
## EQUITY PRINCIPLE 7

Power is present in any interaction. We can have awareness of our power and use it strategically in service of our goals, or we can be unconscious of the power and influence we have and potentially misuse it. Achieving equity and justice **requires an understanding of the power dynamics that emerge from working with communities that may be disconnected from fully utilizing their own power**.

Power differentials are linked to identities. Societies historically have valued some identities more than others and confer more power and influence to people who hold membership in those identity groups. Think, for example, of how societies compensate men at higher rates than they compensate women for the same work; or how particular group identities are uplifted by society through legislation while other identities constructed as inferior have to struggle to achieve equal status (ie. marriage equality). Now, consider intersectionality. How might a woman who identifies as a member of the LGBTQ+ community or a person of color experience the world differently than a man who identifies as heterosexual and/or white?

Below are a few questions to consider in applying this equity principle while designing climate adaptation funding programs:

- Do we understand how power is distributed and acknowledge how it is always present in interactions and relationships?
- Are we aware of and taking steps to address unhelpful dynamics that are the result of unconscious power?
- Are we considering intersectionality in the decision making process—that is, how power is experienced differently at the intersection of different identities?
- Have we done the work to understand the implications of intersectionality on equity and justice?
- Are we skilled at negotiating challenging interactions across power differentials?

To understand more about power, you can begin here: Understand Power and how to use it or here: Difference, Identity and Power.

### Case Study for Equity Principle 7

A contractor on the dredge project needed to kill weeds in order to access an area in the Dames Quarter community. Without any notification to residents, the contractor sprayed herbicides to kill the weeds. Houses, with windows open, were across the road. When this was brought to light at a community meeting, the representative from a state agency simply said, "*We made a mistake*." There was no plan to notify residents of the incident nor any plan of compensation. Would this have happened in an affluent community?

# Recommendations for Decision-Makers

Our recommendations are summarized in **Figures 4 and 5**. More detail and specific recommendations follow.
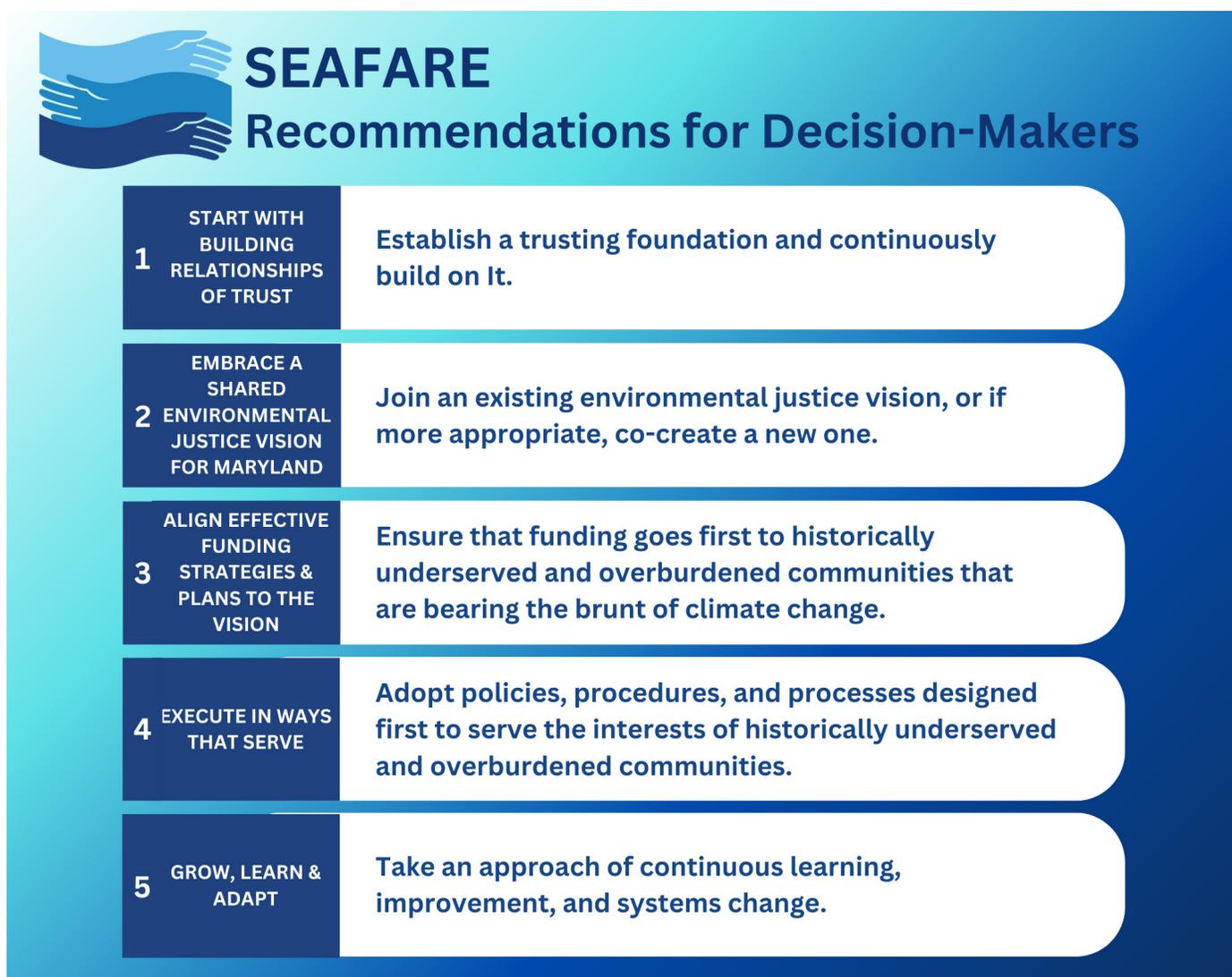


