

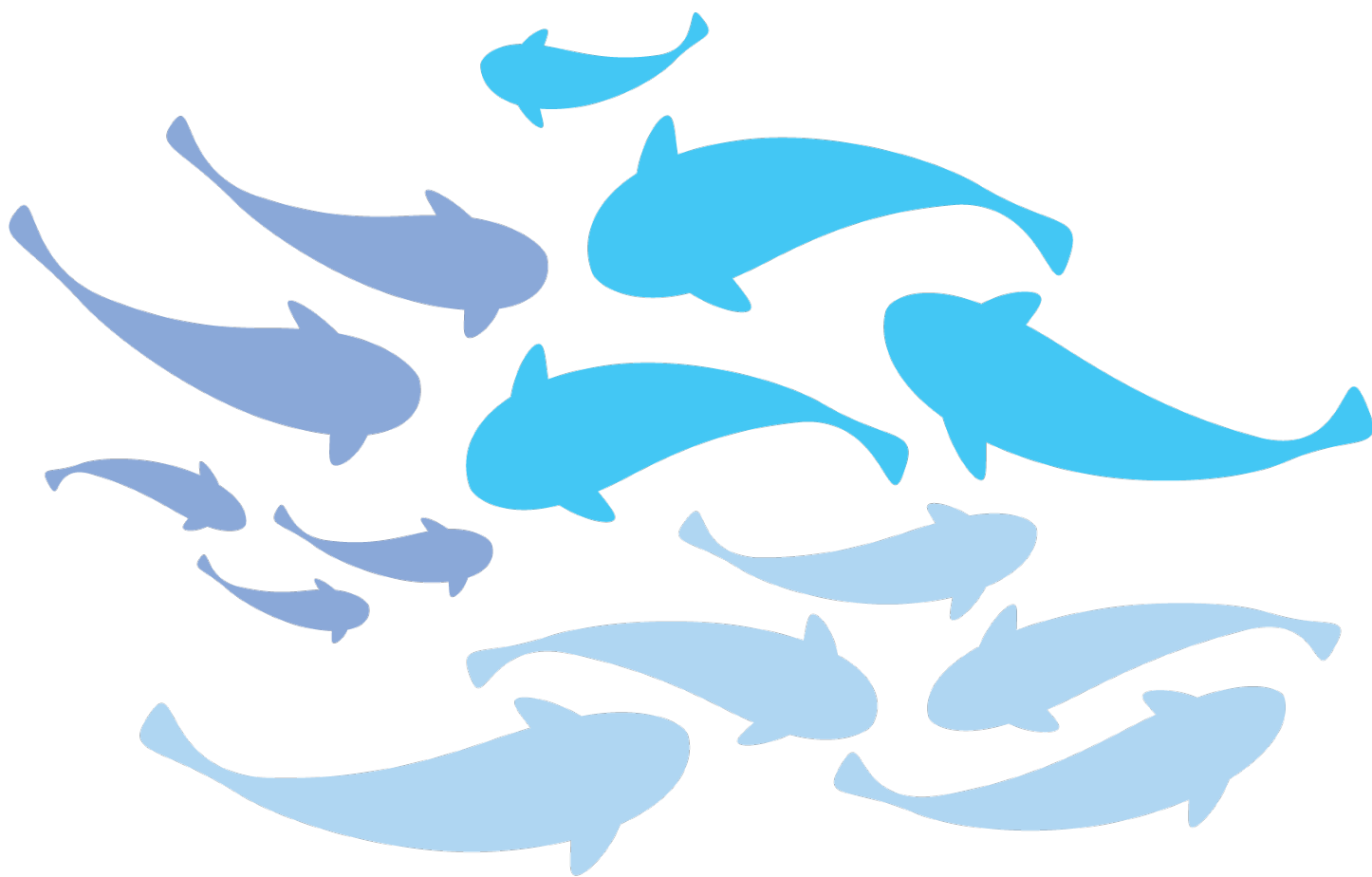


NOAA
FISHERIES

Office of Habitat Conservation

Equity and Environmental Justice Implementation Plan

June 2024



Executive Summary

NOAA Fisheries' Office of Habitat Conservation (OHC) endeavors to equitably serve the American public in our stewardship of habitats for marine and anadromous fisheries and protected resources. The OHC Implementation Plan uses guidance outlined in NOAA Fisheries' national [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#) to incorporate and prioritize equity and environmental justice (EEJ) in our ongoing and future activities.

