

Overview:

The Environmental Justice Survey for Community Organizations was intended to gather input on environmental topics from organizations that serve vulnerable and/or disadvantaged communities in the City of San Luis Obispo. More specifically, the survey gathered input on how the city can better support disadvantaged communities by reducing environmental pollution, identifying key community needs, and increasing the voice of marginalized groups in the City's decision-making process. The survey findings will support the integration of environmental justice into the City's General Plan Safety and Community Resilience Element.

The survey was open for two weeks from August 12th, 2021 to August 26th 2021. The survey was sent via email to 59 staff members at local organizations or agencies that work with disadvantaged communities or focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The survey was also shared with participants of the Environmental Justice Working Group.

Participation:

The survey received 7 responses from the following organizations:

- Diversity Coalition San Luis Obispo County
- SLO Food Bank
- HASLO
- United Way of San Luis Obispo County
- Lumina Alliance
- CAPSLO
- Habitat for Humanity SLO County

Populations Served:

All respondents indicated that they serve populations that live, work, and/or go to school in the City of San Luis Obispo. All organizations reported that they serve low-income, non/limited English speakers. Also, all organizations serve young children and youth within SLO. The majority (6/7) of responses showed to support those who are unhoused, unemployed, and uninsured. People without vehicle access, undocumented individuals and families, people with disabilities, and outdoor workers are also served by a majority of organizations. About half of respondents show support for people with chronic health conditions and people with severe mental illness.

Only one organization (Diversity Coalition SLO County) indicated that they aid racial and ethnic people of color and faith-based communities, this same organization specifically supports BIPOC populations. One individual organization described that they serve "low income residents of SLO County who lack the resources to purchase or obtain enough food for themselves or their families" while another organization noted they assist those with affordable housing ownership. One other organization serves victims of violence particularly.

Environmental Pollutants Adversely Impacting Vulnerable Populations

Types of environmental pollutants (all listed frequently among the respondents)

- Exhaust and traffic pollution from living in proximity to major roadways
- Contaminated drinking water
- Lead paint or pipes in housing
- Pesticide pollution from agriculture
- Living/working near environmental clean-up sites
- Smoke from wildfires

Populations are affected mostly by living and working near the environmental pollutants listed.

Farmworkers are at risk to greater pesticide exposure and are also impacted more by wildfire smoke as they are working outdoors.

Low income housing are often based in areas that are more impacted by pollutants such as noise and exhaust from higher traffic volumes.

Due to insufficient resources and low level priorities from local governments, vulnerable populations are subject to substandard living conditions, lack of proper education/recognition, and are of a low priority for remediation.

Recommendations for how the City can Help Protect Vulnerable Populations from Environmental Pollutants, Hazards and Climate Change Impacts

- Host listening sessions inside of affected communities.
- Devote new human and material resources to investigate and remedy environmental injustices.
- Identify and appoint leadership from within the affected communities
- Provide monetary or other basic needs support to farmworkers when their work is disrupted by unusual or dramatic climate events
- Incorporate greater city plans to clean up pollutants and test for pollutants in soil and other locations
- Provide access to resources, education, funding, and create platforms/events where community members may share their experiences and be intentionally listened to

Community Improvements to Protect the Wellbeing and Safety of Vulnerable Populations

1. Better transit services (more routes, more stops, shorter wait times).
2. Low income housing.
3.
 - Cooling Centers.
 - Broadband access.
 - Cooling/heating for homes and apartments (air conditioning/heat pumps).
4.
 - Park access.
 - Address food deserts by providing farmers markets and such in low income areas.
 - Street Trees.
 - Translation Services.

- Safe parking/ camping areas for the unhoused population that includes services and resources.
- Community gathering places.

“Real, tangible short and long-term, result driven solutions that are not based in politically motivated rhetoric and empty promises”

A general consensus shows these needs are anticipated to change beside one organization which does not think community needs will change as impacts increase. It was noted that better public transportation and cooling centers will rise in importance. Additionally, heightened rates of demographic change will increase need for affordable housing, educational resources, and access to broadband.

Important Public Services and Amenities

- Access to safe living conditions, legal services, and affordable child care.
- Libraries, bus transit, bicycling paths, safe overnight parking, public bathrooms, programs specifically targeted towards low-income housing.
- Living wage jobs and access to affordable housing.
- Access to public parks and recreation
- Transit improvements for senior and disabled populations.

Specifically for disaster situations

- Cooling centers, clean and safe shelters
- Access to food, clean water, electricity, and transportation
- Translation services and assistance for those with mobility issues
- Temporary housing for displaced individuals

Healthy Food Access

- Increase support for food banks
 - Partner with SLO Food Bank to determine regional gaps in service.
 - Create opportunities for food distributions, pantries, free farmer’s markets in underserved communities.
- Improve public transportation to super markets and farmers markets
- Support food banks, farms, and gardens for low income neighbors

Participation in the Public Decision-Making Process

Barriers

- Language barriers seem to be most prevalent.
- Lack of trust also drives participation downward.
- Don’t hear about opportunities (e.g not well connected to the City communication channels)
- Seems to be inaccessible to many people:
 - Too little time to engage (when struggling to put food on table, dealing with violence, engagement in public government not on radar.

- Inaccessible meeting times
- Disconnection between members of the public and government body
 - Topics of city meeting not relevant
 - Lack of interest
 - Lack of knowledge on government processes.

Recommendations for improved involvement and communications

- Ensure affected communities have opportunities to create agendas, not simply respond to agendas.
- Incentivize participation
- Consider alternative meeting times outside of work week/hours
- Collaborate with trusted partners/agencies within different communities to spread information (specific recommendation to use CAPSLO to disseminate info of interest to civilians.
- "Prioritize and focus on real life, basic needs that enhance and sustain"

Additional Comments

- "Further reduce jobs/housing imbalance in order to reduce job commute times and all things associated with them (reduced air quality, decreased quality of life etc.)
- Please sustain our work making environmental justice a core priority in the city's service to all its citizens, don't allow to fall between the cracks... Thank you.