**SEAFARE**
**Recommendations for Decision-Makers**

| 1 | **START WITH BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST** | **Establish a trusting foundation and continuously build on It.** |
| 2 | **EMBRACE A SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE VISION FOR MARYLAND** | **Join an existing environmental justice vision, or if more appropriate, co-create a new one.** |
| 3 | **ALIGN EFFECTIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES & PLANS TO THE VISION** | **Ensure that funding goes first to historically underserved and overburdened communities that are bearing the brunt of climate change.** |
| 4 | **EXECUTE IN WAYS THAT SERVE** | **Adopt policies, procedures, and processes designed first to serve the interests of historically underserved and overburdened communities.** |
| 5 | **GROW, LEARN & ADAPT** | **Take an approach of continuous learning, improvement, and systems change.** |

**Figure 4.** Recommendations for decision-makers.

# SEAFARE
# Recommendations for Decision-Makers

| **1** START WITH BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST | **2** EMBRACE A SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE VISION FOR MARYLAND | **3** ALIGN EFFECTIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES & PLANS TO THE VISION | **4** EXECUTE IN WAYS THAT SERVE | **5** GROW, LEARN & ADAPT |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Ensure that relationships are built on trust, reciprocity, and transparency.<br><br>Consider adopting a shared definition of trust and a charter to guide behaviors of all parties.<br><br>Hold the expertise and lived experiences of historically underserved and overburdened communities on par with other types of expertise and experience.<br><br>Do what you say you will do. | A compelling vision acts as a "North Star" towards which, guided by our equity principles, we can aspire and navigate.<br><br>Funding barriers are just a few of countless obstacles keeping us apart from achieving environmental justice. A more holistic vision of environmental justice in Maryland is needed. | Understand the risk and vulnerability to climate hazards primarily from the perspective of historically underserved and overburdened communities.<br><br>Develop an overarching funding strategy focused first on serving the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities—both long-term and short-term.<br><br>Recognize that climate adaptation problems are often cutting across multiple issues. | Design the RFP process from beginning to end with criteria that prioritize the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities.<br><br>Improve communication between all parties about funding opportunities.<br><br>Designate individuals to serve as allies and advocates for historically underserved and overburdened communities within funding organizations. Communities desire to have an "inside" person "in their corners" to help navigate the process. Doing so will help build trust. | Increase the capacities of both funders and historically underserved and overburdened communities to successfully undertake Justice40 projects.<br><br>Address the rushed U.S. federal mandate for IRA and IIJA: above inequalities were exacerbated with the influx of IRA and IIJA money that agencies administer.<br><br>Support advocacy efforts aimed at defining and tracking Justice40 Benefits. |

**Figure 5.** Recommendations incorporate the equity principles.



Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources

# 1. START WITH BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS OF TRUST—ESTABLISH A TRUSTING FOUNDATION AND CONTINUOUSLY BUILD ON IT.

**1.1 Take on the issue of trust and risk directly at the outset. Ensure that relationships are built on trust, reciprocity, and transparency.**

**1.1.A** Convene all stakeholders and address any lack of trust that may exist. Address the definition and idea of "risk" and seek a shared approach to risk that accommodates the interest of stakeholders.