OHC works to protect and restore habitat to sustain fisheries, recover protected species, and maintain resilient coastal ecosystems and communities through multiple programs. OHC includes the Habitat Restoration Division, Habitat Protection Division, the NOAA Chesapeake Bay Office, and our Operations, Management and Information Division. Our goals are to:

- Conserve habitat for managed fisheries and protected resources
- Restore fisheries and protected resources impacted by oil and chemical spills
- Increase the resilience of coastal ecosystems, communities, and economies through habitat conservation

For OHC, conservation means protection and restoration. We protect healthy habitat by prioritizing our work to address the biggest threats. We restore degraded or injured habitat to ensure the species that depend on this habitat have access to high-quality areas to live. Healthy habitats support fish, clean water, and recreation. But they are declining due to stressors like pollution, development, and extreme weather. We strive to address these issues through our programs and activities that directly support the nation's communities and economy.

Our approach to habitat conservation is collaborative and uses sound science in support of our major mandates like the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA), Endangered Species Act (ESA), the Oil Pollution Act (OPA), the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA), and the Federal Power Act. We focus our efforts for the benefit of marine resources and coastal communities.

OHC works in partnerships at all levels—with local, state, and tribal governments, tribes, other federal agencies, private entities, non-governmental organizations, and communities that are historically underserved by government systems and services. Much of OHC's work and community engagement is done in coordination with NOAA Fisheries' regional offices and science centers. Because OHC is a national program with on-the-ground activities across the nation, regional collaboration within NOAA is imperative to ensure we do not duplicate efforts. Although we have a long history of collaboration and partnership, we are eager to continue building partnerships and learning how we can better incorporate EEJ considerations into our work and implement that learning.

The activities presented in this document represent initial activities or substantial progress toward incorporating EEJ considerations into OHC's work. We intend to continue learning and adapting as we implement and expand on these activities to improve how we work with the public to accomplish our habitat protection and restoration mission goals. This plan is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees or agents, or any other person.

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List of Acronyms

BIL: Bipartisan Infrastructure Law

B-WET: Bay-Watershed Education and Training

CERCLA: Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act

CRP: Community-based Restoration Program

DARRP: Damage Assessment Remediation and Restoration Program

DEIJ: Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

EEJ: Equity and Environmental Justice

ESA: Endangered Species Act

HBCUs: Historically Black Colleges and Universities

IRA: Inflation Reduction Act

LEAD: Leadership, Education, Advocacy & Development

MSA: Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

MSIs: Minority Serving Institutions

NEPA: National Environmental Policy Act

NOAA Fisheries: National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Marine Fisheries Service

NOFO: Notice of Federal Funding Opportunities

NRDA: Natural Resource Damage Assessment

OHC: Office of Habitat Conservation

OPA: Oil Pollution Act

EEJ Objectives Implementation

The Office of Habitat Conservation uses the objectives framework of the NOAA Fisheries’ national [Equity and Environmental Justice Strategy](#), and we have outlined priority ongoing activities that we intend to continue and expand upon. Each objective section includes several examples to highlight the type of work we are doing to advance each priority. The table below outlines the components of NOAA Fisheries’ EEJ Strategy.

NOAA Fisheries’ Equity and Environmental Justice Goals				
<p>Prioritize identification, equitable treatment, and meaningful involvement of underserved communities.</p>		<p>Provide equitable delivery of services.</p>	<p>Prioritize EEJ in our mission work with demonstrable progress.</p>	
Core Areas and Objectives				
<p>Empowering Environment: Provide the institutional support, including training and resources, needed to implement multiple EEJ approaches at NOAA Fisheries. Internal leadership and management will identify EEJ as priorities and encourage staff to consider EEJ in every aspect of their work.</p>				
<p>Policy and Plans: Ensure that our policies promote equal opportunities for all and do not create unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities.</p>	<p>Research and Monitoring: Identify underserved communities and their needs, conduct collaborative research, and assess impacts of management decisions.</p>	<p>Outreach and Engagement: Build relationships with underserved communities to better understand their engagement preferences, and improve information sharing with all communities.</p>	<p>Benefits: Distribute benefits equitably among communities by increasing the access to opportunities for underserved communities.</p>	<p>Inclusive Governance: Enable the meaningful involvement of underserved communities in decision-making processes.</p>

