



Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources

The Nature Conservancy's Maryland/DC Chapter is leading an effort designed to identify ways to more equitably allocate coastal climate adaptation funding to marginalized frontline communities. Through the SEAFARE project our goal is to ensure that community voices are elevated, and underserved communities have better access to the coastal climate adaptation funding they need.



PROJECT RESOURCES

[Project Overview](#)

[Initial Findings from Cross State Analysis](#)

[Advisory Committee Members](#)

[Related Environmental Justice and Climate Adaptation Resources](#)

TNC's network of [climate adaptation professionals](#)

THE CHALLENGE

Impacts of climate change are unequal.

Underserved and overburdened communities - frequently communities of color - are disproportionately impacted by climate change, yet they often must overcome the greatest hurdles to access adaptation funds. 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. Environmental justice and equity are frequently acknowledged as being important considerations for grant programs but are



inconsistently and inadequately used to guide the fair and equitable allocation of coastal climate adaptation resources. With worsening impacts of climate change, there is an urgent and increasing need to address the climate adaptation priorities of underserved and frontline communities.

WHERE WE ARE



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](#) 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 marginalized, underserved, and overburdened. This is an important first step toward redistributing resources more equitably to communities that are most impacted. As these

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

A [“covered program”](#) is a Federal Government program that falls in the scope of the Justice40 Initiative because it includes investments that can benefit disadvantaged communities across one or more of the following seven areas: climate change, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and the development of critical clean water and wastewater infrastructure.

There is a need to identify how the concept of Justice 40 is being applied to coastal communities, and their climate adaptation priorities. For example, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as the primary agency overseeing the nation's coastal and ocean resources only [recently announced](#) a list of Justice40 specific funding programs. There are additional barriers across all stages of federal and state funding systems that restrict coastal communities' access to climate adaptation funds