**1.1.B** Guided by Equity Principle 2, bring the trust and risk issues to light, understand them and own them.

**1.1.C** Remove related misconceptions about risk and trust from the context.

**1.2 Consider adopting a shared definition of trust and a charter to guide behaviors of all parties.**

**1.2.A** Be clear about what we mean by trust, and what the parties can expect from each other moving forward.

**1.2.B** Agree on practical ways we can create and maintain trust. Below is a list of examples:

- **Behavioral Norms:** When entering into a relationship, agree on a written list of behavioral norms to guide the conduct of all parties towards each other. This list would be an overlay to formal funding agreements. Include in the list ways to provide feedback and ensure accountability.

- **Transparent Communication:** Develop a comprehensive communication plan that includes regular updates, feedback sessions and clear documentation of the grant making and administration process. Ensure that information about the decision-making criteria and timelines is readily available to all parties. Provide constructive and detailed feedback to grant applicants whether their proposals are accepted or declined. Consider creating public project dashboards or websites where information can be made available to all parties.

- **Consistency in Decision-Making:** Establish and communicate criteria for making key decisions. Implement a review process that involves multiple stakeholders to ensure consistency in decision-making and accountability.

- **Responsive and Accessible:** Designate specific points of contact for grantors, grantees, and other key stakeholders. Respond to inquiries within a set timeframe. Host regular office hours, open forums, or listening sessions where the parties can ask questions, raise concerns, and seek clarification from each other as needed.

- **Ongoing Collaboration Approach:** Actively seek input from key stakeholders during all parts of the grant-making and administration processes. Create advisory committees or other such groups that include representatives from all involved. Encourage collaboration by organizing workshops, learning sessions, and other gatherings that foster peer-to-peer learning.

- **Regular Feedback:** Implement a feedback loop where the parties can anonymously share their experiences and provide feedback for improvement (particularly—recipients to funders, funders to recipients). Host debriefing sessions after projects are completed to discuss challenges and successes openly, focusing on continuous learning and improvement. Commit to addressing issues voiced by stakeholders in future grant cycles.

- **Shared Learning and Knowledge Sharing:** Facilitate regular meetings, workshops, or online forums where the parties can share best practices, challenges, and lessons learned. Consider creating a knowledge-sharing platform or resource library accessible to all parties.

- **Measurable Impact and Evaluation:** Collaboratively define measurable outcomes and indicators during the processes. Provide support for monitoring and evaluation activities, including workshops on impact measurement, access to relevant tools, and assistance with data collection and analysis. Commit to creating public impact reports.

- **Long-Term Relationships:** Prioritize multi-year funding programs to demonstrate a commitment to the long-term success of projects. Regularly check in outside of formal reporting periods to understand the evolving needs and challenges of those involved.

- **Celebration of Success:** Recognize that "what gets celebrated gets done." Seek out and recognize the bright spots in a good relationship. Provide rewards and other incentives to reinforce trust-building success. Seek to profile good examples of our work together in the news. Share credit widely.

- **Meet People Where They Are:** Invite involved parties to visit the physical locations where they live, work, and where funds are spent. Create a transparent process where the parties can watch, listen, and learn about the realities parties experience on a day-to-day basis.
- **Informal Actions:** Find informal ways to build authentic relationships—for example: meals, coffees, parties, field trips, birthday celebrations, etc. Seek to add joy and laughter whenever appropriate. Be together face-to-face whenever possible.

**1.3 Hold the expertise and lived experiences of historically underserved and overburdened communities on par with other types of expertise and experience.**

**1.4 Consider supporting, creating, or to the extent appropriate, joining, "resiliency hubs" like those of the** City of Baltimore Community Resiliency Hub Program.

> *"Community Resiliency Hubs are trusted, service-based non-profit community organizations with strong leadership located in under-resourced neighborhoods. They partner with the City and provide essential resources and community support during times of crisis. There are currently eighteen Resiliency Hub partner organizations in the program."*

**1.5 Do what you say you will do.** An example would be, Governor Moore visits Crisfield and, while walking through water, says, "*We're going to take care of this.*" Unless he means to fix it and does so, it will hurt trust.

## 2. EMBRACE A SHARED ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE VISION FOR MARYLAND—JOIN AN EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE VISION OR, IF MORE APPROPRIATE, CO-CREATE A NEW ONE.