Empowering Environment

OHC works to create an environment where our workforce feels empowered and supported in understanding and applying EEJ concepts in their work. We do this by communicating the importance of EEJ in our work, providing our workforce with various EEJ training opportunities, facilitating knowledge sharing across our organization, and making strides to increase the diversity of our workforce. We will continue to support our community in increasing our collective understanding of the importance of EEJ to our mission and ensure we all feel equipped to pursue EEJ solutions, to the extent consistent with applicable law and availability of funding.

Training

OHC considers EEJ learning an ongoing need and has supported several training opportunities to allow everyone in OHC to learn and grow, improve awareness and working knowledge of EEJ concepts, and understand how these concepts apply to our habitat protection and restoration work. One such office-wide training focused on implicit bias. This raised our awareness of how the brain works and shapes our biases, explored how researchers measure and understand

identity-based biases, and provided actionable steps to prevent and mitigate the impact of biases. Training like this is invaluable as it broadens horizons and improves how we engage with our partners and each other. We have found several of the centralized training opportunities, such as NOAA Fisheries' Human Capital Management Office (HCMO) Psychological Safety training, to be helpful and hope there continue to be opportunities for our OHC team to join Fisheries- and NOAA-wide training. Recently, our OHC supervisors received Psychological Safety training and learned about its importance in creating a culture of inclusion, trust, and innovation. We are working to gain a better understanding of how we can assess and support our teams in feeling they belong and have the opportunity to contribute. Additionally, OHC hosted an Environmental Justice training for all interested staff led by EPA's Office of Environmental Justice, which provided a history and basic concepts of environmental justice and community engagement. This training was later replicated for a NOAA-wide audience. The training was intended to help our workforce gain a general understanding of EEJ concepts so they can consider how to apply them in various areas of their habitat conservation work. We intend to continue to provide these types of training opportunities for our community.

Knowledge Sharing

OHC has developed various teams and workgroups to share knowledge, challenges, and needs to encourage and arm staff toward action. Additionally, our Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program (DARRP) developed workgroups around key EEJ issue areas to tap into the range of perspectives and experiences in our workforce to promote knowledge exchange and creative solutions to our EEJ issues. These teams have developed several internal products to share transferable examples and tactics within the office that can be applied in many areas of our habitat conservation work. OHC has also established a community-managed "living" EEJ resource library, containing resources and training materials on different EEJ topics that can be populated by members of our workforce in an ongoing manner.

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Teams within OHC

In 2021, OHC conducted a survey to gauge the interests of the entire community on where they would like to focus and better incorporate DEIJ concepts into our organization and how we do our work. Several teams were formed and their first task was to assess what activities were already happening within the agency and where needs or gaps existed. Each group then developed living work plans to guide their activities. OHC now has three self-directed teams focused on different aspects of DEIJ:

- The Educating Ourselves Team works to educate the office about DEIJ issues. The more we all understand, the better we can advance this work in our office.
- The Implementing DEIJ in our Work Team considers DEIJ as we implement our habitat conservation work. We want to empower everyone in our community to do this work and create communities of practice to share ideas.
- The Diversity and Inclusion Team focuses on cultivating an inclusive work environment that values the contributions and perspectives of each unique individual and creates a sense of belonging for everyone.

Benefits of Workforce Diversity

OHC recognizes that we can be better equipped to serve the public if our workforce is more reflective of the diversity of the American public. With the historic investments from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), OHC onboarded additional capacity to carry out the large volume of important work under these laws. Throughout the hiring process, OHC focused on recruiting from a qualified, diverse candidate pool that will be the foundation of our future workforce. Our efforts to reach a broad candidate pool included providing both entry- and mid-level positions to attract applicants at different stages of their careers and those with non-traditional paths to relevant positions, using multiple hiring authorities, using recruiting tools to get our job announcements out far and wide, including questions about EEJ in job interview panels, and using diverse hiring panels, where possible. OHC will

continue to use all of these tools and authorities to grow our collaborative workforce with contributions from people with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, experiences, and identities.