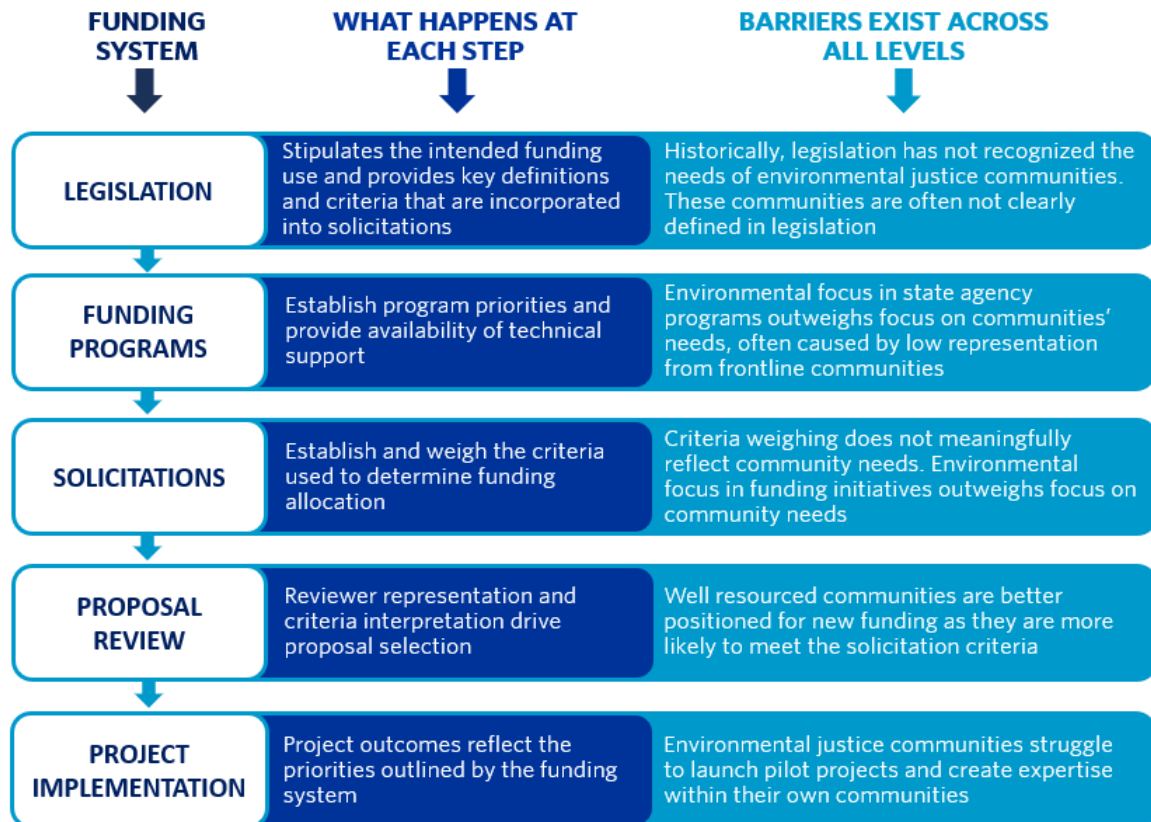
WHAT WE KNOW

In 2021, TNC hired Upwelling Consulting to review the lifecycle of climate adaptation funding in five US 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 isn't comprehensive of all the inequities that exist, it provides a starting point for our work in Maryland. 1) **Built-in inequities:** The funding life cycle often includes embedded inequities at



the legislative and grant program level. 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. 2) **Inconsistent terminology** is often used across and within states. There is a need to design and adopt more inclusive frameworks for identifying the most impacted and climate vulnerable communities. 3) **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. Read the findings from Upwelling Consulting [here](#).



WHERE WE ARE GOING

Ensuring that climate adaptation funds are allocated in more equitable ways requires systemic change informed by the communities being impacted.

Systemic change begins with detailed analyses of federal and state legislation to gain situational awareness of existing barriers. It also requires reimagining community engagement to enable a re-balancing of power in decision-making. Government priorities need to be informed by

the perspectives and aligned with the priorities of the most socio-economically and climatically vulnerable communities. Building trust and shared understanding of climate adaptation priorities and

barriers will enable meaningful discussions to improve current systems. The Nature Conservancy has organized an Advisory Committee of community leaders, environmental justice advocates, policy professionals, and government officials to collaboratively identify and address inequities in funding systems. The Advisory Committee will recommend ways that legislative, regulatory, and solicitation language, criteria, and processes need to change to address inequities in funding allocations for nature-based climate adaptation. The Advisory Committee meetings are being facilitated by [The Collective 180](#).

SEAFARE GOALS

1. Identify barriers to accessing coastal climate adaptation funding and ways to remove those barriers to promote equitable access to adaptation resources
2. Develop a toolkit with Advisory Committee members, aimed at policy makers and funding program managers, with recommendations to improve funding systems
3. Implement guidance through collaborative work with government and funding agencies in Maryland
4. Foster relationships and knowledge exchange among Advisory Committee members to advance climate adaptation goals

PROJECT PHASES

PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
Completed in 2022	Ongoing in 2023	Coming up in 2024
We reviewed the lifecycle of climate adaptation funding in five US states to identify embedded inequities in laws, policies, and programs, as well as opportunities for improvement to increase equitable access to and distribution of climate adaptation funding. The review identified a legacy of embedded inequities in laws, policies, and programs, and emerging efforts to make adaptation funding more equitably accessible. Read the study results here .	An Advisory Committee consisting of community leaders, environmental justice advocates, policy professionals, and government officials is examining existing barriers to funding access in Maryland. The Advisory Committee will recommend ways that legislative, regulatory, and solicitation language, criteria, and processes need to change to address inequities in funding allocations for nature-based climate adaptation. The Advisory Committee’s feedback will be organized into a toolkit to support governments in equitably allocating coastal climate adaptation resources.	TNC will work with government and funding agencies in Maryland to implement the toolkit recommendations. TNC will document this process as a case study to inform replication in other U.S. states. An internal TNC network of climate adaptation professionals will provide additional expertise.

OUR THEORY OF CHANGE

It is widely understood that conservation outcomes are longer lasting and more effective if projects are designed and implemented collaboratively with communities. However, community members are infrequently included in – or even completely absent from – priority setting for coastal climate adaptation programs. TNC’s coastal resilience initiatives have grappled for decades with the challenge of implementing nature-based solutions but doing so in ways that do not continue to benefit only wealthy coastal landowners. With our new [2030 goal](#) of helping 100 million people at severe risk of climate-related emergencies by protecting and restoring the health of natural habitats, we need to redirect funding to the areas where adaptation challenges are the most extreme.

CONTACT US

- **Humna Sharif**
[Resilient Coasts Climate Adaptation Manager](#)
Humna.Sharif@TNC.ORG
- **Maria Estrada**
[Team Lead, Collective 180](#)
maria@thecollective180.com
- **Courtney Ball**
[Team Member, Collective 180](#)
courtney@thecollective180.com