**2.1 A compelling vision acts as a "North Star" towards which, guided by our equity principles, we can aspire and navigate.** The vision can describe our desired end-state and help to align all of our activities to a final point. A compelling vision can be invaluable in times of confusion and conflict.

The SEAFARE **Vision & Mission** set out in the opening of this toolkit was created by the SEAFARE Advisory Committee. It focuses primarily on the funding barriers faced by communities living in coastal Maryland. However, those funding barriers are just a few of countless obstacles keeping us apart from achieving environmental justice. A more holistic vision of environmental justice in Maryland is needed.

Accordingly, we recommend that the audience of this toolkit embrace a single, holistic, shared vision for environmental justice for Maryland. If such a vision exists now, join it. If not, come together with your stakeholders and co-create the larger vision.

Consider convening a visioning process involving a wide range of perspectives and voices. Use the SEAFARE vision as a "first draft" in such a co-creation process.

## 3. ALIGN EFFECTIVE FUNDING STRATEGIES & PLANS TO THE VISION—ENSURE THAT FUNDING GOES FIRST TO HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES THAT ARE BEARING THE BRUNT OF CLIMATE CHANGE.

**3.1 Understand the risk and vulnerability to climate hazards primarily from the perspective of historically underserved and overburdened communities.**

**3.2 Develop an overarching funding strategy focused first on serving the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities both long- and short-term.**

**3.2.A** Use consistent terminology and definitions for target communities.

**3.2.B** Design and adopt more inclusive frameworks for identifying the most impacted and climate-vulnerable communities.

**3.2.C** Create screening and tracking tools that are responsive to and reflective of the climate adaptation goals identified by historically underserved and overburdened community leaders and use these tools in the communities.

**3.2.D** Adopt program evaluation criteria that includes impact on people as well as scientific and financial criteria. For example:

- Weigh the criteria for social benefit and public support categories equally or with more points than inequitable criteria such as program readiness and expertise and match funds available.

- Using the case study from funding barrier C, application quality and other factors could be weighted as 30 points, and the societal benefits could be weighted as 30 points.

**3.2.E** Provide all parties with training and technical expertise on how to use these frameworks and tools to provide and receive funding.

**3.2.F** Consider and reach out to agencies to pool resources and allocate funding in ways that tackle the cumulative impacts of climate change.

**3.2.G** Communicate EJ priorities to foundations when they receive U.S. federal funds for grant making and improve oversight.

**3.3 Recognize that climate adaptation problems are often cutting across multiple issues such as health, infrastructure, education, jobs, etc.**

**3.3.A** Ensure funding is available for climate adaptation projects that cut across issues and prioritize historically underserved and overburdened community resilience.

## 4. EXECUTE IN WAYS THAT SERVE—ADOPT POLICIES, PROCEDURES, AND PROCESSES DESIGNED FIRST TO SERVE THE INTERESTS OF HISTORICALLY UNDERSERVED AND OVERBURDENED COMMUNITIES.

**4.1 Design the RFP process from beginning to end with criteria that prioritize the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities.**

**4.1.A** Together with community representatives, conduct a review of the current funding life cycle using the **Equity Principles** as a lens and adopt improvements.

**4.1.B** Review and revise the technical requirements of applications to make sure the process can be navigated with ease.

**4.1.C** Review and remove matching criteria and requirements that are not necessary.

**4.1.D** Review, remove, or simplify audit criteria and requirements that are not necessary.

**4.1.E** Review and remove other bureaucratic obstacles in the funding process.

**4.1.F** Create a model for funding evaluation panels that will assure community members have a voice in funding decisions.

**4.1.G** Pay local organizations that are part of the work for their efforts on the same terms that we pay consultants and other experts.

**4.1.H** Standardize solicitation language to facilitate consistency and clarity.

**4.1.I** Remove bias in the proposal selection criteria and ensure reviewers are clear about the criteria and their implications.

**4.1.J** Bundle small grants to alleviate administrative burdens on both funders and fund-seekers who might not otherwise make or receive funding in a small amount. Such a bundling approach could include:

- **Thematic or Geographic Pools:** Create thematic pools or geographic funds where multiple small grants are bundled together based on common themes or locations. This allows the funder to support a variety of projects within a specific focus area or community.
- **Collaborative Grant making:** Partner with other funders to pool resources and collectively fund a set of small grants. Collaborative funding can enhance the impact of each funder's contribution and reduce administrative burdens.
- **Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Bundle small grants into capacity-building initiatives that aim to strengthen multiple organizations simultaneously. This could involve training programs, workshops, or mentorship opportunities that benefit a group of fund-seeking organizations.
- **Multi-Year Funding:** Consider providing multi-year funding to a group of recipient organizations, consolidating several years' worth of support into a single grant. This approach provides stability for the recipients and reduces the administrative burden on the funder.
- **Programmatic Funding Approach:** Establish programmatic funds that cover a range of activities or initiatives and award small grants within that program. This allows the funder to support diverse projects under a broader umbrella.
- **Cluster Grants:** Identify clusters of organizations working on related issues and provide a consolidated grant to support their collective efforts. This approach fosters collaboration among participating organizations and maximizes the impact of the funding.