Career Pathways

OHC is working to build career pathways to help overcome barriers that inhibit many from gaining access to opportunities for obtaining on-the-job experience, often necessary prerequisites to employment. For example, OHC co-hosts a Chesapeake Bay Internship program focused on students from populations that are underrepresented in environmental research and management professions. Office-wide, OHC has supported interns from five different NOAA internship programs, allowing OHC to benefit from additional capacity while at the same time exposing students and young people to OHC's work. In addition to providing internships, OHC is working to better connect and expose students from Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to prospective job opportunities by hosting student workshops alongside research and policy convenings. We will continue to look for opportunities to help train and launch the next generation of our workforce.

Implementing Ideas from Within

OHC works to create and maintain an inclusive work environment by championing ideas developed by our employees—specifically, the new employee buddy program, peer-to-peer acknowledgment opportunities, and internal detail opportunities to enhance cross-office experiences and cultures. These initiatives demonstrate how the OHC community can take an active role in welcoming new folks into the community, personally and publicly acknowledge colleagues for their good work, and create a positive work environment that retains employees.

Policy and Planning

OHC is incorporating EEJ into our policies and planning by reviewing existing products and practices, as well as those under development, with an EEJ lens to identify where and how we can better incorporate EEJ considerations. For example, in OHC's recent review of its procedures for Natural Resource Damage Assessment (NRDA) work to promote more active consideration of EEJ issues in its various decision points, such as which NRDA sites to get involved in, how to consider impacted communities in settlement decisions, and which projects to select to ensure impacted communities benefit. OHC will continue to take action and learn so we may make improvements throughout our work.

Equitable Grantmaking

OHC's grant programs make up a significant aspect of our portfolio as we support large-scale restoration efforts across the nation's coastal states and Great Lakes. OHC is proud of our cooperative partnerships with each grant awardee, providing technical assistance, administrative, and consultative support for the work throughout the life of a project. OHC has been steadily working for many years on equitable grantmaking, integrating best practices into our operating policies and procedures, working with partners to ensure we are communicating and understanding how the work will impact communities within the restoration area and not introducing or perpetuating burdensome requirements to applicants or awardees. OHC staff are in ongoing communication with project partners to understand the needs and risks, the environmental compliance requirements, and all aspects of a project necessary to bring it to successful completion. From funding competition selection criteria, outreach and engagement, to on-the-ground implementation, OHC is working to incorporate EEJ considerations into our competitive grant programs across several portfolios, including the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) funding, the Ruth Gates Coral Restoration Innovation Grants, and National Fish Habitat Partnership funding opportunities. We will continue to adapt and make improvements, pushing the system where possible to overcome unnecessary administrative hurdles and facilitate impactful involvement in habitat restoration work.

No Match Requirement within BIL/IRA Grant Proposals

Within the BIL/IRA competitive grant competitions, OHC worked to ensure there were match waivers, as requiring matching funds within these grant proposals could inhibit potential applicants from applying to our competitions, specifically from historically underserved regions that could most benefit from habitat restoration work. Ensuring eligibility for applicants regardless of their ability to provide matching funds is an example of action that OHC will continue to promote, enabling the broadest array of applicants to access habitat restoration funding.

NEPA

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides a means to engage communities, thoroughly evaluate the context of our habitat conservation actions, and create an opportunity to identify situations where underserved communities might face disproportionate environmental burdens. OHC is making strides to better engage the public in the NEPA process, understand their perspectives, and incorporate their knowledge and values into our habitat conservation decisions. We are assessing how we interact with communities by striving to engage early in our decision-making processes, meeting communities where they are, and rethinking our approach to formal and informal public interactions.

Guidance and Policy Documents

OHC intends to continue to evolve our guidance documents and policies systematically when they are due to be revised with an eye on EEJ considerations, focusing on awareness and inclusivity in strategic planning efforts, to the extent consistent with applicable law. We will work to bring in different perspectives and endeavor to avoid creating unintended inequities or unequal burdens for underserved communities and tribes. In addition, OHC is working to translate key outreach materials to languages spoken by local communities contributing to or affected by our work.

Research and Monitoring

Although research is not a primary focus of much of OHC's work, monitoring restoration progress is one of our key activities. We work to incorporate EEJ into monitoring and research efforts by ensuring our funding practices are reaching underserved communities, through our work with partners as well as through involvement in workforce training programs. These efforts help us work with partners to strategically leverage resources and activities toward common goals. OHC will continue to look for ways to be thoughtful and equitable in distribution of research funds, and also continue to support social science research and monitoring as well as participate in various training and development programs related to our habitat protection and restoration mission goals.

VetCorps and GulfCorps

OHC's engagement with Gulf Corps and Vet Corps supports veterans and young people by providing skills-based training and hands-on work experience in on-the-ground restoration and science projects to restore fisheries and habitats they depend upon. OHC works with states and partner organizations to employ veterans and young adults via Vet Corps and Gulf Corps to build a community of habitat restoration and fisheries science practitioners across the nation. Programs like these recruit, train, mentor, and employ workers to implement habitat restoration projects, as well as science and monitoring related to those efforts. OHC is proud of our partnerships in these unique regional efforts—in the Gulf of Mexico, California, Washington, Alaska, and Oregon—a reflection of the wide range of habitats and species we work to protect, conserve, and restore.

Meaningful Engagement Metric for our BIL/IRA Funding Competitions

With the historic level of investment from BIL and IRA, OHC developed a new “meaningful engagement of underserved communities and tribes” metric to allow us to begin monitoring and tracking the percentage of projects funded that engage underserved communities and tribes in impactful ways. We developed a living document defining and outlining what we mean when we say “meaningful engagement” and levels of meaningful engagement were included as scoring criteria for funding proposals. Because this is one of the first times the agency has run a funding competition focused on underserved communities, we were very clear, both internally and externally, on our goals for seeking meaningful engagement within proposals. We outlined a list of activities to use as a starting point to evaluate whether projects and our program are achieving meaningful engagement of communities. This list also gave applicants ideas on what type of activities they might pursue. We are continuously learning and sharing what we learn with colleagues across NOAA. We intend to adapt as we learn from each successive competition. OHC will continue to encourage and support efforts to engage with underserved communities and tribes so as to understand unique needs and barriers to involvement with our various activities. We intend to incorporate this type of thinking into other OHC-funding competitions, to the extent consistent with applicable law.

Fisheries Research Program in the Chesapeake Bay

To reach students who are often underrepresented in the marine sciences, OHC has been focusing efforts where we can bring interns and students into our offices to gain experience and learn through mentorship and by serving internships. For example, our Chesapeake Bay Office expanded outreach to Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) to encourage research grant applications to the Chesapeake Bay Fisheries Research Program and to support grant deliverables that may focus on educating students underrepresented in marine science fields. We are seeing encouraging results in reaching applicants, including from MSIs and HBCUs, and also seeing more proposals that include or involve students historically underrepresented in marine sciences. Additionally, we aim to serve as conveners or networkers, connecting partners with mutual interests in finding ways to collaborate around research topics. One of these connections led to partners developing a project to restore a living shoreline on tribal nation property, conducting before-and-after monitoring, and contributing to the larger body of academic research regarding living shorelines and restored nearshore habitats. This partnership also established a Tribal Citizen Monitoring Training Program to feed into the Chesapeake Bay community monitoring cooperative program. OHC will continue to look for ways to reach historically underrepresented students in this field and also serve in this connector role related to our habitat protection and restoration mission goals.

Using Fisherman Information to Serve Communities and Habitats

Better social science tools and data can help inform what kinds of habitat restoration to pursue and where to build restoration projects so that they broadly benefit coastal communities. OHC has been working in partnership with several academic and NGOs to assess whether existing recreational fishing datasets capture and characterize the Gulf of Mexico's underrepresented/underserved recreational and subsistence shore-based fishermen impacted by pollution events. We expect this effort to produce tools and methods for increased community engagement and capture underrepresented shore-based fisherman activity and values that we may then use to better understand pollution impacts and identify restoration options that address them.