**4.2 Improve communication between all parties about funding opportunities.**

**4.2.A** Ensure that solicitations are widely shared across platforms and agencies.

**4.2.B** If available, use a shared grant portal to release funding solicitations and award notices.

**4.3. Designate individuals to serve as allies and advocates for historically underserved and overburdened communities within funding organizations. Communities desire to have an "inside" person "in their corner" to help navigate the process. Doing so will help build trust.**

**4.3.A** Have a funding liaison available to hold office hours or answer questions.

## 5. GROW, LEARN & ADAPT—TAKE AN APPROACH OF CONTINUOUS LEARNING, IMPROVEMENT AND SYSTEMS CHANGE.

**5.1 Increase the capacities of both funders and historically underserved and overburdened communities to successfully undertake Justice40 projects.**

**5.1.A  Capacity within agencies:** Review whether funders have sufficient skills and resources for community engagement as well as grant management capacity.

**5.1.B  Capacity within communities:** Review whether community members and leaders have sufficient staff, expertise, and knowledge to apply for and administer funding pools.

**5.1.C**  Deploy available resources to close gaps in capacity.

**5.2 Support efforts to develop historically underserved and overburdened community leaders.**

**5.2.A**  Support with funding, mentorship, training and other such means the development of community leaders with the knowledge, skills, and experience they need to be even more effective.

**5.2.B**  Consider creating new leadership development programs or opportunities.

**5.2.C**  Consider financial investment to fund full-time community leadership positions.

**5.3 To the extent possible, address the rushed U.S. federal mandate for IRA and IIJA and seek to increase collaboration across agencies.**

**5.3.A**  Take available advocacy opportunities to help slow any rush to disburse funds that might be keeping those funds from reaching historically underserved and overburdened communities.

**5.3.B**  Take available advocacy opportunities to ensure collaborations across agencies to increase awareness of funding opportunities and priorities to reduce overlap and burden on applicants.

**5.4 Support advocacy efforts aimed at defining and tracking Justice40 Benefits.**

**5.4.A**  Include Justice40 benefits in grant solicitations and encourage quarterly reporting to include updates on progress and lessons learned.

# Next Steps for this Work

We know that Sea-level rise and other impacts of climate change disproportionately impact coastal communities, especially communities that have been historically underserved and overburdened. Maryland is already experiencing impacts of climate change, these challenges include flooding caused by sea level rise, increased precipitation, and extreme weather events, prevalence of invasive species, ocean acidification and increased likelihood of marine heatwaves, land heatwaves, and drought conditions among others. The impacts of climate change harm the health of both people and nature in Maryland.

**Climate change serves as an exacerbating force for existing societal inequities, often the first and worst impacts of climate disasters are felt by underserved and overburdened communities. Underserved and overburdened communities in coastal Maryland must also overcome the greatest hurdles to access climate adaptation funds.**

The SEAFARE Advisory committee's work helped highlight that climate adaptation laws and policies do not yet center climate justice goals, and there are barriers across all stages of federal and state funding systems that restrict coastal communities' access to climate adaptation funds and technical expertise. The findings of this report are part of a larger climate resilience strategy in Maryland, this strategy aims to connect and weave these challenge points together to craft short term and long-term solutions that are in service of both people and nature.

The SEAFARE recommendations and deliverables were finalized in March 2024. TNC Maryland/DC's Government Relations and Resilient Coasts team have begun sharing the recommendations with their partner networks in the state. Parallel to the SEAFARE work, TNC Maryland/DC has also been convening another advisory committee to create a community informed and community led climate adaptation policy vision for a resilient Maryland, this effort is called Community Outreach and Engagement Forums (COEF).

Through COEF, TNC and our facilitating partners Equnival have established a collaborative network to bring together community leaders to collectively identify and champion climate adaptation policy priorities that directly address the resilience needs of Maryland's coastal communities. SEAFARE recommendations are incorporated within the discussions of this group and products from both projects are informing a strategy to educate policymakers and decision-makers to be advocates for change. The goal of this effort is to better connect decision-makers at state and federal levels to local needs along Maryland's coastline, especially in underserved and overburdened communities.

The participating partners in COEF are: City of Crisfield, Somerset County, Maryland Dept. of Natural Resources, Town of North Brentwood, Blacks of the Chesapeake Bay, Envision the Choptank, Dundalk Renaissance, Socially Responsible Agriculture Project, Deal Island Peninsula Partnership, Stormwater Infrastructure Resilience and Justice (SIRJ) Lab at University

of Maryland, US Army Corp of Engineers, Union of Concerned Scientists, Baltimore Resilience Hub, Baltimore Office of Sustainability, B and D Environmental Consulting, Greater Baybrook Alliance, CASA, NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, Charles County Resilience Authority, NAACP Maryland State Conference—and growing.

The team anticipates bringing the toolkit's recommendations for improving funding systems, alongside supporting climate resilience legislation to policymakers during the 2025 Maryland legislative session. TNC Maryland/DC staff and members of SEAFARE will also be sharing recommendations from their work at the annual National Adaptation Forum in St. Paul Minnesota in May 2024, and at future environmental, conservation, climate adaptation, and climate justice gatherings.
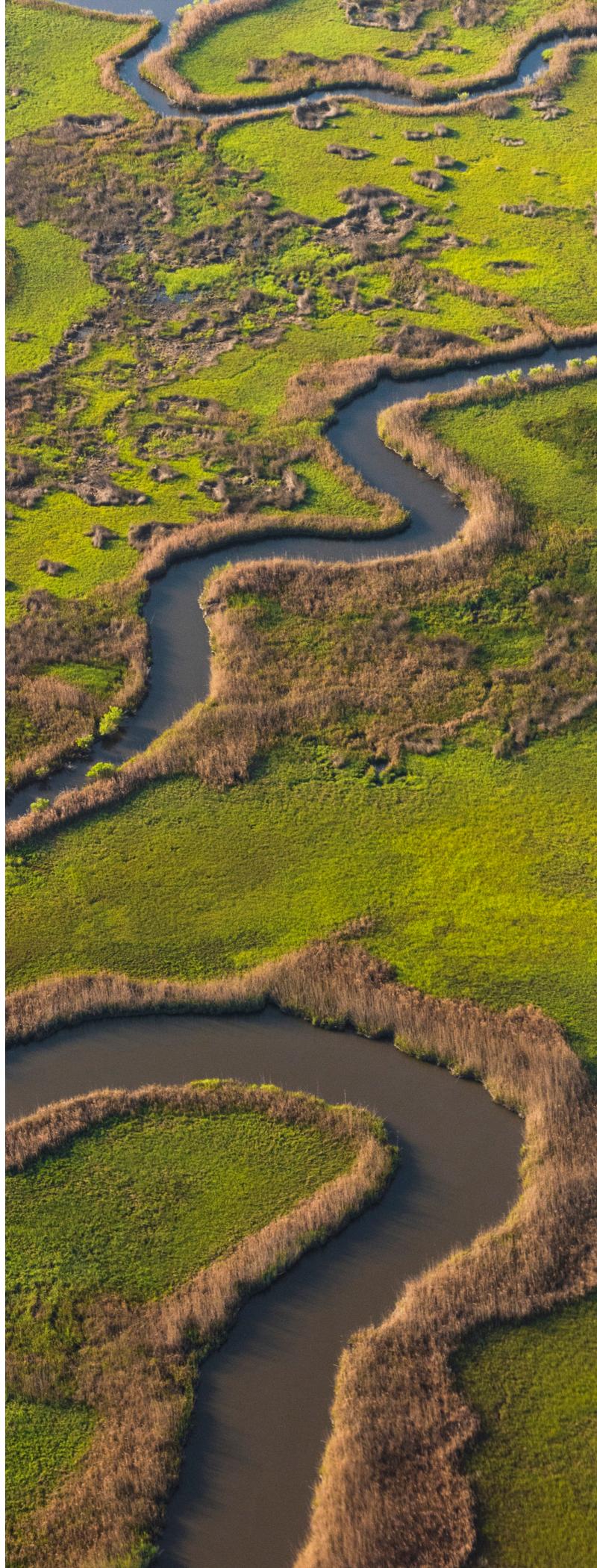
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