Outreach and Engagement

In order to most effectively and equitably conduct our work, OHC draws on diverse expertise and lived experiences from a range of internal and external partners. We also have the opportunity to strengthen existing collaborations with external partners, including those who may have been affected by current or past inequitable practices. As we identify new potential partners in areas we may have underserved or under-resourced in the past, we will seek to build new relationships with a broader base of constituents.

OHC has incorporated EEJ considerations into our outreach and engagement work by reaching out to our partners nationwide, provided training to assist in accessing funding opportunities, led community outreach and meetings when pollution events occurred, and created programs for underserved youth and veterans in habitat restoration.

Technical Assistance

The OHC staff have worked alongside partners in their local communities for over 30 years on restoration projects nationwide. Many of our staff live in the communities where restoration takes place and have long-term engagement, which allows us to offer support tailored to the needs of each community and ecosystem, and to help navigate challenges that may arise. For both our Community-based (CRP) and Damage Assessment Remediation and Restoration programs (DARRP), our staff work closely with partners to provide technical assistance on the latest restoration techniques, the feasibility of potential projects, regulatory requirements, and the many other elements of project planning and implementation. Our staff helps to streamline the process so partners can get their projects underway faster and potentially at lower costs. Examples include project development, identifying the appropriate federal funding opportunity, NEPA assistance, and streamlining federal processes such as the Programmatic Federal Consistency Determinations, and NOAA Programmatic Biological Opinions. OHC recently leveraged funding to recruit a community engagement specialist who will assist our NRDA staff in designing and executing a community engagement strategy for increasing participation in the NRDA process within our priority cases. This capacity will fill a clear gap in our organizational expertise. We are proud of both new and longstanding partnerships we have developed through our technical assistance to support restoration, and intend to continue to partner in ways that improve equity in our restoration work as well as continue to learn how to improve our efforts.

Meaningful Engagement

With a historic opportunity to fund habitat restoration projects under BIL and IRA, OHC is focusing carefully on engagement that is meaningful to ensure that our program and the projects we fund are advancing equity and supporting underserved communities and tribes. The four new funding opportunities launched under BIL and IRA encourage applications from underserved communities as well as from tribal communities and also encourage project proposals that demonstrate strategies to achieve meaningful engagement with tribes and underserved communities. Our working definition of meaningful engagement refers to “communities having an opportunity to be an integral part of the visioning, decision-making, or leadership for activities that may affect their environment and/or health and wellbeing. Meaningful engagement relies on the involvement of those potentially affected in a manner that builds trust and addresses barriers to community participation to ensure that the scope of the activities is inclusive of the priorities and needs of communities and that the benefits of the activities flow back to the community.” Meaningful engagement is a fulfilling two-way street based on relationships and trust. We are focused on continual learning and exploration of ideas as we work toward this goal. As we learn, we are adapting how we evaluate and implement meaningful engagement to ensure that project benefits flow back to the communities.

Equitably Distribute Benefits

OHC is working to incorporate EEJ into our organizational processes to improve the equitable distribution of benefits, notably through our grants processes and by identifying opportunities to increase awareness of and access to funding. How we engage with communities impacted by our work, use of our technical assistance, efforts to increase access to opportunities, support for capacity building efforts, as well as ongoing program evaluation are ways we are working to systematically and consistently embed EEJ considerations and equitably distribute benefits. This manifests in several areas of our work, notably through our grants processes by ensuring underserved communities and tribal partners are aware of and have access to competitive funding opportunities. OHC strives to reach communities where habitat restoration needs and our programmatic mandates align while at the same time meeting communities where they are and supporting them in ways in which they prefer to be supported. One demonstrative example is where OHC, working through DARRP, conducted a cross-program effort to assess processes that potentially limit opportunities to benefit underserved communities. We reviewed and updated program guidance to ensure environmental justice and underserved community considerations were factored into various decisions in the NRDA lifecycle, like case acceptance, the definition of natural resource injuries, and the selection of restoration options.

Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and Inflation Reduction Act Habitat Restoration Funding Competitions

OHC has a long history of supporting habitat restoration efforts by executing large-scale competitive funding opportunities and providing expert technical assistance. In the first round of BIL/IRA competitive funding opportunities, OHC ran four competitions and awarded 109 grants for habitat conservation across the United States, totaling \$480 million. All four of these competitions prioritized tribes and underserved communities, but two competitions specifically focused on funding work that supports them. OHC conducted extensive outreach to ensure broad awareness of this funding availability and we were excited to see more than half of the applicants were new grantees to NOAA, suggesting outreach efforts were successful. Further, 90 percent of the applicants within the underserved communities competition were new partners to NOAA Fisheries. In this first round of competitions, \$53 million was awarded to tribal applicants. Across these projects, tribes will play key roles in decision-making, building capacity to help recover tribally important migratory fish, and providing community and economic benefits such as jobs and training opportunities. Continuing these historic investments, OHC is running four funding opportunities in a second round of BIL/IRA competitions, totaling more than \$500 million. Demand for this funding is high, confirming the need for this important restoration work around the country.

Damage Assessment, Remediation, and Restoration Program

For more than 30 years, NOAA's DARRP has recovered more than \$10.7 billion from polluters to restore fish, wildlife, and habitats harmed by pollution. Using our NRDA authorities, OHC participates in a team of NOAA scientists, economists, and attorneys that address pollution sites by restoring impacted coastal habitats and wildlife and improving community access. Hundreds of communities across the country suffer from legacy pollution sites that impact natural resources, local economies, community resilience, and quality of life. In many instances, these sites impact communities that may have been historically underserved or under-resourced. If left unaddressed, the legacy pollution can compromise the health of vital coastal and marine habitats and the species that depend on them and foreclose opportunities for public use and enjoyment of these resources, often due to restrictions like fish consumption advisories. We deliberately strive to engage affected communities with the intention of understanding their values toward impacted natural resources and incorporate that information into our evaluation of pollution impacts and the development of restoration options. Using this information, we negotiate with responsible parties to hold them accountable and implement restoration that compensates for impacts and that benefits affected communities.

Inclusive Governance

OHC is taking steps to assess our decision-making processes and the data and information we use to make sure underserved communities can meaningfully participate and that their voices and perspectives are appropriately considered throughout our work. Through its program areas, OHC makes decisions about:

- The types of restoration projects to implement and where to site them
- Which grant proposals and cooperative agreements to support
- The composition of management boards
- The habitat conservation issues to prioritize in management plans

In these decision processes, OHC has made some adjustments to ensure communities understand how our processes work and where they have meaningful opportunities to participate. We also take steps to ensure we factor diverse perspectives and information into our decisions, to the extent consistent with applicable law.

Supporting and Working with Tribal Nations

Soon after BIL passed, OHC and NOAA colleagues prioritized garnering input from tribal leaders on the opportunities and decisions that this funding provided. We committed to a sustained dialogue with tribal nations. Our intent was, and is, more than engagement; it is to truly serve as cooperative partners in habitat restoration work. OHC received funds to enhance fish passage by removing barriers, a portion of which was to be directed toward tribal priorities. We hosted several meetings with the NOAA Administrator, and more than 40 tribal nations and tribal organizations participated. All information collected through this process is available via a [summary document posted online](#) and this input informed the development of the first round of funding opportunities. Before the second round of competitions, we again solicited feedback to incorporate and further improve the funding competitions. We learned that staggering our funding opportunities would allow for the workload to be spread out for those applicants with limited capacity who were applying to multiple competitions, that a lengthier application period would alleviate some workload burden, and that some applicants prefer to receive funding as a sub-award as opposed to directly funded. We incorporated these lessons into our application process and will continue to learn, adapt, and improve as we address needs. Additionally, in the second round of competitions, OHC added a tribal community focus to another funding competition that goes beyond fish passage and barrier removal and supports a range of activities, including capacity building, outreach and education, and training programs. Across capacity building and on-the-ground restoration activities, OHC will support projects that ensure the needs and priorities of tribes are at the center of habitat restoration efforts in their communities.

Broadening or Increasing Participation

OHC developed an internal best practices compendium to guide our NRDA restoration planning to better engage communities affected by pollution and consider their perspectives in habitat restoration decisions. The best practices encourage the characterization of affected communities, effective ways of clearly and plainly communicating actionable information, and strategies for increasing the participation of communities with EEJ concerns in decision-making processes. OHC has also developed a [Coastal Recovery](#) email newsletter to reach communities impacted by pollution and make them aware of opportunities to participate in the NRDA process.

OHC has initiated conversations with our funding partners to prioritize and advance strategies and tactics for engaging underserved communities, tribes, and communities with EEJ concerns so that the habitat conservation efforts we fund consider the perspectives and interests of these communities.

Adjusting Processes

OHC adjusted its review process for the Bay Watershed Education and Training (B-WET) grants to ensure proposals are reviewed by a diverse set of experts in the field. OHC gives careful consideration to ensure reviewers represent a range of diverse perspectives. Since 2022, we have also offered honoraria for reviewers in compensation for their time and expertise to facilitate their engagement in the review process.

OHC has developed recommendations to enhance the consideration of EEJ in grant-making opportunities. These include providing match waivers for grant applicants, including geographic prioritization criteria, pursuing flexibilities that allow for awards for capacity building that target training and assistance for cooperative agreement development, and developing and applying proposal scoring criteria that prioritize the meaningful engagement of underserved communities.

Forward Progression

Going forward, OHC intends to continue implementing and refining many of the directions identified in this document. We are intentional about learning from our actions. We would like to hear directly from communities about the real or perceived effectiveness of our efforts to advance equity and inclusion. We have made investments to expand our workforce to include socio-economic and DEIJ expertise to help support our learning about the effectiveness of the activities we have already implemented and identify opportunities for improvement into the future. The table below outlines several actions we will be tracking going forward. While many of the activities demonstrate a good start or substantial progress, additional resources, coordination, and opportunities for efficiencies could promote greater progress and innovation in EEJ.

Ongoing Activities Table: Actions, Metrics, and Resources Needed

Actions	Metrics	Resources Needed
<p><i>Empowering Environment</i> Support continued staff participation in the NOAA Fisheries national EEJ Working Group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> OHC participants serving on the NOAA Fisheries national EEJ Working Group 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time
<p><i>Empowering Environment</i> Support continuation of OHC DEIJ teams/workgroups. Groups continue to meet to share information about successful approaches, collaborate on outreach and inclusion of common constituencies, and make recommendations to OHC leadership when needed.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DEIJ groups hold regular meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership support Staff time
<p><i>Empowering Environment</i> Provide and/or encourage participation in training or workshops that help build a shared understanding of the concepts of EEJ and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and how to implement these concepts in our work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Highlight relevant training opportunities for OHC community Share learnings of training by participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EEJ training opportunities and materials, or funds for trainer Staff time
<p><i>Research and Monitoring</i> Continue to participate in internships and other programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Number of interns supported Number of OHC staff mentoring interns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff time

Actions	Metrics	Resources Needed
<p><i>Policy and Planning</i> When OHC-led Policy Directive System documents (or other relevant guidance documents) are up for review, ensure the review considers accessibility (including but not limited to 508 compliance). Consider language, customs, and Indigenous knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of guidance documents reviewed for accessibility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time • EEJ training • Accessibility to translation services
<p><i>Equitably Distribute Benefits</i> Continue to engage with communities meaningfully and encourage others to do so as well. We want to ensure communities have the opportunity to be an integral part of the visioning, decision-making, or leadership for activities that may affect their environment and/or health and wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of awards with meaningful engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time • Funding for restoration actions
<p><i>Outreach and Engagement</i> Create joint opportunities to share success stories via the web, congressional visits, and outreach materials. We want to ensure partner voices are being shared and amplified. This could help to increase awareness of NOAA Fisheries among underserved communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of communication products or events (web stories, congressional meetings) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time • Access to interpretation and translation services
<p><i>Inclusive Governance</i> Continue to seek feedback from partners on real or perceived effectiveness of our efforts to improve equity and inclusion in our work.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback sought 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff time