

Safe, Clean Water Program 2025 Interim Guidance

May 2025

Introduction

This Safe Clean Water Program (SCW Program)¹ 2025 Interim Guidance² has been developed by the Los Angeles County Public Works (Public Works), considering input from Interested Parties, to support development of projects and feasibility studies to align with the key components of the SCW Program Goals in the following areas:

- Strengthening Community Engagement and Support
- Water Supply Guidance
- Programming Nature Based Solutions
- Implementing Disadvantaged Community Policies in the Regional Program

Information in this *2025 Interim Guidance* is meant to provide context for SCW Program activities and the drivers behind new and ongoing program-related developments. This is accomplished through definitional refinements, responses to motions from the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, incorporation of early outcomes from the SCW Program Watershed Planning Framework, and other actions related to the evolving SCW Program landscape. Considering this guidance document will be released prior to the completion of the Initial Watershed Plans, subsequent adaptations may incorporate, as appropriate, outcomes from the Watershed Planning process, as well as ongoing work with Watershed Coordinators (WCs)³, the Watershed Area Steering Committees (WASCs), and other coordination efforts, among others. Additional issues warranting further guidance may be considered in the future. Figure 1 below provides a timeline for recent SCW Program-related developments as well as those expected in the near future.



Figure 1: Tentative SCW Program Adaptive Management Timeline

¹ Terms in blue font, along with further detailed information about the SCW Program and its various aspects/components, can be found in the SCW Program Terms & Concepts Glossary (Appendix A). ² Italicized terms herein tend to refer to additional SCWP Guidance and other reference documents. Refer to <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/call-for-projects/</u> for a comprehensive document list.

³ https://safecleanwaterla.org/watershed-coordinators/

SCW Program Interim Guidance Purpose

A primary function of this 2025 Interim Guidance is to provide a basis upon which Project Applicants can build the specific features and characteristics of their proposed projects. Integrating aspects such as Community Engagement, Water Supply Benefits, Nature-Based Solutions, and Disadvantaged Community Benefits is vital for the success of any SCW Program project, as well as its inclusion within Stormwater Investment Plans (SIPs). This 2025 Interim Guidance is intended to consolidate the existing requirements and recommendations within the SCW Program regarding these project aspects and, at a high level, support SIP programming by providing information to help:

- Project Applicants with early project development and application preparation.
- Watershed Area Steering Committees, Watershed Coordinators and the Scoring Committee consistently employ decision-making tools and strategies (both quantitative and qualitative) to inform scoring and/or the development of SIP recommendations.

An understanding of the scoring criteria for projects proposed to the SCW Program is crucial to ensure that projects sufficiently address requirements and recommendations such that they are deemed appropriate for SIP inclusion. Further details regarding scoring criteria can be found in the *Feasibility Study Guidelines* and *Supplemental Guidance to Support the Feasibility Study Guidelines*. There are specific aspects of proposed projects that can highly influence scoring. This 2025 Interim Guidance includes an overview of scoring criteria that will aid in effective project planning and design.

Also included within this 2025 Interim Guidance is a breakdown of the tools and strategies that may be used by entities such as WASCs, WCs, and the Scoring Committee (SC) in efforts to accurately and consistently evaluate each proposed project. Evaluation is performed in consideration of the overall SCW Program Goals.

Several additional documents, distinct from this 2025 Interim Guidance, have been developed to provide support and/or information for a range of SCW Program-related applications. Some of these documents are referenced and/or sourced from throughout this 2025 Interim Guidance, including the following:

- Feasibility Study Guidelines
- Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines
- <u>2024 Metrics and Monitoring Study</u>
- Equity in Stormwater Investments White Paper
- SCW Program Watershed Planning Framework
- <u>Regional Program Funding Process Handbook</u>
- <u>SCW Program Handbook for Municipalities</u>
- <u>Reporting Module Guidance New Regional Program Performance Measures</u>

Supplementary SCW Program details, documents, projects, and program information is available on <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/</u>.

Program Background

The Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program) provides local, dedicated funding generated through a Special Parcel Tax to support SCW Program Goals. General SCW Program objectives are to increase regional water supply, improve water quality, and enhance communities throughout Los Angeles County Flood Control District (District) boundaries.

The SCW Program generates approximately \$285 million per year in funding for multibenefit Projects and Programs that align with SCW Program goals and objectives. The funding is divided across three subprograms- District, Regional, and Municipal Programs.

The District Program administers the SCW Program and Regional Program, provides technical assistance, oversees regional

SCW Program Goals (paraphrased):

- A. Water Quality
- B. Water Supply
- C. Community Investment Benefits
- D. Leverage Funding
- E. Multi-Benefit Projects
- F. Nature-Based Solutions
- G. Provide a Spectrum of Project Sizes
- H. Adopt New Technology
- I. Scientific Studies
- J. Disadvantaged Community Benefits
- K. Municipal Benefits
- L. Adaptive Management
- M. Green Jobs and Career Pathways
- N. Ongoing Operations & Maintenance

Additional detail regarding SCW Program Goals can be found in District Code <u>Section 18.04</u>.

water quality planning and coordination, Scientific Studies, and water quality modeling, and plans, implements, and maintains District projects. The Municipal Program funds efforts including Municipality-led infrastructure and maintenance programs to support water quality and Multi-Benefit Projects. The Regional Program funds regional projects and efforts through Watershed Area-level management oversight and includes the Infrastructure Program, Technical Resources Program, and Scientific Studies Program. Under the Regional Program and for the purposes of this *2025 Interim Guidance*, the term "Project" is intended to mean the development (including design, preparation of environmental documents, obtaining regulatory permits, construction, inspection, and similar activities) and Operations & Maintenance (O&M) (including monitoring) of a physical structure or facility that increases Stormwater or Urban Runoff capture or reduces stormwater or urban runoff pollution in the District.



Figure 2. SCW Program funding allocations by sub-program

For each of these program areas, information and/or specific guidance documents have been developed to summarize existing SCW Program information, establish a shared vocabulary as part of the SCW Program, include information related to best practices, and provide additional clarity on key SCW Program components through implementation to date. This *2025 Interim Guidance* has been developed primarily to support the Regional Program call for projects, scoring, and SIP processes; however, information may be of value for the District and Municipal Programs as well. Additional information specific to the Regional Program is provided in the *Regional Program Funding Process Handbook*. Detailed Municipal Program guidance can be found in the SCW Program's *Handbook for Municipalities*.

Key interested parties and intended users of this 2025 Interim Guidance include:

- Infrastructure Program Project Applicants: Any individual, group, business or governmental entity that submits a proposed project or Feasibility Study for consideration for funding by the SCW Program. Entities that may submit a proposed Project or Feasibility Study for funding may include, but are not limited to: Public Works, a municipality, watershed management group, joint powers authority, public utility, special district, school, Community-Based Organization (CBO), Non-Governmental Organization (NGO), non-profit organization, Federally-Recognized Indian Tribe, State Indian Tribe listed on the Native American Heritage Commission's California Tribal Consultation List, or mutual water company.
- Infrastructure Program Project Developer: The individual, group, or entity that carries out or causes to be carried out part or all the actions necessary to complete a SCW Program project.

- **Project Proponents:** Community members, Project Developers/Applicants, or other interested parties with a tangible desire to promote a given project and assisting in the eventual realization of its Water Quality, Water Supply, and/or Community Investment Benefits.
- Watershed Area Steering Committees (WASCs): A governing body created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board), one for each Watershed Area, that reviews proposed projects, project concepts, and scientific studies, and develops SIPs for their respective Watershed Areas as part of the Regional Program. WASCs are occupied by municipal, agency, and community member representatives, and each WASC is supported by at least one WC.
- Scoring Committee (SC): A group of six subject-matter experts in Water Quality Benefits, Water Supply Benefits, Nature-Based Solutions, and Community Investment Benefits created by the Board to review and score projects and Feasibility Studies in connection with the Infrastructure Program.

These key interested party groups are primarily relevant in the context of the Regional Program's Infrastructure Program. Project Applicants seeking funding through the Infrastructure Program must submit a Feasibility Study, or equivalent, for evaluation through the SCW Program Projects Module. The Projects Module assigns a Feasibility Study a preliminary "Module Score" based on Scoring Criteria requirements and alignment with SCW Program Goals. The Module Score is then verified by the SC. Feasibility Studies which meet or exceed a certain Threshold Score are considered to move forward for programming into one of the nine watershed area SIPs administered by the WASC.

Project Applicants who submit a Feasibility Study through the SCW Program Projects Module are also asked to identify the Known or Perceived Needs (or Desired Outcomes) of the community or Watershed Area within which a project is located, justification of why the Project Developer understands those to be needs, and the ways that the project is anticipated to address those needs and achieve desired outcomes. This question is posed for each of the three SCW Program benefits – Water Supply Benefits (WSB), Water Quality Benefits (WQB), and Community Investment Benefits (CIB).

While not scored, the identification of needs related to each type of benefit is an important part of the project narrative that WASC members should evaluate for any individual project or suite of projects considered for inclusion in a SIP. This is particularly important for Water Supply Benefits, primarily due to the potential for one project's claimed benefit to be impacted by another that is upstream or downstream of the other, especially in the absence of any coordination prior to project development and planning.



Safe, Clean Water Program 2025 Interim Guidance

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Community Engagement and Support



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Section Highlights

Acknowledged here are the SCW Program developments that are new additions to this 2025 Interim Guidance.

What's New



- Updated organization and clarification of community engagement and support guidance.
- Incorporation of recommendations derived from the Equity in Stormwater Investments (UCLA 2022) White Paper and MMS (LA County PWD 2024), including additional Performance Measure reporting requirements to better quantify and track outreach and engagement efforts.
- Refined best practices for comprehensive community engagement.
- Alignment of outreach and engagement guidance with project phases outlined in the <u>2025 Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines</u> (2025 Supplemental Feasibility Study Guidance)
- The Community Strengths and Needs Assessment (CSNA) has been developed and implemented.
- In partnership with the Water Foundation, the Safe Clean Water Public Education and Community Engagement Grants Program has been launched by the District.

Section Highlights



In addition, the following requirements and recommendations are included for Community Outreach and Engagement within SCW Program projects:

What's Required

- Documentation of community engagement efforts prior to application submittal.
- Description of plans for engagement during project implementation.
- Requirements presented by the SCW Program Transfer Agreements.
- Efforts to mitigate issues related to displacement and gentrification.
- Plans to solicit, address, and incorporate interested party input through outreach and engagement.

What's Recommended

- Consideration of contextual variables in distinguishing individual communities.
- Demonstration of strong community-based support and/or project development in partnership with local NGOs and CBOs.
- Provision of evidence of NGO partnerships(s) and/or widespread community support for project.
- "Best"-level community outreach and engagement, as outlined in Table 3.
- Integration of CSNA input, to the maximum extent feasible.
- Discussion of engagement related to Native American Indian tribes.

For additional guidance regarding the various requirements and recommendations related to community outreach and engagement within SCW Program projects, refer to the following supplementary documents:

- 1. Feasibility Study Guidelines
- 2. <u>2024 Metrics and Monitoring Study</u>
- 3. Reporting Module Guidance New Regional Program Performance Measures
- 4. Equity in Stormwater Investments White Paper

A comprehensive list of relevant SCW Program documents is available at <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/call-for-projects/</u>.

Purpose

Community outreach, meaningful engagement, and the pursuit and attainment of Community Support are important for ensuring that SCW Program projects and expenditures deliver tangible *and* welcomed benefits on the ground. Program experience to date has indicated that additional detailed community engagement guidance can support development of meaningful engagement tools and approaches for SCW Program projects.

At the base of community engagement and support as related to the SCW Program is the determination of what constitutes a "community". For the purpose of this *2025 Interim Guidance,* and based on input from SCW Program interested parties, the following definition has been developed:

While the definition above provides guidance, it is the responsibility of the WASCs and SC to verify Project Applicants' interpretation of "community" based on their subject matter expertise and the context in which community is referenced by Project Applicants.

What features distinguish an individual community from another often varies based on circumstance. Any SCW Program project may be subject to a number of variables that impact how communities are differentiated. Consideration of these contextual variables is an important step in identifying individual communities and determining community boundaries in the context of a given SCW Program project.

The term "community" refers to a group of individuals or entities that hold and recognize something in common, for instance, a geographic area, culture, needs and interests, goals, or other social bonds. Community boundaries can be defined by formal political or informal social geographies that have meaning for the community members. In the context of the SCW Program, community members can be self-defined and may include residents, CBOs, local businesses, public institutions, agencies, and other interested parties who are either directly or indirectly influenced by the development of a project and the associated benefits that support their quality of life.

Community engagement, defined as activities that solicit, address, and incorporate input from community members for SCW Program activities/projects, is a key element of the SCW Program. The intended outcome of community engagement activities is the attainment of community support, or tangible support from and/or partnerships with the local community. Engagement is woven through many different aspects of the District Program, Municipal Program, and Regional Program; however, it is not an explicitly listed Goal of the SCW Program. The focus of this *2025 Interim Guidance* chapter is in support of progressing engagement strategies and implementation aimed at developing community support for Infrastructure Projects submitted or funded by the SCW Program.

Projects submitted for inclusion in SIPs are required to document pre-submittal community engagement and describe plans for engagement during project implementation. WCs and/or the Technical Resources Program may support Project Proponents with community

engagement prior to the award of funding. Even so, completing community engagement and/or providing sufficient evidence of community support prior to receiving funding can be challenging for some Project Applicants. Further, community engagement does not guarantee community support, and a strong demonstration of community support may not necessarily be the result of engagement.

Specifically, this 2025 Interim Guidance includes guidance related to the following:

- 1. **Engagement Prior to Application:** Policies for establishing and documenting that community engagement has occurred (and to what level) and/or support for a project exists (and to what level).
- 2. Engagement Plan for Project Implementation: Clarification of how project proponents and WASCs can interpret and substantiate commitment to community engagement once a project is funded and being implemented.

Note that additional guidance was provided by the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment (CSNA)⁴ and the SCW Program <u>2024 Metrics and Monitoring Study (MMS)</u>⁵, as well as is contained the <u>Equity in Stormwater Investments</u> (University of California, Los Angeles [UCLA] 2022) White Paper⁶.

⁴ <u>https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/8efe6e5f57804998be1a8c4067c41cab/page/Dashboard</u>

⁵ https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2024/07/SCWP-Metrics-Monitoring-Study-Executive-Summary.pdf

⁶ <u>https://www.stantec.com/content/dam/stantec/files/PDFAssets/technical/001/equity-in-stormwater-investments-stantec-ucla.pdf</u>

Existing Community Outreach/Engagement Policies in the SCW Program

The SCW Program includes various planning and reporting requirements for Community Outreach/Engagement activities as part of <u>Regional</u> and <u>Municipal Program Fund Transfer</u> <u>Agreement</u> processes and <u>Feasibility Study Guidelines</u>.

SCW Program Transfer Agreements in the Regional and Municipal Programs

A Fund Transfer Agreement is the SCW Program process used for recipients of funds to comply with the requirements of the other appropriate provisions established in the SCW Program Implementation Ordinance. The standard template Regional Program Transfer Agreement includes plan submittal requirement with provisions for outreach and engagement activities as well as ongoing biennial reminders for O&M projects and activities and measures to mitigate against displacement and gentrification.

Implementation of appropriate outreach can lead to community engagement. Community engagement activities solicit, address, and incorporate input from community members for SCW Program projects and activities.

Stakeholder and Community Outreach/Engagement Plan activities should occur during the design phase and construction/O&M phases. A broad suite of events including public meetings with multiple agenda items such as council, commission, or committee meetings where **Regional Community Outreach Activities** Outreach activities are performed to provide residents information about upcoming meetings or other scheduled engagement activity. Methods should be appropriate in type and scale to the served community. Outreach methods include but are not limited to:

- Online Media Outreach Online media includes email blasts, social media efforts, and website publication. Further details can be located on the <u>SCW Program Community Engagement &</u> <u>Education Webpage</u>.
- Local Media Outreach Local media includes newsletters, local and regional newspaper publications, and local television and radio. Additional local media may include emerging techniques such as targeted advertisements within streaming/podcast services, and/or YouTube.
- Grassroots Outreach Efforts include door-todoor canvassing, phone banking, focus groups and surveys, coordination with local community groups, and activities such as the distribution of flyers and other printed materials. This method of community outreach is accompanied by a recommendation for ongoing coordination with local organizations.

Best practice includes coordination with Public Works via web-based platforms (requires four weeks lead time), social media outreach and notifications for meetings and other engagement events.

public input is invited; at festivals, fairs, or open houses where a table or booth may be set up, or project-specific meetings may be used to support community engagement. The <u>SCW</u> <u>Program Transfer Agreement</u> (Section A-8.3) specifies minimum required outreach/engagement activities for Infrastructure Program Project Funding (Table 1).

 Table 1. Minimum required and example outreach/engagement activities for different SCW Program project funding levels. (Information derived from Transfer Agreement Sections A-8.3/8.4)

Infrastructure Program Funds	Required Activity 1	Required Activity 2	Example Outreach Activity	Example Engagement Activity	Example Outreach Content
Up to \$2 M	Outreach or Engagement		Distribution of informational materials to community via signage, online media, and/or grassroots efforts	Attendance/ presentation at Public Forums / Community Meetings	Project planning and implementation progress and schedule updates Project features and benefits
Up to \$10 M	Outreach	≥ 1 Engagement	Distribution of informational materials to community via signage, online media, local media and/or grassroots efforts Earned media coverage	Attendance/ presentation at Public Forums / Community Meetings/City Council / Board of Supervisors Meetings	Project planning and implementation progress and schedule updates specific to planning / design phases Focused outreach to minimize potential construction phase impacts to the community and public- at-large
Over \$10 M	Outreach	≥ 2 Engagements	Distribution of informational materials to community via signage, online media, local media and/or grassroots efforts Earned/paid media coverage	Attendance/ presentation at Public Forums / Community Meetings/City Council / Board of Supervisors Meetings Project-specific community meetings	Targeted phase-specific project progress and schedule updates Focused outreach to minimize potential construction phase impacts to the community and public- at-large Post-construction project features and Community Investment Benefits promotion
Infrastructure Program Project O&M	Outreach (Biennial)		Distribution of informational materials to community via signage, online media, local media and/or grassroots efforts		Focused outreach to remind communities of the SCW Program contribution

In addition, Regional Program Transfer Agreement plan submittal includes a requirement to address "Activities and measures to mitigate against displacement and gentrification. This includes, as applicable, an acknowledgement that the Funded Activity will be fully subject to and comply with any County-wide displacement policies as well as with any specific antidisplacement requirements associated with other funding sources."⁷ Although there do not currently exist any readily available anti-displacement policies listed at the County-level in Los Angeles, interested parties can refer to other anti-displacement regulations in California (e.g. AB1482) for guidance regarding potential displacement and gentrification goes hand in hand with overall Disadvantaged Community (DAC)-related SCW Program Goals that aim to "prioritize equity in implementation" and "address inequity in infrastructure".⁸ Further detail regarding the necessity for consideration of Disadvantaged Community Benefits within the SCW Program is provided in the "Implementing Disadvantaged Community Policies in the Safe, Clean Water Program" section of this *2025 Interim Guidance*.

Regional Program Feasibility Study Guidelines

A Feasibility Study is required to include a plan to solicit, address, and incorporate interested party input through outreach and engagement. Demonstration of strong community-based support for a project and/or project development in partnership with local NGOs and CBOs is not required but is suggested by the *Feasibility Study Guidelines*. A discussion of these aspects of project development is necessary if the Project Applicant intends to receive points for community support.

In addition to requirements presented by the *Feasibility Study Guidelines*, community engagement is woven into many other components of the SCW Program related to Regional Program activities. This includes, but is not limited to:

- WCs as part of the Regional Program Technical Resources Program.
- The District Education Program, including District-wide public education and community engagement programs and sustained education and engagement programs for DACs.
- The Public Education and Community Engagement Grants Program, which will provide support through funding of education and community engagement efforts.
- Municipal Program implementation, including plans for interested party engagement in Municipal Program funds allocation planning.

For additional details regarding requirements related to community engagement, refer to the SCW Program *Feasibility Study Guidelines*.

⁷ See Section A-8.5.

⁸ <u>https://www.stantec.com/content/dam/stantec/files/PDFAssets/technical/001/equity-in-stormwater-investments-stantec-ucla.pdf</u>

Additional Guidance for Community Engagement and Support

In addition to the policies and requirements listed above, Project Applicants, Developers, Proponents, and WASCs may also consider the following.

Expectations for Community Engagement by Project Phase



Sustained engagement to solicit, address, and incorporate interested party input on the project, including potential impacts related to displacement and gentrification, should occur for both the design and construction/O&M phases. Outreach and engagement activities, even if funded by other sources, should generally be aligned to provide an overview of the project and approach, appropriate technical information to support meaningful engagement and input, and summary of Community Investment Benefits. The goals and expectations for the level of community engagement may vary based on the project status and schedule. Project Applicants are strongly encouraged to seek input from WCs to achieve desired goals based on project phase. Project phase-specific expectations for community engagement are discussed in detail below.

Design Funding Applicants

During the design phase, outreach to connect with and allow for identification of key interested parties for subsequent engagement is an important first step. Project details developed during the design phase including geographic location, project goals and concepts designs, surrounding community characteristics, long-term Water Supply, Water Quality, and Community Investment Benefits may be used to support targeted outreach. Community engagement is undertaken with the goal of engaging relevant interested parties to solicit, address, and incorporate input on community needs/concerns/objectives, as well as identify potential solutions to challenges. Issues related to displacement and gentrification should also be addressed. This ongoing consideration for interested party and community views regarding a project is essential in ensuring iterative and equitable decision-making within a project design phase. Specifically, continued communication of progress and/or benefits to interested parties and the community prevents engagement fatigue and ensures that benefits claimed by Project Developers are agreed upon by community members. Those applying for design phase funding may also seek funding for community outreach and engagement efforts related to project planning phase activities.

This approach includes the minimum expectation that Program Applicants identify and inform/consult interested parties prior to application submittal (see Table 3 below). Other available funds (such as support from the Public Education and Community Engagement Grants Program and/or Municipal Program funds if the applicant is a municipality) should be utilized to prioritize and secure resources for additional community engagement needs as part of the design phase. Should such resources not exist prior to application submittal, a clear description and discussion of limitations along with a description of any plans for future resource acquisition should be included by the Program Applicant.

Construction/O&M Funding Applicants

The construction portion of this phase consists of project designs that have advanced to 60-percent or beyond and tangible project implementation, including but not limited to site preparation and construction of infrastructure components. The O&M portion of this phase involves operating and maintaining infrastructure to ensure its long-term functionality and effectiveness. Additional technical components of the O&M portion monitoring relevant parameters such as maintenance frequency and cost as well as efficacy in terms of Water Quality and Water Supply Benefits.

During and following a project's construction phase, the primary goals of community engagement are to realize and maintain effective partnerships, sustain ongoing public education, and communicate/recognize project progress and project benefits. This engagement may be used to optimize long-term maintenance, monitoring, adaptive management, and/or plans for future project phases. Project Developers are already required to report on activities through the funded duration of the project. Project Developers can refer to Table 3 for best practices. SCW Program Infrastructure Program Scoring Criteria explicitly identifies that "a plan or existing justification for how the project demonstrates strong local, community-based support or has been developed as part of a partnership with local non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and others" as the criteria for which community support is evaluated. It is worth noting that outreach to communities is distinctive from support from or partnerships with communities. When demonstrating community support, it is recommended to provide evidence of partnerships with NGOs or compelling evidence that the project enjoys widespread community support. For the purposes of this *2025 Interim Guidance*, the following clarifications have been developed:

- Widespread community support is defined as verifiable support and agreement from a discrete number of distinct Interested Parties within a given community.
 - The number of interested parties from which support and agreement must be attained to be able to claim widespread community support can be determined by using the ratio of the project's drainage area to the aggregated drainage area that has been managed by Infrastructure Program projects to date in the Watershed Area for which a Project Applicant is applying (Table 2).

Watershed Area	Aggregated Drainage Area (acres)
Central Santa Monica Bay (CSMB)	78,085
Lower Los Angeles River (LLAR)	29,387
Lower San Gabriel River (LSGR)	40,582
North Santa Monica Bay (NSMB)	1,889
Rio Hondo (RH)	67,500
Santa Clara River (SCR)	2,457
South Santa Monica Bay (SSMB)	27,690
Upper Los Angeles River (ULAR)	21,324
Upper San Gabriel River (USGR)	5,889

 Aggregated drainage area for projects to date for given Watershed Areas were taken from FY24-25 SIPs, and are provided here:

This methodology is intended to contextualize the proposed project's size in relation to the SCW Program projects that have occurred to date for its specific Watershed Area, and provide recommendations for widespread community support accordingly.

Project Size Category	Drainage Area Ratio (DAR) ⁹	Support Recommendation
Small	DAR ≤ 0.005	≥ 3 Interested Parties
Medium	0.005 < DAR < 0.05	≥ 4 Interested Parties
Large	DAR ≥ 0.05	≥ 5 Interested Parties

 Table 2: Project Sizes and Corresponding Recommendations for Widespread Community Support

For illustrative purposes, consider the following example:

Consider a project with a drainage area of 500 acres, located in the Lower San Gabriel River Watershed Area. This Watershed Area's aggregated drainage is 40,582 acres. Thus, this project's DAR would be equal to 500 acres divided by 40,582 acres.

$$DAR = \frac{500}{40,582} = 0.012$$

As this DAR value falls between 0.005 and 0.05, this project would fall into the medium size category and thus have a support recommendation of 4 or more interested parties.

- Compelling evidence is considered to be documentation of widespread community support that sufficiently achieves the "Best" benchmark in the Good/Better/Best framework presented below for community engagement best practices. Examples of such documentation include, but are not limited to:
 - Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or support letters from CBOs, tribes, elected officials, or other community representatives;
 - Documentation of community organizing, community-driven planning, open planning forums with citizen polling, consensus building, participatory action research, participatory budgeting, etc.;
 - Performance of volunteerism activities and/or workforce development activities.

Best Practices for Community Education and Engagement

Best practices for community outreach and engagement for the SCW Program are intended to assist in ensuring equity, inclusion, and accessibility (Table 3). These best practices, and the corresponding terminology, are derived from professional standards, guidance/input received to date, benchmarking, and existing analyses from Cities, non-profit experts, and other project

⁹ Drainage Area Ratio means the ratio of an individual project's drainage area to the aggregated drainage area of projects to date for its Watershed Area, as listed in the Watershed Area's most recent SIP.

developers and interested party groups. Some of these resources include the Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, originally developed by Rosa González of Facilitating *Power* in partnership with Movement Strategy Center¹⁰ and the *Pricipios y Comunidad*: Principals that Redefine Strategies & Approaches for Impactful Community Engagement by Mujeres de la Tierra¹¹. These guidelines/terms may be applied to numerous aspects of the SCW Program, including Regional Program Applicants, WC efforts, and planning/reporting in the Municipal Program. SCW Program projects should ultimately target the "Best" category at all project phases. Those claiming "Better" or "Best" engagement practices should also demonstrate the incorporation of listed examples from the lower categories when documenting their justification of completed or planned outreach and engagement.

While community engagement is, on its own merit, an essential component of projects within the SCW Program, it is also key to achieving equitable implementation of projects and associated benefits. Equity of project benefits directly relates to the community engagement and Disadvantaged Community Benefit components both of this 2025 Interim Guidance, and of the SCW Program as a whole. Conducting sufficient community engagement promotes the recognition of benefits by community members and fosters ongoing community support through the Lifecycle of a project.

One way to promote consistency between a project's benefits and the self-identified needs/priorities of a community is through incorporation of information gathered through the Community Strengths and Needs Assessment (CSNA), a survey that gathers input from the public regarding community needs, strengths, and priorities. By doing so, the CSNA allows interested parties engaging with the SCW Program to become informed on the issues and priorities considered important by local communities. Currently, the most prominent Performance Measure (i.e., metrics) system in the SCW Program is the project scoring criteria and the Metrics and Measures data collected from Regional Program Project Applicants during semi-annual reporting. However, data gathered through the CSNA has the potential to inform the creation of new, more comprehensive performance measures for the evaluation of a project's community engagement and its provision of tangible and desired outcomes for a community. Additionally, incorporation of community input promotes a sense of involvement throughout the community and mitigates Engagement Fatigue, while addressing needs explicitly set forth by community members promotes equity and community-driven decisionmaking by bridging the gap between community and governance¹². It is worth noting that use of CSNA input does not itself constitute the performance of outreach and engagement, and is best used to inform outreach and engagement efforts and more comprehensively align efforts with the self-proclaimed needs/priorities of community members. The use of CSNA data supplements but does not replace actual outreach/engagement efforts.

¹⁰ https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagementto-Ownership.pdf

¹¹ https://safecleanwaterla.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-Principios-y-Comunidad-Report-2020-

^{2.}pdf ¹² https://movementstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/The-Spectrum-of-Community-Engagement-

Table 3. Best practices for conducting outreach and engagement

Outreach/ Engagement Practice	Good	Better	Best	
Engagement Levels	Inform - Provide the community with relevant information Consult - Gather input from the Community	Involve - Ensure community input, needs, and assets are integrated into processes, receive demonstrable consideration and appropriate responses, and inform planning Educate – Grow community understanding of the existing infrastructure systems, purposes, perceived outstanding needs, pertinent history and regulations, SCW Program opportunities (including WCs) to establish Learn – Grow own understanding of existing community, perceived needs, pertinent history, key concerns, and other potentially interested parties.	Collaborate - Leverage and grow community capacity to play a leadership role in both planning and implementation Incorporate - Foster democratic participation and equity by including the community in decision-making, bridge divide between community and governance Partner – Establish certain project concepts based on community-driven and identified needs, solidify formal partnerships, and build in sustained paths forward to joint implementation and management with well-defined roles per agreement, including appropriate compensation for community partners	
Example Activities	 Fact Sheets with translation as needed Open Houses Presentations Videos Online Media Social Media Local Media Listening Sessions Public Comment Focus Groups Surveys Polling 	 Open house Meetings Interactive Workshops & Tours Community Forums Canvassing Transparent responses to community comments Document expanded understanding and commitment to ongoing relationships 	 MOUs / support letters from CBOs or Elected Officials MOUs / support letters from impacted Tribes Community Organizing Citizen Advocacy Committees Open Planning Forums with Citizen Polling Community-Driven Planning Consensus Building Participatory Action Research Participatory Budgeting Cooperatives Volunteerism activities Workforce Development activities Compensate community partners for their time and expertise 	

Additional best practices recommended for effective and inclusive community outreach and engagement include:

- Project Applicants should provide a reasonable budget for outreach/engagement activities that aligns with the outreach/engagement plan. These costs can be included in the SCW Program funding request or funded by other sources and should acknowledge/account for any specific needs or focuses during certain project phases. Budgets for projects included in the SIP are included in the project applications which are accessible via the SCW Program Portal¹³.
- Communicate early and often with your respective WC. This can include coordinating with the WC to verify sufficient and accurate identification of interested parties, community needs/concerns, and potential solutions during the planning phase. Communication can also ensure sufficient performance of educational activities and incorporation of interested party input to enhance decision-making in project designs. Finally, communication can help to maintain effective partnerships and communicate/recognize project progress during the construction/O&M phase to best prepare for the project's long-term success.
- Engage with elected officials:
 - In the early planning phase for high profile, multi-jurisdictional, or critical resource projects to facilitate critical project aspects such as funding opportunities, interested party coordination, and community needs identification;
 - Prior to the construction/O&M phase to inform relevant interested parties and the community of a project's primary impacts and benefits;
 - Near project completion to allow for positive promotion and progress reporting and promote further interested party engagement opportunities throughout the project's continued lifecycle.
- Leverage existing relationships in the community and the outreach/engagement expertise of local CBOs/NGOs.
- Establish meaningful dialogue early in the project timeline with both Federally Recognized and Non-Federally Recognized Tribes that are or may be affected by the proposed project in an early and ongoing process with a basis of mutual respect and recognition of consultation capacity and needs.
 - Project Developers are obligated to consult with tribes regarding potential adverse changes in the significance of tribal cultural resources.
 - <u>California Assembly Bill 52</u> requires public agencies to consult with tribes during the CEQA process.
- Use outreach and engagement methods that are appropriate in scale and type to the community being served (e.g., neighborhood-specific, family-focused, culturally appropriate, etc.).
- Review recent engagement efforts undertaken by others with the same community to become familiar with community goals and wishes. Ensure new engagement honors other recent contributions made by the community.
 - Incorporate public input received through CSNA.

¹³ SCW Portal <u>https://portal.safecleanwaterla.org/scw-reporting/map</u>

- Coordinate with partner educational, non-profit, and governmental entities to prevent community meeting/engagement fatigue and frustration about redundant meetings.
 - Employ local NGOs/CBOs in efforts to most effectively engage with communities regarding local issues/challenges.
- Support awareness of outreach/engagement events through multiple platforms (Online Media, Local Media, Grassroots Outreach, etc.).
- Inform the community of engagement events at least one week prior and send reminders a day or two before the event.
- Provide project team training and consider utilizing residents from the local community.
- Consider transportation options for community members who do not own vehicles or hold community outreach and engagement activities in accessible locations.
- Consider providing at-event childcare services and compensation for participation.
- Consider virtual or online meetings to increase access to information and participation. If an online approach is taken, consider the digital divide for community members who do not have reliable access to the internet.
- When a community identified as a primary beneficiary of a given project has a population in which 5% or more of community members speak a language other than English, interpretation and translation services are recommended to ensure equitable and inclusive outreach/engagement efforts.
- Refer to https://safecleanwaterla.org/events/for community events/engagements that are being coordinated with the WC efforts.

Whenever possible, community support documentation should address specific SCW Program Goals and objectives including, but not limited to, Water Quality, Water Supply, and Community Investment Benefits, as well as anti-displacement efforts, benefits to DACs, nature-based solutions, and the needs of the community. To achieve points for community support at the discretion of the SC, documentation may include, but is not limited to:

- Letters from involved community leaders, NGOs/CBOs, individuals, tribal representatives, and elected representatives stating their support for the project and/or explaining how they contributed to shaping the proposed project, indicating that the project has garnered community support and/or has been developed in partnership with NGOs/CBOs and promoting the acquisition of associated Scoring Criteria points.
- Minutes from meetings, including attendees and their affiliations (if applicable), photos, flyers, or other documentation that provides an indication of community and/or interested party involvement in meetings and project planning.
- Community engagement plans that incorporate best practices described herein as these best practices provide the maximum potential for acquiring points for community support at the discretion of the SC.
- Verification that the benefits provided directly address identified community needs such as a summary of community concerns and how the concerns were addressed. If particular community concerns were not addressed by the project, a discussion should be provided of why those concerns could not be addressed.
- Verification of leveraged funding, which can be achieved through interested party involvement and/or partnership with entities such as NGOs/CBOs.

 Leveraged funding can provide up to six points from the Scoring Criteria, with three points available for funding matched in excess of 25% of SCW Program funding and an additional three points available for funding matched in excess of 50% of SCW Program funding.

WASC and SC Tools and Strategies

The following strategies are available to the members of WASCs and SC to assist in evaluating Community Engagement and Support.

- Read the justification provided in the application, submitted Feasibility Study, and scoring rubric about Community Engagement and Support for the project.
- Cross-check that the benefits being claimed by Project Applicants align with needs/priorities being presented by responses to the CSNA.
 - Example community priorities identified by CSNA responses at present time include: litter & illegal dumping, climate change impacts, crime, cost of living & housing, access to parks & outdoor recreation.
 - Additional information regarding community priorities can be found in the <u>CSNA Dashboard</u>.
- Evaluate whether the Feasibility Study includes a discussion which adequately supports the project's inclusion of Community Outreach and Engagement efforts and whether these efforts are considered sufficient in pursuit of community support.
- During presentations by Project Proponents or SC evaluations, ask questions about the type, extent, duration of Community Engagement and Support for the project and specific feedback received.
- Ask WC(s) to evaluate and report to the WASC how the community, municipal agencies, and other interested parties would describe community needs, concerns, and objectives in the Watershed Area.
- WASCs, WCs, and the SC are encouraged to collaborate in review and verification of an applicant's definition of "community" as it pertains to the community outreach and engagement efforts undertaken in relation to their proposed project.

Long-Term Vision for Strengthening Community Engagement and Support

Future guidance is currently expected to consider the following:

1. **Refinement or Additions to Interim Guidance:** This may include, but is not limited to, further refinement of best practices related to community and tribal engagement as well as documentation and demonstration of community outreach, engagement, and support. Additional refinements may be initiated as other SCW Program elements are

updated or refined. In alignment with the recommendations of the <u>Equity in Stormwater</u> <u>Investments White Paper</u>, this could include additional processes to engage Indigenous and tribal communities in collaboration with the California Native American Heritage Commission and building on the precedent set by the County's sustainability consultation process.

- Regional Program Scoring Criteria: Assessment of potential adjustments to scoring as part of comprehensive scoring review informed by the <u>MMS</u>, CSNA, and robust interested party processes.
 - a. Based on recent discussions, future revisions to Scoring Criteria are expected to explore the potential implementation of an explicit requirement for the undertaking of community engagement and attainment of community support to an extent sufficient for the accrual of minimum threshold points through the Scoring Criteria.
- 3. **Establish and Refine Metrics:** Performance Measures and Indicators for evaluating community engagement efforts over time to inform adaptive management as well as to evaluate projects and overall SCW Program equity were developed during the <u>MMS</u> and are being collected through routine reporting. These new insights will inform the pending Initial Watershed Plans and subsequent Adaptive Watershed Plans, and will allow for more objective and comprehensive evaluation of a project's benefits and performance in the context of community engagement.
 - a. The ongoing development of Indicators such as the "Proportion of Projects and Programs addressing a community-stated priority or concern" provides a direct linkage between the performance of community engagement efforts and SCW Program decision-making processes.
- 4. Incorporate Community Needs: Assess techniques/tools for WASCs supported by WCs, or Project Proponents, for establishing community wishes, that include both strengths to be reinforced and needs to be addressed. Continued incorporation of CSNA responses is intended to contribute to addressing this consideration by incorporating meaningful community input to provide a means for more objective determination of community-specific needs and priorities.
 - a. Continued outreach and engagement efforts will capture shifting priorities among community members and other interested parties and inform the SCW Program's pending adaptive management framework.
- 5. Integration Across SCW Program: Ensure that Regional Program processes and preferences are appropriately integrated with the implementation of the Municipal Program, WCs, and District Programs, including the District Education Program. Integration with the guidance for Implementing Disadvantaged Community Policies in the Regional Program.
- 6. **Expand Tribal Engagement Processes:** A next step in the development of SCW Program processes will be the refinement and expansion of protocols and practices related to engagement with Federally and Non-Federally Recognized Native American Tribes. Details and discussion relating to this next step are expected in the next round

of updates to this *Interim Guidance*, currently anticipated in late 2025. This will be supplemented by discussions within the WC Tribal Allyship Working Group.

The SCW Program utilizes an adaptive management framework to incorporate ongoing refinements and lessons learned. Long-term community engagement and support strategies will continually seek to update Baselines and adjust Targets and strategies through adaptive management by addressing definitional gaps and limitations, refining underlying data and analyses, and assessing progress toward meeting targets and achieving SCW Program Goals. In addition to informing the overall adaptive management process of the SCW Program, these strategies will inform adaptive Watershed Area-specific planning processes that meet the needs of both Watershed Areas and community members. The synchronicity between Watershed Area Needs and community needs is expected to evolve with adaptive management as more CSNA survey responses are collected. Additional updates to this *2025 Interim Guidance* should be periodically revisited to incorporate new information, policies, and project planning and implementation procedures.

Water Supply Guidance



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Section Highlights

Acknowledged here are the SCW Program developments that are new additions to this 2025 Interim Guidance.

What's New



- New Performance Measures have been developed and implemented in efforts to better quantify and evaluate the Water Supply Benefits provided by a project.
- Definitions of Water Supply Benefits and "locally available water supply" have been refined in order to allow for more objective and accurate interpretation and evaluation of these aspects of a given project.
- The Alternate Water Supply Scoring Pilot has been developed as part of the MMS
 to provide an alternative method of scoring for the Water Supply Benefits (both benefit magnitude and cost-effectiveness) of a given project.
- Developments made by the ROC's Water Supply Working Group have been acknowledged, and incorporated as appropriate/feasible.
- The MMS has made the determination that new local water supply can be considered as benefitting all municipalities within a given Watershed Area.
- Clarification has been made regarding the term "unmanaged aquifer".

Section Highlights

In addition, the following requirements and recommendations are presented for Water Supply Guidance within SCW Program projects:

What's Required

- Estimation and adequate justification of claimed Water Supply Benefits, including estimation of net average annual capture volume.
- Demonstration by Project Applicant that claimed Water Supply Benefits are eligible for classification as "new" locally available water supply.
- Documentation and justification of the nexus between water supply and the stormwater/urban runoff that is captured/infiltrated/diverted by a given project.
- Estimation of project lifecycle cost.

What's Recommended

- Consideration of conditions specific to a given Watershed Area.
- Review of alternate Water Supply Scoring Adaptation Pilot Rubric for potential applicability in scoring a given project.

For additional guidance regarding the various requirements and recommendations related to Water Supply Benefits within SCW Program projects, refer to the following supplementary documents:

- 1. Feasibility Study Guidelines
- 2. 2025 Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines
- 3. <u>Reporting Module Guidance New Regional Program Performance Measures</u>

A comprehensive list of relevant SCW Program documents is available at <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/call-for-projects/</u>.

Purpose

Water Supply Benefits refer to increases in the amount of locally available water supply. These are a key objective associated with SCW Program Goals, specifically the Program Goal to "increase drought preparedness by capturing more stormwater and/or urban runoff to store, clean, reuse, and/or recharge groundwater basins" as defined by District Code (Section 18.04.B). Experience in the SCW Program to date has highlighted the need for additional guidance related to Water Supply Benefits. This need was apparent based on two factors:

- A broad range of interpretations and/or desires regarding what could and should count as a Water Supply Benefit.
- The need to address issues that stem from the variability in potential for projects that provide Water Supply Benefits throughout the District due to factors like hydrogeology, condition of groundwater aquifers, connection to/capacity of existing infrastructure, dependency on future infrastructure, among others.
 - Note: It's important to acknowledge that projects within a specific Watershed Area are competing for Regional Program funds only amongst one another (not against projects from other watershed areas). Thus, differing Water Supply Benefit opportunities between Watershed Areas do not influence whether a given project is included within a SIP.

The refinement of how Water Supply Benefits are applied within the context of the SCW Program was also explored at the Regional Oversight Committee (ROC) in early 2021 and as part of adaptive management and Initial Watershed Planning (anticipated by early 2026). This *2025 Interim Guidance* accounts for discussions to date, as able, and seeks to help Project Proponents and decision-making bodies develop and consistently evaluate projects that claim to provide Water Supply Benefits.

Specifically, this 2025 Interim Guidance:

- 1. Establishes a shared vocabulary for considering and evaluating Water Supply Benefits,
- Clarifies how a Project Developer or Applicant should characterize Water Supply Benefits in relation to the <u>Feasibility Study Guidelines</u> and Scoring Criteria. Calculating Water Supply Benefits is complex and depends upon several physical/contextual variables as well as being subject to certain qualitative assumptions and assessment parameters;
- 3. Provides guidance to the SC on how projects claiming Water Supply Benefits should be evaluated. Specifically, this *2025 Interim Guidance* presents an overview of the existing framework for Water Supply Benefit evaluation/calculation;
- 4. Provides guidance to the nine WASCs about how to assess Water Supply Benefits when evaluating projects and programming recommended SIPs. The assessment methodology for Water Supply Benefits is undergoing continued refinement and future updates to this *2025 Interim Guidance* will provide more detailed analysis of this aspect of project evaluation.

This 2025 Interim Guidance focuses on elements within the Regional Program but may also be an important reference for the Municipal Program. Ongoing refinement is anticipated as part of the adaptive management process.

Water Supply Benefits in the Safe, Clean Water Program

The term Water Supply Benefit is defined to mean an increase in the amount of locally available water supply, provided there is a nexus to stormwater or urban runoff capture. Various project types may be considered to provide a Water Supply Benefit including, but not limited to, the following:

- Reuse and conservation practices;
- Diversion of stormwater or urban runoff to a sanitary sewer system for direct or indirect water recycling;
- Increased groundwater replenishment or available yield;
- Offset of potable water use.

It should also be noted that the claiming of Water Supply Benefits is accompanied by an obligation for Project Applicants to demonstrate that stormwater capture is "new" water and will be made available for regional water supply. In other words, water that is captured or diverted by a project can only be considered a Water Supply Benefit if the locally available water supply was not already inclusive of that water. Recent developments regarding the refinement of what can and cannot be counted as Water Supply Benefits for a project have been informed by discussions involving Public Works and other key interested parties. Additionally, the MMS has determined that, under the current definition, Water Supply Benefits for given project can be considered attributable to all municipalities within the project's associated Watershed Area¹⁴.

¹⁴ Compilation of MMS Metrics & Outcomes

The following fates of captured water **count as new locally available water supply** and a Water Supply Benefit (claims to be confirmed through modeling, geotechnical analysis, and/or engagement): Net water used onsite for potable offset (not including offset of projectcreated water supply demand). • Water that is diverted to sanitary sewers tributary to existing treatment/reuse plants. Water that is diverted to sanitary sewers tributary to future planned treatment/reuse plants operational within 10 years with concurrence from treatment/reuse plant on timeline and capacity. • Water infiltrated to managed useable groundwater aguifers. • Water infiltrated to unmanaged aquifer with geotechnical analysis and/or community acknowledgement to confirm infiltration and use. Water that is treated and discharged to storm drain or receiving water when tributary to a downstream water recharge facility in the project facilitates the recharge of water that would otherwise not be used to augment water supply. The following do NOT count towards new locally available water supply but do provide Water Quality Benefits: • Water that would have already been captured downstream of a project by an existing water recharge/treatment facility (see adjustment factors in Watershed Planning Framework and 2025 Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines that can be used to prorate the net new local water supply when captured upstream from existing facilities) Maintenance of existing capture/conservation infrastructure (i.e. sediment 0 removal behind dams). Environmental Water: Water that is allocated and managed specifically for improvements to the ecological health of receiving waters. • Environmental water does not count as locally available water supply nor a Water Quality Benefit unless analysis proves that discharging clean water to channels to support ecological functions will offset potable supplies. Environmental water may provide a Water Quality Benefit if site-specific studies

An unmanaged aquifer is an area of a groundwater basin that is not managed by a Groundwater Sustainability Agency, an adjudication, or an alternative Groundwater Sustainability Plan and is not subject to deliberate human interventions such as artificial recharge efforts and relies solely on natural replenishment mechanisms. Applicants claiming a new locally available water supply from infiltration in these areas must provide proof of a specific potable or non-potable use that will be enabled by the project (for example, if a project infiltrates to a perched, unmanaged aquifer and also installs a private well to extract water to

demonstrate improvement in flow ecology.

offset existing irrigation). Further detailed information regarding the definition and interpretation of Water Supply Benefits, "locally available water supply", and other terms/concepts can be found in Appendix A: Terms & Concepts Glossary.

Regional Program Guidance

Regional Program guidance for Water Supply Benefits includes components for project scoring criteria, updates to scoring criteria provisions based on implementation of SCW Program adaptative management processes, and overall long-term vision and expectations for Water Supply Benefits as they pertain to the SCW Program as a whole.

Points Available for Water Supply Benefits

Scoring criteria in the *Feasibility Study Guidelines* currently award points for both Water Supply Cost Effectiveness and Water Supply Benefit Magnitude (25 maximum for Water Supply Benefits out of 110 total points). It should be noted that a project's capacity to capture is not equivalent to a Direct Water Supply End Use (see additional *Feasibility Study Guidelines* provisions below).

Water Supply Cost Effectiveness refers to the total lifecycle cost of a project per unit acre foot of stormwater and/or urban runoff volume captured for water supply. Projects can receive up to 13 points for cost effectiveness, ranging from a score of zero points for values exceeding \$2,500/ac-ft to a score of 13 points for values below \$1,000/ac-ft. It is worth noting that total lifecycle cost is calculated using annualized cost values in lieu of present value to provide a preference to projects with longer life spans.

Water Supply Benefit Magnitude refers to the yearly additional water supply volume resulting from the project. Projects can receive up to 12 points for benefit magnitude, ranging from a score of zero points for projects with less than 25 ac-ft/year of additional water supply volume to a score of 12 points for projects with more than 300 ac-ft/year of additional water supply volume.

An important recent development related to Water Supply Benefit scoring is the implementation of alternative Water Supply Scoring Adaptation Pilot Rubric. These are new, optional, project scoring rubrics calibrated the point scale to historical Infrastructure Program project performance and cost, as well as added one-point scoring increments to the current "step-wise" rubric. The alternative approaches better align the cost-effectiveness and magnitude scoring with the true range of program-worthy multi-benefit project efficiencies and performance, and inherently account for Program-wide opportunities, constraints, and economic changes over time¹⁵. An initial Scoring Pilot was developed as part of the MMS for the FY24-25 Call for Projects cycle and was revisited during adaptive management in 2025 to

¹⁵ <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2023/06/Alternate-WS-Scoring-Pilot-202306.pdf</u>

incorporate additional data from recent Regional Program project applications. The optional Water Supply Scoring Adaptation Pilot Rubric is being offered to Project Applicants during the FY26-27 Call for Projects and can be found in the <u>2025 Supplemental Guidance to Support</u> <u>Feasibility Study Guidelines</u>.

Feasibility Study Guideline Provisions

Project Applicants should include detailed Water Supply Benefit information in their Feasibility Studies to be awarded points. Water Supply Benefit information includes an estimation of the net average amount of stormwater or urban runoff captured annually by the project both for onsite reuse and for augmentation of water supplies. This estimate should be based on modeling or a similar approach and include adequate justification as well as a discussion of why and how the claimed Water Supply Benefit will result from offsetting potable demand, increasing water supply, or both. Based on a project's nature and claimed Water Supply Benefits, it may also be necessary to include components such as an engineering analysis, irrigation demand projections, and a discussion of the project's ability or lack thereof to capture/divert the 85th percentile storm. Additionally, Project Applicants are expected to document and justify the nexus between water supply and the stormwater/urban runoff that is captured/infiltrated/diverted by the project as well as the project's total lifecycle cost based on annualized value. Further details regarding Water Supply Benefit information and its suggested inclusion within a Feasibility Study can be found in the *Feasibility Study Guidelines*.

Interim Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guideline Provisions

Public Works acknowledges that projects seeking to achieve Water Supply Benefits in the program face additional challenges when designing, applying, and being evaluated by the program committees and community members. In some Watershed Areas, hydro-geographic conditions limit certain types of meaningful Water Supply Benefits. Careful consideration is needed moving forward as Public Works continues to promote the incorporation of other meaningful SCW Program benefits and potential water reuse projects that could be developed to augment reuse supplies during storm events. Table 4 provides an overview of various Water Supply Benefit scenarios and some of their key considerations. Infrastructure Program Project Applicants should consult the forthcoming Watershed Planning Tool (expected by early 2026) to evaluate their Project's Water Supply Benefits in the context of Watershed Area-specific opportunities, priorities, and targets.

Water Supply Benefit Scenario	Key Considerations
Scenario 1: Projects in watersheds with existing downstream stormwater capture facilities	 Feasibility Study must demonstrate that captured or diverted water would not otherwise be captured downstream to avoid double counting of Water Supply Benefits (see adjustment factors in <u>Watershed</u> <u>Planning Framework</u> and <u>Supplemental Guidance to</u> <u>Support Feasibility Study Guidelines</u>) Alternatively, include justification of value added in capturing or diverting upstream. Project Proponents must establish and describe relationship to downstream projects (i.e. development of a stormwater model). SC should consider Project Proponent's fact-based analysis and be engaged with by interested parties and agencies in support of decision-making related to evaluation of the proposed project and other downstream projects.
Scenario 2: Projects claiming to capture "first flush" flows that would not be captured by existing facilities or concurrent projects	 Projects should demonstrate the benefit of capturing these limited events (i.e. anticipated capture amount, intended beneficial use, etc.). SC should use only first flush flows, substantiated by modeling, to determine Water Supply Benefit.
Scenario 3: Projects claiming future Water Supply Benefit due to future projects or infrastructure	 Projects may receive Water Supply Benefit points for water diverted to a downstream project that will be built and operational within 10 years, with concurrence from the manager of the future infrastructure.
Scenario 4: Projects diverting onsite runoff to a sanitary sewer	 Calculating how much stormwater runoff would reach a reclamation plant and be converted to locally available water supply can be complex. Currently, the full calculated diversion volume will be considered locally available water supply. This may change when a more refined quantitative analysis becomes available. Outreach, engagement, and concurrence of sewer collection system owner/operator.
Scenario 5: Projects claiming infiltration of water	 It remains challenging to quantify the volume of infiltrated water that would reach a managed, usable, groundwater aquifer and be converted to locally available water supply. Project Applicants should justify the magnitude of Water Supply Benefits using site-specific geotechnical analysis combined with groundwater management agency or community concurrence of new, locally available water supply

Table 4. Example Water Supply Benefit Scenarios and Key Considerations

Evaluating Water Supply Benefits at the WASC

Tools and strategies are available for WASCs and WCs in determining the appropriateness of a project's claim of providing Water Supply Benefits over the course of a project's lifecycle:

During Project Evaluation:

- **Justifications:** Read the justification provided in the application, submitted Feasibility Study, and scoring rubric about Water Supply Benefits claimed for the project, including how the project creates locally available water supply.
- **Assurances:** Where applicable, review applications for assurance that infiltrated water reaches an aquifer managed for beneficial use through demonstration of high infiltration potential or proximity to a water reclamation facility.
- **Inquiries:** During presentations by Project Applicants, ask follow-up questions about the Water Supply Benefits claimed for the project, as appropriate.
- Assessments: Use the forthcoming Watershed Area Planning Tool to assess Water Supply Benefits provided by projects in comparison to Watershed Area targets.

At any time:

- Descriptions: Ask WC(s) to evaluate and report to the WASC how the community, public agencies, and other interested parties would describe the preferred Water Supply Benefits in the Watershed Area (i.e., desired outcomes and watershedspecific goals).
- **Presentations:** Invite informational presentations from agencies, organizations, and other interested parties to better understand potential Water Supply Benefits sought and challenges faced in the Watershed Area.

The <u>MMS</u> also developed new performance measures to more accurately and comprehensively evaluate the potential fate of captured runoff and amount of potable offset through onsite use. These performance measures, collected during project application and subsequent reporting, can be used by interested parties to better evaluate claimed Water Supply Benefits¹⁶. Infrastructure Program Project Developers/Applicants can refer to the *Reporting Module Guidance – New Regional Program Performance Measures* document for additional guidance on the definition and estimation of performance measures.

Long-Term Vision for Water Supply Guidelines

In the long term, Public Works may further enlist third-party experts to assist in informing additional guidance to score and evaluate Water Supply Benefits, in conjunction with any

¹⁶ <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2024/07/SCWP-Metrics-Monitoring-Study-Executive-Summary.pdf</u>

pertinent results from SCW Program Watershed Planning. Future updates to this 2025 Interim *Guidance* are currently expected to consider the following:

- 1. **Refinement or Additions to Interim Guidance:** As the SCW Program adaptive management process is implemented, additional updates to this *2025 Interim Guidance* may be applied.
- 2. Assessment of Watershed-Specific Conditions: Consideration of watershed-specific needs and capabilities in the planning process will allow for a more appropriate, tailored project approach in which addressing the needs of a particular area or demographic can be incorporated within project evaluation/scoring. This includes the analysis of watershed-specific hydrogeological conditions and how these may impact a project's ability to meet the Threshold Score. These assessments are currently being performed as part of the ongoing Watershed Planning process, and lessons learned will inform the development of the SCW Program's pending adaptive management framework.
 - **a.** Watershed Planning includes the development of Initial Watershed Plans and a Watershed Planning Tool, expected to be available by early 2026.
- 3. Establish and/or Refine Definitions and Metrics: Further refinement of guidance for what is considered a Water Supply Benefit and locally available water supply and the scale at which those benefits should be considered. This will come in addition to the definitional refinements that have been developed thus far (documented above in this section and in Appendix A: Terms & Concepts Glossary).
 - a. Further standardization regarding how to calculate First Flush Flows and how/whether to apply benefits for projects capturing such flows;
 - b. Further establishment and/or refinement of definitions and metrics will be a vital component of the SCW Program's ongoing adaptive management process, both in the context of water supply and of the SCW Program as a whole.
- 4. Guidance for Addressing Water Rights Implications Additional future work on this topic is expected.
- 5. **Recommendations from Water Supply Working Group:** The ROC's Water Supply Working Group has made recommendations for continued refinement of the SCW Program, including recommending the development of an incentive program for large infrastructure projects and the development of collaborative partnerships with institutions such as the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Caltrans, LA Metro, Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (LADWP), and more.
- 6. **Regional Program Scoring Criteria:** A Water Supply Scoring Adaptation Pilot Rubric was developed for the FY26-27 Call for Projects cycle. Its effectiveness will be evaluated and future updates to this *2025 Interim Guidance* will include further refinements and developments relating to Water Supply Benefit scoring within the Regional Program.

The SCW Program's adaptive management framework will be a key influence on the continued long-term development of Water Supply Benefits in the context of the Regional Program. Adaptive management will seek to address definitional gaps and limitations, refine Scoring Criteria processes and underlying data and analyses, and assess progress toward meeting targets and achieving SCW Program Goals.
Programming of Nature-Based Solutions



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Purpose

Los Angeles Flood Control District Code states that one of the Safe, Clean Water Program goals is to "**prioritize Nature-Based Solutions**" (Section 18.04.F),which refer to projects that incorporate nature-mimicking processes in pursuit of objectives to achieve Water Quality, Water Supply, and Community Investment Benefits. This goal applies across the entire SCW Program, with specific requirements in both the Municipal and Regional Program elements. This *2025 Interim Guidance* seeks to help project proponents and decision-making bodies prioritize Nature-Based Solutions (NBS).

Specifically, this 2025 Interim Guidance clarifies how best to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions by:

 Establishing a shared vocabulary, starting from the SCW Program definition, for considering Nature-Based Solutions during project development and the programming of SIPs;

- 2. Providing guidance to the nine WASCs about how to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions when evaluating projects and programming SIPs;
- 3. Clarifying how a project developer or applicant can and should support the Program Goal of prioritizing Nature-Based Solutions; and
- 4. Highlighting how the Feasibility Study requirements and virtual application submittal tool support project proponents and WASCs in the prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions.

This 2025 Interim Guidance is focused on elements within the Regional Program but may also be an important reference for the Municipal Program.

Section Highlights Acknowledged here are the SCW Program developments that are new additions to this 2025 Interim Guidance. At the time of publishing this 2025 Interim Guidance, a NBS Blue Ribbon Panel is being convened by Public Works to establish Countywide NBS standards. Outcomes of the panel

are expected to be incorporated into subsequent interim guidance in late 2025 or early 2026; as such, this chapter is substantially identical to the 2022 Interim Guidance.

Nature-Based Solutions in the Safe, Clean Water Program

Section 16.03.V: **Nature-Based Solution** means a project that utilizes natural processes that slow, detain, infiltrate or filter stormwater or urban runoff. These methods may include:

relying predominantly on soils and vegetation; increasing the permeability of Impermeable Areas; protecting undeveloped mountains and floodplains; creating and restoring riparian habitat and wetlands; creating rain gardens, bioswales, and parkway basins; and enhancing soil through composting, mulching, and planting trees and vegetation, with preference for native species.

Nature-Based Solutions may also be designed to provide additional benefits such as sequestering carbon, supporting biodiversity, providing shade, creating and enhancing parks and open space, and improving quality of life for surrounding communities.

Nature-Based Solution includes projects that mimic natural processes, such as green streets, spreading grounds and planted areas with water storage capacity.

In short, projects that use natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies to meet identified needs and deliver SCW Program benefits are Nature-Based Solutions:



Natural process or nature mimicking strategies can be further defined as follows.

Natural processes: Practices where vegetation serves as a primary treatment mechanism or endpoint for captured runoff (including irrigation)

Nature-mimicking strategies: Unvegetated practices that capture runoff and infiltrate into native soils

- Can be augmented with vegetated surface improvements
- Previously categorized Nature-Based Solutions such as permeable pavement and infiltration basins would now be in this category

Such projects can employ natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies to achieve any of the key benefits that SCW Program seeks to provide:

- Water Quality
- Water Supply
- Community Investments, including, but not limited to:
 - o Improved flood management, flood conveyance, or flood risk mitigation;
 - Creation, enhancement or restoration of parks, habitat, or wetlands;
 - Improved public access to waterways such as new or improved pedestrian and bicycle paths;
 - Enhanced or new recreational opportunities;
 - Greening of schools; and
 - Reduced heat island effect and increased shade or planting of trees / other vegetation

Below are examples of Nature-Based Solutions that can be used to address needs or desired outcomes and to provide SCW Program benefits.



It is important to note that Nature-Based Solutions are inherently holistic approaches, and as a result, provide multiple benefits. The examples above have been simplified for illustrative purposes. The actual benefits provided through these projects are more extensive than those listed.

The prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions, as called for in the Program Goals, is intended to apply to both the Regional and Municipal Programs. The Los Angeles Flood Control District Code calls for the following high-level policies related to Nature-Based Solutions:

Regional Program

Section 16.05.D.1.g: Regional Infrastructure Program funds "Shall be programmed, to the extent feasible, such that Nature-Based Solutions are prioritized."

Municipal Program

Section 16.05.C: "Projects implemented through the Municipal Program shall include a Water Quality Benefit. Multi-Benefit Projects and Nature-Based Solutions are strongly encouraged."

Section 16.05.C.1: Municipalities receiving funds shall prepare "...a progress/expenditure report that details a program-level summary of expenditures and a description of Water Quality Benefits, Water Supply Benefits, Nature- Based Solutions, and Community Investment Benefits realized through use of Municipal Program Funds."

Prioritizing Nature-Based Solutions

The prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions can be realized from initial project design to recommended programming of funds in SIPs, to retrospective program evaluation. Across these varied contexts, the following question can help Program participants prioritize Nature-Based Solutions:

Are there natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies that this project can use to address watershed needs and deliver SCW Program benefits?

For example, using this question, a project proponent can design a project that maximizes the use of natural processes and nature-mimicking strategies to provide needed or desired water quality, water supply, or community enhancement benefits, or to submit a request under the Technical Resources Program such that a Feasibility Study would be conducted, including an investigation as to if and how natural processes and nature-mimicking strategies can be used at the particular site.¹⁷ Likewise, the governance committees can use this question in evaluating the extent to which individual projects and SIPs for each Watershed Area are fulfilling the directive to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions in order to meet needs of the

¹⁷ Any requests to explore project concepts as part of the Technical Resources Program must be approved by Watershed Area Steering Committees as part of Stormwater Investment Plans for the Watershed Area in which the request was submitted.

watershed and/or communities within it. Additional tools and suggestions are included in the section, "Regional Program Guidance," below.

For many watershed and community-level needs-from addressing unreliable local water supply to improving community-level investment in historically underinvested communitiesand for each of the core SCW Program benefits, there are proven Nature-Based Solutions in the greater Los Angeles region and elsewhere around the world. Further, the use of Nature-Based Solutions can, in many circumstances, be the most effective tool for achieving multiple benefits. For example, prioritizing solutions that use natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies to address poor water quality or insufficient local water supply can often produce community enhancements as well. In cases where the need is not feasibly met by Nature-Based Solutions, other identified needs or desired outcomes, such as increasing access to green space or reducing vulnerability to the urban heat island effect, may perhaps be addressed with natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies. There are plentiful examples for using Nature-Based Solutions to meet a variety of needs and desired outcomes, including improved flood management; additional parks, habitat or wetlands; increasing access to waterways such as new or improved pedestrian and bicycle paths; enhancing recreational opportunities; increasing green space on school property; and mitigating against extreme heat. Applicants are encouraged to work with WCs and other resources such as the WHAM Task Force to maximize Nature-Based Solutions, develop multi-benefit projects, and evaluate other funding opportunities.

Natural Processes and Nature-Mimicking Strategies Used in Nature-Based Solutions

A clear linkage exists between watershed and community needs, Nature-Based Solutions, and delivery of the core benefits the Safe, Clean Water Program. Below is a table that attempts to capture and make explicit some of those linkages. It is important to note that many of the needs or desired outcomes, feasible Nature-Based Solutions, and the benefits that can be achieved by using them are integrated. Thus, there is significant overlap in the rows below.

The table below is not intended to be an exhaustive list of needs/desired outcomes, strategies, or benefits in any of its columns; rather it is illustrative and presented to support project developers and WASC members in identifying ways in which natural processes and nature-mimicking strategies can be used to address known challenges and as means of yielding tangible benefits. Because this table is not comprehensive, there may be natural processes and/or nature-mimicking strategies that address needs/desired outcomes and provide benefits outside of these categories. *Any natural processes or nature-mimicking strategy claimed as Nature-Based Solutions by a Project Applicant but not included on this table will be evaluated at the discretion of WASC members in each individual Watershed Area on a case-by-case basis.*

Identified	Potential Natural Processes & Nature-Mimicking	SCW
Need or	Strategies	Program
Desired		Benefits
Outcome		
Improved	Bioretention; biofiltration; removed impermeable area;	Water Quality
environmental	increase of permeability; soil enhancement; green	Benefit
water quality	streets	
Increased	Surface and subsurface infiltration to groundwater; treat	Water Supply
local water	and release clean stormwater flows for a justified	Benefit
supply	beneficial use; stormwater capture to offset irrigation	
	with potable water; soil enhancement to offset irrigation	
	with polable water, new native and climate-appropriate	
	impormobile area: increase permeability	
Improved	Rioretention: native and climate appropriate planting:	
flood	removal of impermeable area: increase of permeability:	Management
management	microtopography changes: protection or restoration of	Management
managomont	riparian or wetland systems	
Improved	Stream daylighting; bioretention; microtopography	CIB: Flood
flood	changes; removed impermeable surfaces; increase of	Conveyance
conveyance	permeability; localized infiltration to groundwater	-
Reduced flood	Bioretention; microtopography changes; native and	CIB: Flood
Risk	climate appropriate planting; soil enhancement;	Risk Mitigation
	construction or restoration of riparian or wetland	
	systems; protection of undeveloped mountains or	
	floodplains	
Increased park	New pocket parks, green alleys, green medians; new	CIB: Create,
space	access to stormwater facilities or streams; park	Enhance,
	renovation; new native or climate appropriate planting	Restore Parks
Increased,	Construction or restoration of riparian or wetland	CIB: Create,
improved, or	systems; new native and climate appropriate planting;	Ennance,
restored	soil ennancement; treat and release clean stormwater	Restore
Habilal area	restoration of native or climate appropriate habitat:	Παριίαι
	protection of undeveloped mountain or floodplains	
Increased.	Construction or restoration of riparian or wetland	CIB: Create
improved, or	systems: new native and climate appropriate planting.	Enhance.
restored	soil enhancement: treat and release clean stormwater	Restore
wetlands	flows to wetland habitats	Wetlands
Increased	New parks or greenways at street ends or in streamside	CIB: Public
public access	rights-of-way; new access points and services in	Access to
to waterways	waterway rights-of-way	Waterways
Increased	New or enhanced parks or greenways; stream	CIB:
access to	daylighting; treat and release clean stormwater flows in	Enhanced or
quality	recreational areas; new native and climate appropriate	New
recreational	planting	Recreational
opportunities		Opportunities

Increased green space on school property	Removal of impervious area; new native and climate appropriate planting	CIB: Greening Schools
Extreme heat mitigation	Removal of impervious area, new native and climate appropriate planting, soil enhancement	CIB: Reduced Heat Island Effect
Increase in shade/tree canopy and vegetation	Native and climate-appropriate shade tree planting ¹⁸	CIB: Increased Shade; Planting Trees
Improved air quality	Native and climate-appropriate tree planting	CIB: Planting Trees
Increase in green space	New pocket parks, green alleys, green medians; new access to natural stormwater facilities; park renovation; new native or climate appropriate planting	CIB: Planting Other Vegetation
Greenhouse gas emissions mitigation	Native and climate appropriate planting; soil enhancement; construction or restoration of riparian and wetland systems	CIB: Sequestering Carbon
Enhanced biodiversity	Native and climate appropriate planting; soil enhancement; construction or restoration of riparian and wetland systems	CIB: Supporting Biodiversity
Improved quality of life	New or enhanced parks, green alleys, green medians; new or enhanced access to rights-of-way along waterways; new native and climate appropriate planting	CIB: Improving Quality of Life
Improved public health	New native and climate appropriate planting, soil enhancement; vector minimization strategies; biofiltration; treat and release stormwater flows to recreational areas; new or enhanced park and recreational access	CIB: Improve Public Health

Regional Program Guidance

Scoring and Feasibility Studies via the Project Module

All applicants seeking funding through the Regional Program must submit a Feasibility Study, or equivalent, for review by the SC and one of nine WASCs. Feasibility Study applications are submitted using a virtual tool on the website, the Project Module. Using the Feasibility Study

¹⁸ For all plantings on SCW Program Project sites, there is a preference for plants that are native or climate-appropriate for the Los Angeles Region. Several resources with examples of these plant types are linked in the "Regional Program Guidance" section. Note that these lists are not intended to be exhaustive, and a proponent may choose to justify that a plant not found on these lists is climate-appropriate and/or native as well.

information provided by the applicant via the Project Module, the SC will verify the points awarded for projects, including points specifically for Nature-Based Solutions.

Known or Perceived Need Addressed by Project

The Project Module asks each Project Applicant to identify the known or perceived needs or desired outcomes of the community or Watershed Area within which a Project is located, justification of why the Project Developer understands those to be needs, and the ways that the project is anticipated to address those needs and achieve desired outcomes. This question is posed for each of the three SCW Program benefits – Water Supply Benefit, Water Quality Benefit, and Community Investment Benefit.

While not scored, this is an important part of the Project narrative that WASC members should consider in their evaluation of the strength of any individual Project or suite of Projects for inclusion in a SIP.

Points Available for Nature-Based Solutions

Of the total 110 points maximum, Project applicants can attain a total of 15 points for implementation of Nature-Based Solutions. See description and point distribution in the table below.

D.	15 points max The Project implements Nature-Based Solutions	
Nature-Based Solutions	15 points	 D1. Project: Implements natural processes or mimics natural processes to slow, detain, capture, and absorb/infiltrate water in a manner that protects, enhances and/or restores habitat, green space and/or usable open space = 5 points Utilizes natural materials such as soils and vegetation with a preference for native vegetation = 5 points Removes Impermeable Area from Project (1 point per 20% paved area removed) = 5 points

Project Applicants must include the following Nature-Based Solutions information in their Feasibility Studies in order to be awarded points:

• 5 points for **implementing natural processes** (yes/no)

The Project Module provides the following example for implementing natural processes: "For example, does this project implement natural processes or mimic natural processes to slow, detain, capture, and absorb/infiltrate water in a manner that protects, enhances or restores habitat, green space or usable open space."

To be eligible for points in this category, projects should support achieving desired outcomes related to improved water quality, water supply, and/or community investments using **embedded solutions** where the processes used to slow, detain, capture, and absorb/infiltrate water is both a natural process or nature-mimicking strategy <u>AND</u> protects, enhances, and or restores habitat, green space and/or usable open space.

Importantly, habitat, green space, and usable open space can often be incorporated in Stormwater Improvement strategies. However, habitat, green space, and usable open space or other natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies that are independent of the stormwater improvement would not be eligible for points in this category. Excluded strategies may include, but are not limited to, ornamental landscaping, pocket parks, and shade trees.

• 5 points for **utilizing natural materials** (yes/no)

The Project Module references the following example for how a project can use natural materials: *"For example, such as soils and vegetation with a preference for native vegetation. The explanation should include the relative increase in soils and vegetation at the project site and/or the relative increase in native vegetation. If a plant palate has been developed, it should be attached."*

To be eligible for points in this category, the project should advance benefits related to water quality, water supply, and/or community investments by incorporating natural materials such as soils and vegetation—with a preference for native and climateappropriate vegetation—anywhere within the project area. There are multiple databases produced by Los Angeles area organizations and institutions that can support the selection of appropriate and preferred plants, trees, and soil amendments. Note that these lists are not intended to be exhaustive, and a proponent may argue that a plant not found on these lists is climate-appropriate and/or native.

The natural materials may be associated with the stormwater improvement but are not required to be. Strategies may include, but are not limited to, adding landscaping, planting shade trees, planting native and climate appropriate vegetation, soil enhancement for infiltration (or subsurface infiltration) or improved soil health, and other strategies listed in the table above.

Figure 1. Resources for Native and Climate-Appropriate Vegetation.

Los Angeles County Waterworks Division:

California Native Plant Society: https://vegetation.cnps.org

Metropolitan Water District Water Wise Program: https://www.bewaterwise.com/assets/ mwd plantguide-screen la 4 23.pdf

Theodore Payne Foundation: Plant Guides: <u>Plant Guides | Theodore</u> <u>Payne Foundation</u>

TreePeople Climate-Appropriate Non-Native Plants List: <u>https://www.treepeople.org/wp-</u> <u>content/uploads/2020/08/Non-Native-</u> <u>Plant-Starter-List.pdf</u>

Up to 5 points for removing impermeable surface (1 point for every 20% impervious area removed)

The Project Module asks the proponent to quantify the amount of impermeable surface that will be removed during the course of the project, with this guidance: "*An* engineering estimate for how much impermeable area is removed after the construction of the project. Compares the impermeable area of the project work area before construction to after the project is completed." (Yes/No; Acreage estimation

before and after)

Impermeable Areas should be calculated for the entire project work area (i.e., areas within active work limits). Percent Impermeable Area Removed shall be calculated using the following formula. See sample calculation below for reference.



The role of impermeable surfaces in the production of polluted runoff and as a barrier to infiltration is well established. Impermeable surfaces are also often the cause of heat islands and the associated negative public health outcomes.

Absence of Nature-Based Solutions

If Nature-Based Solutions are not used, the proponent is required to provide an explanation, with supporting analysis and information, of why it is not feasible to do so.

For each of the three scored benefits in the Project Module, Water Quality, Water Supply, and each of the identified Community Investments, a Project developer is asked the following: *"Can you describe how natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies have been used to achieve this benefit? If you have achieved this benefit without using Nature-Based Solutions,* please include a description of what options were considered and why Nature-Based Solutions were not utilized."¹⁹

Project Proponents are responsible for prioritizing Nature-Based Solutions at the earliest available stage of development by working through the feasibility of using natural processes and nature-mimicking strategies to meet identified needs in the watershed and/or community and provide Program benefits.

Evaluating Projects at the Watershed Area Steering Committee

WASCs develop SIPs, which summarize WASC recommendations for how to allocate Regional Program funding for each Watershed Area. One criterion the WASCs must consider in the development of their SIP recommendations is the prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions to the extent feasible.

WASC Evaluation of Individual Projects

WASCs can use the materials submitted by each applicant in the Project Module to evaluate the Nature-Based Solutions submitted for funding consideration. WASCs can use this question set to assist their consideration of each qualified project, alongside the answers provided by the proponent when they submitted the project and asserted the use of, or the decision to not use, Nature-Based Solutions:

Questions to Ask Regarding Individual Projects

Are there natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies that this Project will use to address watershed needs and deliver SCW Program benefits?

If not, should this project be revisited for future SIP consideration instead?

Where possible, WASC members should consider known needs of the Watershed Area and/or the community in which the Project is located when evaluating the benefits that it is providing.

Note that the feasibility of using Nature-Based Solutions is key to the treatment of the second question. In situations where a Project proponent has expressed that Nature-Based Solutions are infeasible, the WASC can evaluate how the proponent analyzed and ultimately decided to not include natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies in the proposed Project. If the infeasibility is considered to be demonstrated adequately, the WASC should not consider the

¹⁹ Note that previously, a version of this question was asked just on the Project Module page for Nature-Based Solutions. Starting in Round 3, it instead is asked for each benefit in order to help the WASCs better understand and evaluate the project- and program-level prioritization of NBS.

absence of natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies as the sole grounds to revisit the Project in the future.

However, for those sites where Nature-Based Solutions are feasible and desirable, the WASC may consider shifting the Project to the Technical Resources Program for refined/new concept development (incorporating Nature-Based Solutions) or requesting the proponent bring a revised proposal back to the WASC for consideration in a future year.

WASC Evaluation of SIPs

Additionally, WASCs can prioritize Nature-Based Solutions by considering how the suite of Projects supported by past SIPs, and those under consideration each fiscal year as a SIP is programed, together reflect a prioritization of Projects that use natural processes or naturemimicking strategies across the Watershed Area and to the benefit of all communities. A couple questions that could help this consideration are:

Questions to Ask Regarding SIPs

Has the WASC prioritized Nature-Based Solutions within this and prior SIPs?

How are the Nature-Based Solutions funded to-date collectively providing the anticipated benefits to the Watershed Area, and where are the biggest needs or opportunities?

Considering the known and perceived needs of the Watershed Area, WASC members should evaluate the extent to which full suites of Projects programmed in SIPs meet or are anticipated to meet those needs.

In cases where collective groups of Projects, including Nature-Based Solutions, do not adequately address Watershed Area Needs, WASC members may wish to reevaluate programming recommendations to have a suite of Projects more targeted toward providing specific benefits or achieving particular outcomes. If programming a SIP such that Watershed Area needs can be met is not possible (i.e. there are not eligible Projects that meet those needs that can be programmed), WASC members should provide that information to Public Works staff and to their WC(s) to assist with developing the pipeline of such Projects applying for funding in future years.

Other Tools Available to WASC Members

A series of actions and activities are available to WASCs for prioritizing Nature-Based Solutions:

Strategies to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions that WASC members can use during Project evaluation and SIP recommendation development:

- Prior to sending submitted Projects to SC, the WASC can choose to evaluate the extent to which natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies are included in each Project, and the extent to which Nature-Based Solutions appear across the suite of Projects. This evaluation can support the WASC decision-making about which Projects are "sent" to Scoring.
- Upon the completion of scoring and during review of individual Projects, the WASC should read materials provided by proponents about natural processes and nature-mimicking strategies included in Projects, and in the case where Nature-Based Solutions were judged infeasible, about the analysis and reasons given.
- During presentations by project proponents, the WASC members can ask questions about the natural processes or nature-mimicking strategies included in the Project, or about the analysis completed which showed Nature-Based Solutions to be infeasible.
- When programming the SIP, the WASC can review SIP of previous years, and the suite of Projects proposed, to consider how Nature-Based Solutions are being prioritized in the Watershed Area.

Strategies to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions that WASC members can use at any time:

- WASCs can ask their WC(s) to evaluate and report to the WASC how the people, city and county agencies, and other interested parties would prioritize Nature-Based Solutions in the Watershed Area.
- WASCs can invite informational presentations from agencies, organizations, and other interested parties to better understand how Nature-Based Solutions would bring benefits and meet the challenges faced in the Watershed Area.

SCW Program Fund Transfer Agreements in the Regional and Municipal Programs

In addition to the requirements listed above, recipients of SCW Program funding in the Regional and Municipal Programs do not receive funds until they execute a Fund Transfer Agreement that outlines several expectations relative to Nature-Based Solutions in Project design, implementation, and reporting.

Both Regional Program Fund Recipients and Municipalities are required:

- To consider using and incorporating Nature-Based Solutions for their Projects.
- To include in their Progress reports (quarterly and annual) and in the Expenditure report a summary whether and how their Projects achieve a good, better, best for each of the 6 Nature-Based Solutions methods in accordance with guidance (See section below entitled 'Annotated "Nature-Based Solutions Best Management Practices" for the good/better/best guidance for Nature-Based Solutions).
- To include in their Progress reports (quarterly and annual)/ Expenditure Reports a discussion of any considerations taken to maximize the class within each Nature-Based Solutions method. If at least 3 Nature-Based Solutions methods score within a single class, the overall Project can be characterized as that class.
- To attach a copy of the matrix for each Project with the good, better, or best column indicated for each method, to facilitate Public Works tracking of methods being utilized.

Specifically in the case of Municipalities, Nature-Based Solutions can be effectively implemented in ways that include, but are not limited to:

- The use of NBS through the SCW Program to help engage other City Departments for partnership opportunities, for planning purposes and the potential of mitigation credit, and to achieve community development through methods such as urban greening, recreational improvements, etc.
- Leveraging NBS concepts for integration with active transportation, climate resilience, and other funding sources to maximize project cost efficiency.
- Incorporating community engagement efforts with NBS by using NBS development as an educational opportunity to inform the public and other relevant interested parties/decision-makers of the benefits provided by NBS implementation and the overall positive impacts of SCW Program investments.

Long-Term Vision for Nature-Based Solutions

Public Works recognizes that, long-term, additional measures will need to be taken across SCW Program implementation—from project design to retrospective considerations, along with ongoing adaptive management—to facilitate the prioritization of Nature-Based Solutions. While not appropriate to include within the scope of this guidance, Public Works anticipates pursuing additional activities and exploring further potential guidance in late 2025.

- 1. **Regional Program Project Design Phase**: Assessment of ways to build a pipeline of Nature-Based Solutions applications received for funding consideration. This could be accomplished through a variety of tactics, including but not limited to the following:
 - a. Identification of regional and watershed-level needs that can be met using Nature-Based Solutions
 - b. Education/training for Project developers on what is considered a Nature-Based Solution in the SCW Program, how to design, construct, and maintain Nature-Based Solutions, and examples of projects that are considered good, better, or best for meeting Nature-Based Solutions preferences of the SCW Program
 - c. Incentives for Project developers, such as by specifying round-specific program preferences for funding, development of Nature-Based Solutions targets for WASCs, or other measures
 - d. Exploration of an iterative project design process that enables Project developers to engage with Public Works and with WASCs earlier in the design process so that any preferences in design can be shared by governance committees and taken into account by Project developers
 - e. Facilitating WASC discussions to further establish Watershed Area specific needs and opportunities that inform new project concepts and ensure maximum consideration of potential Nature-Based Solutions
- 2. **Regional Program Scoring:** Assessment of potential adjustments to scoring as part of comprehensive scoring review following <u>MMS</u> and robust interested party processes that may include modifications related to any or all of the following:
 - a. Desirable Nature-Based Solutions are competitive in scoring (i.e., pass threshold)
 - b. Nature-Based Solutions on the lower end of the good/better/best spectrum are not awarded de facto full points
 - c. Nature-Based solutions be a means to desired outcomes related to the primary benefits and Goals of the SCW Program.
 - d. Adjustment of impermeable area removal criteria to incentivize hardscape transformation.
- 3. **SCW Program Evaluation:** Establish processes for the biennial review in developing recommendations for adaptive program management. This will include careful consideration of lessons learned to date and resulting options to potentially improve outcomes.
- 4. **Watershed Planning:** Ongoing development of the SCW Program Watershed Planning Framework is expected to provide additional clarity and guidance regarding the integration of NBS in the Watershed Planning process with consideration for Watershed Area-specific needs/priorities.
- 5. **Nature-Based Solution Blue Ribbon Panel Developments:** Ongoing work from the NBS Blue Ribbon Panel is expected to address gaps, limitations, and ambiguity in several NBS-related areas:
 - a. Final and water-specific definitions for Nature-Based Solutions.
 - b. Further clarification of "natural processes", "nature-mimicking solutions", and "utilizing natural materials".

- c. Recommendation of a framework for evaluating/tracking NBS to support consistent tracking, planning, reporting, and decision making within the SCW Program.
- 6. **Integration Across SCW Program:** Ensure that Regional Program processes and preferences are appropriately integrated with the implementation of the Municipal Program, WCs, and District Programs, including the District Education Program, such that all parties working to implement the SCW Program are fulfilling the directive to prioritize Nature-Based Solutions.

Annotated "Nature-Based Solutions Best Management Practices"

The content below has been taken from the Fund Transfer Agreements, and annotated for clarity. This annotation is meant to assist the Project Developers and Municipalities in filling out progress reports for Projects and expenditures. It clarifies terms and other ambiguities for each of the Nature-Based Solutions methods highlighted in the evaluation form.

Nature-based solutions refers to the sustainable management and use of nature for undertaking socio-environmental challenges, including climate change, water security, water pollution, food security, human health, and disaster risk management. As this environmental management practice is increasingly incorporated into projects for the SCW Program, this guidance document may be expanded upon to further quantify NBS practices based on benefits derived from their incorporation on projects.

The SCW Program defines Nature-Based Solutions as a Project that utilizes natural processes that slow, detain, infiltrate or filter Stormwater or Urban Runoff. These methods may include relying predominantly on soils and vegetation; increasing the permeability of Impermeable Areas; protecting undeveloped mountains and floodplains; creating and restoring riparian habitat and wetlands; creating rain gardens, bioswales, and parkway basins; enhancing soil through composting, mulching; and, planting trees and vegetation, with preference for native species. Nature-Based Solutions may also be designed to provide additional benefits such as sequestering carbon, supporting biodiversity, providing shade, creating and enhancing parks and open space, and improving quality of life for surrounding communities. Nature-Based Solutions include Projects that mimic natural processes, such as green streets, spreading grounds and planted areas with water storage capacity. Nature-Based Solutions improve water quality, collect water for reuse or aquifer recharge, or to support vegetation growth utilizing natural processes.

Recipients are to consider using Nature-Based Solutions for infrastructure projects and include in each quarterly and annual report whether and how their project achieves a good, better, or best for each of the 6 NBS methods in accordance with the guidance below. Additionally, reports should include discussion on any considerations taken to maximize the class within each method. If at least 3 methods score within a single class, the overall project can be characterized as that class.

Note that because Nature-Based Solutions are inherently holistic approaches, many attributes of projects that meet the description under one method will receive credit under other methods.

Method 1: Vegetation/Green Space

Purpose: This method refers to the utilization of climate-appropriate and native vegetation, as well as strategically placed shade trees that provide cooling benefits. The class is determined by the type of vegetation included in the project as well as estimated percentage of vegetative cover.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method, both criteria must be met in that class. This method is also intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

CLASS	DESCRIPTION		
GOOD	Use of climate-appropriate vegetation (groundcover, shrubs, and trees) / green space		
	5%-15% covered by new climate- appropriate vegetation		
BETTER	Use of native, climate-appropriate vegetation (groundcover, shrubs, and trees) / green space 16%-35% covered by new native vegetation		
BEST Establishment of plant communities wirdiversity of native vegetation (groundcover, shrubs, and trees) / grees space that is both native and climate- appropriate More than 35% covered by new native vegetation			

NOTES

"Climate appropriate vegetation" means a variety of plants that may not be "native" to the Los Angeles region, but which require below-average amounts of water. This includes certain shade trees. Examples can be found here: <u>TreePeople</u> <u>Climate-Appropriate Non-Native Plants</u> List

The **percentages** indicated here mean the portion of the total Project area cover by vegetation at plant maturity.²⁰

"Native vegetation" means a variety of plants that are adapted to and historically grown within the Los Angeles region, and are non-invasive. Examples may be found using the following resources:

- Los Angeles County Waterworks
 Division Native Plant List
- <u>Metropolitan Water District Water</u> <u>Wise Program Native Planting</u> <u>Guide for LA County</u>
- TreePeople Native Plants List
- <u>California Native Plant Society</u>
- <u>Theodore Payne Foundation: Plant</u> <u>Guides</u>

²⁰ While only the portion of vegetation relative to the whole Project area is noted as a criteria for this method, Project developers and WASCs should consider the total absolute square footage of vegetation when self-assessing for reporting purposes and evaluating Project impact.

Method 2: Increase of Permeability

Purpose: This method is about increasing the amount of permeable surface in LA County. Accordingly, for projects implemented on land that is already fully permeable, this method does not apply.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method, two criteria must be met: (1) percentage of impermeable/paved surfaced removed and (2) the type of landscape installed (see "Notes" section for details). The other criterion in each class is desirable, but not required. This method is intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained

CLASS	DESCRIPTION	
GOOD	Installation of vegetated landscape – 25%-49% paved area removed Redesign of existing impermeable surfaces and/or installation of permeable surfaces (e.g. permeable pavement and infiltration trenches)	
BETTER Installation of vegetated landscape – 50%-74% paved area removed Improvements of soil health (e.g., compaction reduction)		
BEST	Installation of vegetated landscape – 75%-100% paved area removed Creation of well-connected and self- sustained natural landscapes with healthy soils, permeable surfaces, and appropriate vegetation	

only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

NOTES

Paved area means anything impermeable through which water cannot percolate or infiltrate.

The **percentages** refer to the proportion of paved/impermeable surface being removed in the Project area.²¹

To meet a **"good" class** in this method, a Project must have removed at least the listed percentage of impermeable/paved area, AND installed a permeable surface in its place, including but not limited to permeable pavement, soil, or vegetated landscape. Redesign of remaining impermeable/paved surfaces is encouraged but not required.

To meet a "**better**" **class** in this method, a Project must have removed at least the listed percentage of impermeable/paved area, AND installed soil or landscape in its place (permeable pavement does not count). Redesign of remaining impermeable/paved surfaces and improvements to soil health are encouraged but not required.

To meet a "best" class in this method, a Project

must have removed at least the listed percentage of impermeable/paved area, AND installed vegetated landscape with groundcover, shrubs, and/or trees in its place. Redesign of remaining impermeable/paved surfaces, improvements to soil health, and creation of landscapes are encouraged but not required.

²¹ While only the portion of impermeable/paved surface removed relative to the whole Project area is noted as a criteria for this method, Project developers and WASCs should consider the total absolute square footage of removed surface when self-assessing for reporting purposes and evaluating Project impact. For example, removing a total of 1 square foot of pavement that exists on a Project site shouldn't qualify for the "best" class even if the Project removes 100% of the impermeable surface.

Method 3: Protection of Undeveloped Mountains & Floodplains

Purpose: This method refers to the preservation of existing habitat, wetland, and natural hydrologic features of the watersheds of Los Angeles County. For Projects located on land that does not have existing vegetation or land to preserve, this method does not apply.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method, both criteria must be met in that class. This method is intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

NOTES

rather than to a built system.

CLASS	DESCRIPTION	NOTES	
	Preservation of native vegetation	Preserving native vegetation: Projects built in locations that already have a lot of native vegetation that is protected or will be preserved via Project implementation are considered to be in the "good" and "better" classes.	
GOOD	Minimal negative impact to existing drainage system	The existing drainage system may be the natural hydrology or an existing built drainage system, depending on the project site. Minimal negative impact is any action or impact	
		CEQA.	
BETTER	Preservation of native vegetation Installation of new feature(s) to improve existing drainage system	Improvements will enhance the drainage system's ability to slow, detain, capture, and/or infiltrate water without creating increased flood damage risk to property or persons.	
BEST	Preservation of native vegetation Creation of open green space Installation of features to improve natural hydrology	Creating open space : Those projects that preserve native vegetation AND create open green space, using climate-appropriate and native vegetation, that is intended for safe public use are considered to be in the "best" class. The natural hydrology is comprised of green infrastructure and land elements that direct and infiltrate water entering the built designed a water	
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	To meet the "best" class in this method, improvements should be to the natural hydrology,	

SCW Program 2025 Interim Guidance

Method 4: Creation & Restoration of Riparian Habitat & Wetlands

Purpose: This method is about restoration of former or existing degraded riparian habitat and wetlands and/or creation of riparian and/or wetland habitat on the Project site.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method, all criteria must be met in that class. This method is intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

CLASS	DESCRIPTION	NOTES
	Partial restoration of existing riparian habitat and wetlands	Riparian habitat is defined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and can be found <u>here</u> .
GOOD	Planting of climate appropriate vegetation between 5 and 15 different	Wetland is defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and can be found <u>here</u> .
	species newly planted No potable water used to sustain the wetland	Restoration means the manipulation of physical, chemical, or biological characteristics of a site with the goal of returning natural or historic function of degraded habitat to equal or
BETTER	Full restoration of existing riparian habitat and wetlands Planting of native vegetation between 16 and 30 different native plant species newly planted	better than its former state. Partial restoration means less than 80% of the existing riparian habitat or wetlands on the parcel will be restored as part of the project scope.
	No potable water used to sustain the wetland	A list of climate-appropriate and native vegetation can be found in Method 1, "Vegetation/Green Space." Plant palettes should be designed to consider habitat opportunities.
	Full markens the send some sector of	functional use, and site conditions.
BEST	Full restoration and expansion of existing riparian habitat and wetlands Planting of plant communities with a diversity of native vegetation – greater than 31 native plant species newly	Full restoration means all or almost all (at least 80%) of the existing riparian habitat or wetlands on the parcel has been restored as part of the Project scope.
	planted No potable water used to sustain the wetland	To meet the " best " class in this method, new riparian habitat or wetlands must be created in addition to the area restored.

Method 5: New Landscape Elements

Purpose: This method refers to the use and/or manipulation of the natural landscape to capture or direct stormwater flows and to improve water quality. These new landscape elements may supplement or even replace existing drainage systems.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method the capture criteria indicated below must be met. This method is intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you

CLASS	DESCRIPTION	
GOOD	Elements designed to capture runoff for other simple usage (e.g. rain gardens and cisterns), capturing the 85th percentile 24-hour storm event for at least 50% of the entire parcel	
BETTER	Elements that design to capture/redirect runoff and filter pollution (e.g. bioswales and parkway basins), capturing the 85th percentile 24-hour storm event from the entire parcel	
BEST	Large sized elements that capture and treat runoff to supplement or replace existing water systems (e.g. wetlands, daylighting streams, groundwater infiltration, floodplain reclamation), capturing the 90 th percentile 24-hour storm event from the entire parcel and/or capturing off-site runoff	

believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

NOTES

Landscape elements that qualify a project for credit under this method include any of the following:

- Cisterns (small-scale)
- Rain gardens (small-scale)
- Treewells (small- to medium-scale)
- Bioswales (medium-scale)
- Parkway basins (medium-scale)
- Retention ponds (medium- to large-scale)
- Wetlands (large-scale)
- Daylighting streams (large-scale)
- Regional groundwater infiltration basins (*must be vegetated*) (large-scale)
- Floodplain reclamation (large-scale)

The "good," "better," or "best" evaluation for this method will depend on the amount of **stormwater effectively captured or redirected** by the elements across the parcel and off-site, as noted in the matrix.

For the "**best**" **class**, Projects must capture either the 90th percentile OR at least the 85th percentile from the entire parcel plus off-site runoff in order to qualify. For off-site runoff, WASCs should verify volumes in order to consider a Project as "best" under this method.

Method 6: Enhancement of Soil

Purpose: This method refers to the health of soil at the project site to ensure adequate drainage and advance co-benefits associated with healthy soils, like greenhouse gas

CLASS	DESCRIPTION	retentio
GOOD	Use of soil amendments such as mulch and compost to retain moisture in the soil and prevent erosion Planting of new climate-appropriate vegetation to enhance soil organic matter	Evalua any cla met in t be cum is attair lower ti believe "best" c
BETTER	Use of soil amendments such as mulch and compost that are locally generated to retain moisture in the soil, prevent erosion, and support locally-based composting and other soil enhancement activities Planting of new native, climate- appropriate vegetation to enhance soil organic matter	Soil ame the soil to absorptic wood chi A list of c can be fo
BEST	Use of soil amendments such as mulch and compost that are locally generated, especially use of next-generation design with regenerative adsorbents (e.g. woodchips, biochar) to retain moisture in the soil, prevent erosion, and support on-site composting and other soil enhancement activities	Locally- sourced the proje enhance within tha
	Planting of new native, climate appropriate vegetation to enhance soil organic matter	For the "

sequestration, erosion prevention, water retention, and others.

Evaluation: To be considered as meeting any class in this method, all criteria must be met in that class. This method is intended to be cumulative, where a "best" classification is attained only when all requirements of lower tier(s) are satisfied as well. If you believe you have met a "good," "better," or "best" class but haven't met all the criteria within or below a tier, please justify.

NOTES

Soil amendments mean materials that are mixed into the soil to improve water retention and nutrient absorption, which could include compost, manure, wood chips, or rocks.

A list of **climate-appropriate** and **native vegetation** can be found in Method 1, "Vegetation/Green Space."

Locally-generated soil amendments are those sourced and processed within the Watershed Area of the project under consideration. **Locally-based** soil enhancement activities will be those taking place within that same Watershed Area.

For the "**best**" **class**, Projects should include on-site soil enhancement.

Implementing Disadvantaged Community Policies in the Regional Program

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Section Highlights

Acknowledged here are the SCW Program developments that are new additions to this 2025 Interim Guidance.

What's New

- In addition to direct community concurrence of DAC benefits, placed-based measures have been developed and refined to allow for objective and quantitative evaluation of which project-associated benefits can be considered applicable to specific communities. This includes the development of project-based "walksheds".
- Best practices for Disadvantaged Community Benefits and community engagement have been refined, with substantial influence from the MMS and the third partydeveloped Equity in Stormwater Investments White Paper.
- New considerations for the distinction of DACs and their geographical boundaries are being developed and incorporated into project decision-making processes.

Section Highlights

In addition, the following requirements and recommendations have been presented for DAC Benefit Policies within SCW Program projects:

What's Required

- Documentation, description, and justification of all claimed DAC benefits, including new Performance Measure reporting derived from MMS recommendations.
- Provision of DAC benefits to an extent consistent with the District Code's 110% investment requirement.
- Performance of ongoing and robust community engagement efforts throughout a project's lifecycle when claiming DAC benefits.

What's Recommended

- To the extent feasible, attempting to locate project components within the geographical boundaries of Census Block Group(s) designated as DACs.
- Obtaining documented support/interest/agreement from DAC members regarding the provision of any claimed DAC benefits.
- Incorporation "walkshed" methodology for determination of service areas of claimed DAC benefits to specific communities.
- Use of CSNA input to provide DAC benefits in alignment with self-proclaimed needs and priorities of DACs.
- Incorporation of DAC benefit assessment data sources and considerations presented in Table 5.

For additional guidance regarding the various requirements and recommendations related to community outreach and engagement within SCW Program projects, refer to the following supplementary documents:

- 1. Feasibility Study Guidelines
- 2. <u>2024 Metrics and Monitoring Study</u>
- 3. Equity in Stormwater Investments White Paper

A comprehensive list of relevant SCW Program documents is available at <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/call-for-projects/</u>.

Purpose

Experience to-date in the Regional Program reveals that aspects of SCW Program related to providing Disadvantaged Community Benefits require further guidance to better support achieving outcomes. The SCW Program emphasizes investments that produce Equitable Benefits in or directly to DACs. Complying with the Disadvantaged Community Benefit Policy in the Program is complex, and asserting what benefits accrue to which communities is not easily quantified. While distinguishing communities and subsequently asserting the accrual of benefits to specific communities is challenging, some influential factors include geographic location, topography, socioeconomic factors and other population demographics, and public transportation system quality.

Foundational to the SCW Program is an obligation to support DACs. WASCs and Project Applicants are expected to "provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits, including Regional Program infrastructure investments, that are not less than one hundred and ten percent (110%) of the ratio of the [DAC] population to the total population in each Watershed Area." – District Code Section 18.04 (J)

Promoting the equitable implementation of benefits within any SCW Program project is a key aspect of satisfactory achievement of DAC-related Program requirements. In doing so, two primary concepts are brought to the forefront:

- Members of a DAC must agree that they will benefit from a project and express interest in the prospective benefits. Items that qualify as agreement and/or interest from DAC members regarding project benefits include, but are not limited to:
 - Written letter(s) demonstrating explicit agreement and/or interest in a project and its prospective benefit(s);
 - Official statements from community representatives and/or elected officials expressing agreement and/or interest;
 - Verified results of a survey which indicate alignment between a project's prospective benefits and the needs/wants of a given community (e.g., CSNA survey responses);
 - Other forms of documented community support including survey results, direct interactions with Project Applicants, video, social media 'likes', etc.
- Project Applicants in DACs should be required to, and provide resources for, the performance of ongoing and robust community engagement throughout the project lifecycle, especially when claiming a Disadvantaged Community Benefit.

These concepts go hand in hand, as the only way in which to verify the standing of DAC members regarding a project is through robust community engagement. Maintaining this community engagement throughout a project lifecycle is important in terms of communicating project progress and ensuring public awareness of accrued benefits, while simultaneously gauging public perception of a project and incorporating public/interested party feedback to inform adaptive management practices.

The following information is intended to support SIP programming by providing information to help Project Proponents with application preparation and WASCs with consistent evaluation and decision-making during the development of SIP recommendations. As appropriate, this *2025 Interim Guidance* may also be referenced during ongoing discussions at the WASCs for recommendations.

Specifically, this 2025 Interim Guidance includes the following:

- 1. Clarification of how Project Applicants and WASCs can interpret and substantiate a project's ability to deliver Disadvantaged Community Benefits;
- 2. Policies for consistently accounting for the 110% investment provisions within SIPs;
- 3. Considerations to inform deliberation and discussion about relationships between communities, municipalities, and Census Block Groups.

Disadvantaged Community Benefit Policies in the Safe, Clean Water Program

Summarizing the ordinance sections and definitions below reveal that the program goal of investing in DACs is achieved by locating beneficial projects within, or such that the benefits of a project are directly provided to, Census Block Groups where the median household income (MHI) is less than 80% of the statewide MHI.

When a project has these qualities, and the WASC recommends it for funding, the value of regional SCW Program funding that is allocated to the project in the SIP will be used to calculate fulfillment of the 110% requirement, which mandates that funding for projects providing DAC benefits be at least 110% of the proportion of a given Watershed Area's population that is considered to be disadvantaged. For example, this would entail that if 50% of a Watershed Area's population is considered disadvantaged, then at least 55% (110% * 50%) of total SIP investments within that Watershed Area must be used for projects providing benefits to a DAC.

Key Provisions

Key provisions for SCW Program implementation are fundamentally based on the District Code. These provisions include, but are not limited to, the following:

 Section 18.07(B)2.c: Funding for Projects that provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits shall not be less than one hundred and ten percent (110%) of the ratio of the DAC population to the total population in each Watershed Area. To facilitate compliance with this requirement, Public Works will work with interested parties and WC(s) to utilize existing tools to identify high-priority geographies for water-quality improvement projects and other projects that create Disadvantaged Community Benefits within DACs, to help inform WASCs as they consider project recommendations. Section 18.07(B)2.d: Each municipality shall receive benefits in proportion to the funds generated within their jurisdiction, after accounting for allocation of the one hundred ten percent (110%) return to DACs, to the extent feasible, to be evaluated annually over a rolling five (5) year period.

An understanding of District Code, its provisions, and how they influence the SCW Program and its undertaken projects is foundational knowledge for Project Developers and Proponents in regard to successfully adhering to DAC Benefit policies while applying to the SCW Program for SIP programming. A comprehensive understanding of this Code is key for effective and efficient DAC-related decision-making processes throughout the lifecycle of any given project.

Regional Program Guidance for Interpreting "Disadvantaged Community Benefit"

The following Interim Guidance supports ongoing decisions at the WASCs.

- Direct Disadvantaged Community Benefits: Projects will be considered as providing a Disadvantaged Community Benefit if they provide any of the benefits sought by the SCW Program (Water Quality Benefit, Water Supply Benefit, or Community Investment Benefit) directly to a DAC.
- 2. **Projects within a DAC:** Projects will be considered to be "within" a DAC where any of the construction effort is within a Census Block Group designated as a DAC, and therefore providing a Disadvantaged Community Benefit.
- 3. **Direct Benefit vs. Project Location:** Projects will be considered as providing a Disadvantaged Community Benefit where none of the construction effort is within a Census Block Group designated as a DAC, but where the completed project will provide a Direct Benefit inside a Census Block Group designated as a DAC. If two potential project locations provide substantially equivalent benefits to a DAC but one is physically located within that DAC, the prospective Project Developer(s) should pursue the location within the DAC to the extent otherwise feasible.
- 4. **Consideration of Direct Benefits:** Whether a project provides a "direct benefit" as used in SCW Program policy and within #3 above will be a decision made by WASCs on a project-by-project basis, considering SCW Program Goals, the benefits provided to the community by each project, and the area within which those benefits will be felt. See section, "Consideration for Direct Benefit Determination" below, for additional guidance.
- 5. **Public Support for Direct Benefits:** The WASC, in its determination of whether a project provides "direct benefit" to members of a DAC, should strongly rely on documented public support by members of that community such as CBOs, NGOs, elected representatives, and other interested parties. <u>A Disadvantaged Community</u>

<u>Benefit can only be claimed for a specific community if members of that community</u> recognize the benefit and express interest in it. Similarly, decisions by the WASC can rely upon the lack of documented public support, or the presence of documented resistance from members of a community. See section, "Community Support," below, for additional guidance.

- 6. Modifying Disadvantaged Community Benefit Designations: The designation as to whether a project is providing a Disadvantaged Community Benefit may be modified from the original application during an agendized discussion of a project. Any voting WASC member may suggest adjusting the Disadvantaged Community Benefit designation of a project (in accordance with District Code Section 18.07.B.2.c) as part of a motion related to the formation of a SIP, either to say that a project claiming a Disadvantaged Community Benefit does not provide one, or that a project that did not claim to provide a Disadvantaged Community Benefit in the application does provide a benefit. In the latter case, the WASC would need to request additional information about the Disadvantaged Community Benefit from the Project Developer, consistent with the questions in the Project Module. See sections titled "Relevant information in the Project Module" and "WASC Tools and Strategies," below.
- 7. 110% Investment Provision: When a project judged to be providing benefits to members of a DAC is included in a recommended 5-year SIP, the total amount of funding provided by the Regional Program towards the project is used to make the 110% investment calculation. This "all or nothing" approach is currently the primary policy for evaluating the 110% investment provision, but governing committees should also consider the place-based measures discussed later in this section as supplemental information to inform decision-making about which Projects provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits. The place-based approach is currently being evaluated through the SCW Program Initial Watershed Planning process and may inform policy changes during the next adaptation of this 2025 Interim Guidance.

Relevant Information in the Project Module

All applicants seeking funding through the Regional Program must submit a Feasibility Study, or equivalent, for review by the SC and one of nine WASCs. Feasibility Studies are submitted using the web-based Project Module.

The Project Module currently includes the following prompts related to Projects seeking to provide benefits to members of DACs:

- Will the project provide benefit to a disadvantaged community?
 - Note that the questions below are posed within the Project Module only if the applicant answers "YES" to this first question.
- Is the project located in a [disadvantaged community] Census Block Group as defined by SCW?
- If no, please describe if there is a formal or informal community boundary more

appropriate than a Census Block Group boundary to consider for the benefit area of a particular project where the MHI statistic or current CalEnviroScreen tool (linked below) considers that community "disadvantaged".

- Describe how the project will provide benefits to a [disadvantaged community].
- Describe how the project will provide Water Quality Benefits to a [disadvantaged community].
- Describe how the project will provide Water Supply Benefits to a [disadvantaged community].
- Describe how the project will provide Community Investment Benefits to a [disadvantaged community].
- Describe how the project engaged the benefitting [disadvantaged community] to date.

By default, the project's Disadvantaged Community Benefit designation will be displayed as a YES or a NO based on the entries made by Project Proponents.

Consideration for "Direct Benefit" Determination

California has two policy systems for identifying DACs, one is CalEnviroscreen which is managed by the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA), the other is within the State Water Code and uses a MHI statistical test. In both policy systems, census boundaries are used because the relevant socioeconomic and demographic data is differentiated using those boundaries. However, neither state policy defines what a "community" means. The use of the census boundaries as community boundaries is a convention in these programs, not a formal policy. Because a "community" is undefined within the Water Code related policy system, any appropriate geographic boundary that supports the MHI statistical test can be deemed as a DAC.

Unlike the state policy, the SCW Program directs that Census Block Groups are communities, either disadvantaged or not. Functionally, Census Block Groups are rarely perceived as a community by community members, agencies, or elected representatives. Census Tracts and Blocks rarely have any utility outside the Census itself, and the use of demographic data that is differentiated with those boundaries. Census Places, however, are another geographic unit used by the Census and are typically drawn to contain political or social geographies that have meaningfulness for the people who live and work there.

The California Department of Water Resources (DWR) maintains a Disadvantaged Community Mapping Tool (linked below) for the use across many programs that it administers, which includes US Census data from 2016-2020 for analyzing DACs. The SCW Program currently uses 2020 data to determine the targeted ratios of investment into DACs but is expected to be updated roughly every five years.

 Link to DWR Disadvantaged Community Mapping Tool: <u>https://gis.water.ca.gov/app/dacs/</u> Link to CalEPA CalEnviroScreen: <u>https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen</u>

For a project to be credited with providing a Disadvantaged Community Benefit to any community, that community must formally and specifically agree with the suggestion that it will benefit from the project in the manner discussed by that project's Feasibility Study. This includes formal documentation by Project Proponents that DAC members have indicated that the community wants the project and that the project's proposed benefits address the needs of that community, which presents the challenge of identifying community-specific needs. Formal documentation may include things like statements from community representatives and/or elected officials and written letters from officials/representatives and/or DAC members explicitly demonstrating agreement and/or interest. Additionally, elected officials and provide support/verification for suggestions of what they may be.

Identifying community-specific needs can also be accomplished using the <u>CSNA Dashboard</u>, which gathers information about community preferences, strengths, and needs to provide a starting point for engagement between Project Applicants/Developers and community members. This tool could be used in the context of communities prospectively benefiting from the SCW Program, not just DACs, and could assist in the development of place-based performance measures. Additionally, the development of an interactive mapping tool that combines data regarding social and/or climate vulnerability, climate hazards, infrastructure, and flood risk would also provide substantial utility for the identification and evaluation of potential SCW Program-provided Disadvantaged Community Benefits²²; some of these elements are expected to be incorporated into the online planning tools developed through the SCW Program Watershed Planning process.

Additional Disadvantaged Community Benefit Assessment Information

A suite of additional data and information may be used to support determinations related to Disadvantaged Community Benefits. A summary of available source datasets and potential applicability to assessment of SCW Program Disadvantaged Community Benefit assessments is presented in Table 5. For additional datasets applicable to a variety of SCW Program processes, refer to https://scwp-lacounty.hub.arcgis.com/.

²² <u>https://www.stantec.com/content/dam/stantec/files/PDFAssets/technical/001/equity-in-stormwater-investments-stantec-ucla.pdf</u>

 Table 5. Potential Applicable SCW Program Disadvantaged Community Benefit Assessment Data Sources

 and Assessment Considerations

Source	Data	Assessment Considerations
LA County	 Los Angeles County Climate Vulnerability Web Map <u>https://egis-</u> <u>lacounty.hub.arcgis.com/map</u> <u>s/lacounty::los-angeles-</u> <u>county-climate-vulnerability-</u> <u>web-map/about</u> 	 The Los Angeles County Climate Vulnerability Web Map includes approximately 90 layers across boundaries, climate hazards, physical infrastructure, social sensitivity indicators, and adaptive capacity. Data displays by Census Tract in Social Sensitivity Index categories of High, Medium, and Low.
LA County	2022 Population and Poverty at Split Tract <u>https://demography-</u> <u>lacounty.hub.arcgis.com/data</u> <u>sets/lacounty::2022-</u> population-and-poverty-at- <u>split-tract/about</u>	 This data is created by attributing population and poverty information to the split tract geography. Split tract is the product of 2020 census tract boundaries split by LA County legal city boundaries and unincorporated areas (commonly known as CSA) as of July 1, 2022. Data displays by Census Split Tract in three categories.
LA County	Flood Zone Determination <u>https://apps.gis.lacounty.gov/</u> <u>dpw/m/?viewer=floodzone</u>	 The Flood Zone Determination website allows you to see the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) flood zones at the individual property, and whether your property is within a Los Angeles County flood zone.
State of California	• California State Geoportal • <u>https://gis.data.ca.gov/</u>	 California State Geoportal is a centralized geographic open data portal, which includes authoritative data and applications from a multitude of California state entities. Potentially applicable data categories include economy, education, environment, health, and transportation. Specific data sets include information related to home ownership and rental density, health trend and facilities, transportation hub and stop information, traffic, and others.
US Housing and Urban Development	Point-in-Time Count and Housing Inventory Count <u>https://www.hudexchange.inf</u> o/programs/hdx/pit-hic/#pit- count-tools	 The HUD Exchange is an online platform for providing program information. The Homelessness Data Exchange 2.0 is HUD's platform that allows view of Point-in-Time (PIT) Count data. The PIT Count is a count of sheltered and unsheltered people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January.

An integrated analysis of the information in Table 5 and other potential data sets may allow for Project Developers to better understand, describe, and quantify potential project service and Direct Benefit to DAC communities. Given the SCW Program investment requirements for DAC communities and the limitations associated with the Census Block Group-driven description of 'community', additional related indicators of DAC communities, especially when compiled by alternative geographic, municipal, and socio-economic boundary information, may be of value in preparing accurate and comprehensive project information and supporting measures of Community Investment Benefit metrics.

Inglewood Example

The calculated MHI for the city of Inglewood falls below 80% of the statewide MHI as a Census Place (Figure 3) and meets the designation for a DAC. However, in review of the many Census Block Groups within the city (Figure 4), some are considered disadvantaged, some severely disadvantaged (defined in the State Water Code as having a MHI below 60% of the statewide MHI), and some are neither disadvantaged nor severely disadvantaged communities.

Benefits within a community boundary can be identified formally (like the City of Inglewood) or less formally (like the community of Pacoima, where the MHI calculation using that boundary supports the designation of "disadvantaged community"), or when CalEnviroscreen suggests unjust cumulative impacts are experienced inside that boundary. In any such cases, a WASC would be justified considering that project as providing benefits across the entire area within that boundary. This is reiterated in three steps, below:

- 1. Is there a formal or informal community boundary more appropriate than Census Block Group boundaries to consider for the benefit area of a particular Project? *If yes...*
- 2. Using that boundary as a community, does the MHI statistic or the current CalEnvironScreen tool consider that community "disadvantaged?" *If yes...*
- 3. Does the WASC wish to recommend that the project will provide benefits across the entire community boundary?

For Project Applicants, Developers, and/or Proponents, the determination of direct benefits should begin with the identification of communities that are potential beneficiaries of a given project. This is best initiated with the distinction of specific communities and their geographical boundaries. Once these communities are distinguished, justification of their status as a DAC or a severe DAC must be provided using the MHI statistic tool or CalEnviroScreen.



Figure 3 - Inglewood Census Place (DWR Disadvantaged Community Mapping Tool): Pink is disadvantaged, and purple is severely disadvantaged.



Figure 4 - Inglewood Census Block Groups (DWR Disadvantaged Community Mapping Tool): Pink is disadvantaged, purple is severely disadvantaged, and yellow is missing data.

This example is shared to reveal that a pure focus on Census Blocks may inadvertently omit projects that are of critical importance to communities that collectively have unmet needs and are therefore intended to benefit from the DAC policies of the SCW Program.

Subsequent assessment of the applicability of benefits to specific communities is complex and best performed by applying the "Walkshed" methodology. Further details of this methodology can be found in the Long-Term Vision for Disadvantaged Community Benefits section of this document.

The following municipalities are within the SCW Program boundaries, and are US Census Places that have an MHI below 80% of the statewide MHI (2023 data), and therefore could be considered disadvantaged at the scale of the municipality (alphabetical):

- Bell
- Bellflower
- Bell Gardens
- Commerce
- Compton
- Cudahy
- El Monte
- El Segundo
- Hawaiian Gardens
- Hawthorne
- Huntington Park

- Industry
- Inglewood
- Lynwood
- Maywood
- Montebello
- Paramount
- Rosemead
- South El Monte
- South Gate
- Vernon

Information for both statewide MHI and MHI of individual municipalities is based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2023 American Community Survey.

Community Support

The SCW Program places priority on developing community engagement and support for projects that yield Water Quality Benefits, Water Supply Benefits, and Community Investment Benefits. Within the scoring process for regional projects, points are available for projects that document community support.

Assertion that a project will provide benefit to a particular community is most effectively supported by documentation that the community itself agrees and expresses support. Project Applicants are encouraged to obtain letters of support documenting that communities who will benefit from the project are, in fact, eager for those project benefits and supportive of the effort. Alignment of anticipated project benefits with community preferences can also be achieved through the incorporation of community input from the CSNA. WASCs too, when considering which communities will benefit from regional projects, can rely on assertions from communities and their representatives that the project will provide benefits. This underscores the importance of empowering community members to voice their perceived benefits through community education and engagement.

This approach can be very effective when projects are anticipated to provide Regional Benefits, some of which will accrue to one or many DACs. If a Project Proponent engages with members of those communities and their representatives and has received their concurrence that the project benefits will be felt by their community, this becomes strong evidence that the project will provide a Disadvantaged Community Benefit.

WASCs can look towards the letters of support that are provided by a Project Proponent, or to public engagement during the programming of the SIPs. Public testimony offered during public
meetings that expresses how a project will, or will not, provide benefits to a community can be part of the decision-making process of the WASC as the question of "direct benefit" is settled.

Estimating Disadvantaged Community Benefits Using Place-Based Measures

Place-Based Performance Measures

Place-based performance measures have become a desirable concept for future enhancements to the SCW Program in terms of determining the applicability of benefits for specific communities. The necessity of such performance measures stems from a Project Applicant's ability to claim Disadvantaged Community Benefits for a specific community if project features are within a reasonable distance from the community in question, even if the project itself is not located within a DAC. Analysis of walkable, bikeable, and drivable routes to project components such as parks and other public facilities allows for a more accurate, objective determination of Disadvantaged Community Benefits in the context of their applicability to specific communities. This approach also enables governing bodies to evaluate the proportion of benefits attributed to DACs and non-DACs when designating whether a Project provides Disadvantaged Community Benefits and when evaluating the 110% investment provision.

The <u>MMS</u> recommended presumptive methods for estimating how many people and which communities may benefit from a project based on proximity and potential accessibility. A range of "service areas" were defined using the walkable road network to estimate the population within reasonable walking, biking, and/or driving distances from projects. Because the approach considers population density, the benefits of projects theoretically increase with higher population served; this helps differentiate the total magnitude of benefits with respect to both "what" (e.g., acres of new park) and "who" (e.g., how many people now have access to the new park space). This approach may be useful for quantifying potential benefits to Disadvantaged Communities, and provide more insight when evaluating the equity of SCW Program investments; however, it is still the responsibility of the WASC—as subject matter experts in their Watershed Areas and communities—to designate which Projects provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits.

Service Areas for Estimating Community Investment Benefit Accrual

For most Community Investment Benefits, the <u>MMS</u> suggested that people living within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile (approximately equivalent to a 5-minute walk) have the potential to experience a benefit. For parks and green space opportunities that may draw users from farther away, a $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile walking distance (using the walkable road network) could be used to evaluate potential access, which is consistent with the assumptions of the 2016 Los Angeles County Park Needs Assessment. A $\frac{1}{2}$ -mile (or approximately 10-minute walk) is also supported by the National Household

Travel Survey average distance for social and recreational trips. The National Household Travel Survey also supports the use of a 2-mile travel distance as the threshold for acceptable recreational access by bicycle.

Based on the <u>MMS</u> and the SCW Program Working Group convened by Accelerate Resilience L.A., Public Works recommends the following service areas when estimating populations and communities potentially served by projects:

Project Benefit Type	Project Size	Service Area Using Walkable Road Network
Creation/enhancement/restoration of parks, habitat, or wetlands; enhanced or new recreational opportunities; and improved public access to waterways	< 3 acres	1/4 mile
	3-10 acres	1/2 mile
	10+ acres	2 miles
Greening of Schools	Any size	2 miles (or applicant-specified)
Improved flood management, flood conveyance, or flood risk mitigation	Any size	Applicant-defined service area. Service area/needs identification based on CSNA/community engagement, drainage needs assessment, and/or regional flood modeling
Reduction of local heat island effect and shade increases, increasing number of trees and/or other vegetation at the site location that will increase carbon reduction/sequestration and improve air quality	Any size	1/4 mile service area. These benefits are typically only realized in close proximities
Other community-identified benefits		Applicant-defined service area. Service area/needs identification based on CSNA/community engagement and acknowledgement
Water Quality Benefits	Any size	Considered a regional benefit to all communities in a Watershed Area, unless justification of a localized benefit is provided
Water Supply Benefits	Any size	Realized at the scale of municipalities, tributaries, and Watershed Management Groups, and Watershed Areas

 Table 6: Service areas corresponding to types of project benefits.



It is important to consider the walkable road network when defining service areas to account for features that can impede pedestrian or cycle travel (e.g., freeways, river channels, large private parcels, etc.).

To develop service areas and estimate population within different travel distances from projects, the <u>MMS</u> recommended the following steps:

- 1. Use GIS tools to delineate 0.25-mile, 0.5-mile, and 2-mile services areas to SCW Program projects. The Network Analyst tool in ArcGIS uses the walkable road network when evaluating distances, so it inherently accounts for pedestrian or cyclist barriers like parcels, rivers, and freeways. For larger projects, the public access point (i.e., entrance) to the project should be used to accurately estimate distances. If Network Analyst is unavailable, Project Applicants can simply use best judgment to delineate a buffer around a project and exclude areas from which travel may be obstructed by barriers like freeways, private parcels, or flood control channels.
- Intersect the service areas with population data to estimate the population within each project service area range. Publicly available census data collected within the last 10 years at the tract level can be used. Converting the tract-level data to 1-acre grids can help streamline analysis.
- Intersect the service area and population data with Disadvantaged Community boundaries to estimate the population within and outside of Disadvantaged Communities that could be served by each project (Figure 5).

While the service areas above can be used to evaluate potential access to Community Investment Benefits provided by Projects, support for those benefits must be confirmed by the community through the engagement guidelines in this document.



Figure 5. Example delineation of alternative service areas to a project (yellow circle) using the walkable road network, intersected with Disadvantaged Community (DAC) boundaries

Attributing Water Quality and Water Supply Benefits to Disadvantaged Communities

The MMS suggested that Water Quality Benefits may accrue to municipalities (and, potentially, the communities within those municipalities) according to Watershed Management Group (WMG) boundaries. WMGs are groups of municipalities that are collaborating towards achieving water quality compliance, and are separate entities from SCW Program Watershed Areas and WASCs. Each WMG has its own distinct compliance plan with targets and strategies, which is why the MMS suggested that Water Quality Benefits should accrue at that scale.

If a Project Applicant wants to claim Water Quality Benefits as Disadvantaged Community Benefits, the Applicant must provide documentation that members of the DAC agree and support those claims.

On the other hand, due to the regional nature of drinking water management in Los Angeles County, the MMS suggested that Water Supply Benefits accrue to *all* communities throughout a Watershed Area and do not apply when considering equity and Disadvantaged Community Benefits.

Aggregating Place-Based Measures to Guide Evaluation of Disadvantaged Community Benefits

The SCW Program's Initial Watershed Planning is evaluating how the place-based approaches described above may provide supplemental or alternative approaches to estimate progress towards the Program's 110% Disadvantaged Community Investment policy (see Appendix G of the <u>SCW Program Watershed Planning Framework</u>, ²³ Figure 6). To inform target-setting and strategies, the Initial Watershed Plans hypothetically assume that Community Investment Benefits provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits to those living within each project's service area. Then, the ratio of Water Quality Benefits to DACs versus non-DACs is estimated by attributing Water Quality Benefits to WMGs and the DACs within each WMG. The ratios of Community Investment Benefits and Water Quality Benefits to DAC and non-DAC populations were then weighted using the Regional Program Scoring Criteria at a ratio of 5:1 (i.e., 50 maximum points available for Water Quality Benefits and 10 maximum points available for Community Investment Benefits).

While this approach does not confirm that those within a project's service area support the presumed benefits, it can be used in combination with direct engagement and CSNA results to help justify the potential extent of benefits to Disadvantaged Communities. The approach will be tested during Initial Watershed Planning and may be incorporated into subsequent adaptations of this *2025 Interim Guidance*.

²³ <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2024/11/Deliverable-3.2.4-FINAL-Framework-Appendices.pdf</u>



Figure 6. Service areas to SCW Program-funded projects evaluated in MMS

WASC Tools and Strategies

Tools and strategies are available to the members of WASCs both during project evaluation and as part of the project lifecycle. These tools and strategies may assist in determining benefits to members of DACs using available resources.

<u>At any time:</u>

- WASCs can ask their WC(s) to evaluate and report to the WASC how the people, city and county agencies, and other interested parties would describe the preferred Disadvantaged Community Benefits in the Watershed Area.
- WASCs can invite informational presentations from agencies, organizations, and other interested parties to better understand potential Disadvantaged Community Benefits sought and challenges faced in the Watershed Area.

During Project Evaluation

- WASC evaluation of the justification provided in the application and submitted Feasibility Study about Disadvantaged Community Benefits claimed for the project; Project Applicants must provide documented support from members of DACs to justify claims of Disadvantaged Community Benefits.
- Responses to questions during Project Proponent presentations posed by WASC members about the Disadvantaged Community Benefits claimed for the Project.
- During the agendized project discussion period, any voting WASC member may suggest modifying the Disadvantaged Community Benefit designation of a project in accordance with 18.07.B.2.c and the recommended criteria described above as part of a motion related to the formation of a SIP.
 - When modifying a Disadvantaged Community Benefit designation from NO to YES, where justification was therefore not provided in the Project Module application and submitted Feasibility Study, the WASC may consider the recommended criteria described herein and seek equivalent information to that solicited in the Project Module and otherwise as necessary.
- WASC members may aggregate place-based measures to guide the evaluation of a project's claimed DAC benefits, as discussed in the "Estimating Disadvantaged Community Benefits Using Place-Based Measures" section above, and in the SCW Program's Initial Watershed Plans.

Long-Term Vision for Disadvantaged Community Benefits

Public Works recognizes that long-term, additional tools and engagement are needed to enhance efforts across the SCW Program to achieve benefits sought by those who live in, work in, and represent DACs.

- 1. Evaluating and sharing accomplishments of WCs: WCs are a key element within the SCW Program for ensuring communities are engaged and able to influence the Regional Program in each Watershed Area. Providing engagement opportunities, education, and technical assistance to members of DACs will be fundamental to the WCs' work. Future guidance will evaluate and share accomplishments from the WCs' efforts.
- 2. **Watershed Planning:** Future additions to this *2025 Interim Guidance* will incorporate lessons learned from the SCW Program's ongoing Watershed Planning process regarding needs and priorities related to the evaluation and estimation of DAC benefits.
- 3. Evaluating community support or opposition: One element that is clarified in this 2025 Interim Guidance is how the WASCs, the SC, and the ROC can rely on representations of community support or opposition as part of their decision-making. This includes discussion of requirements and recommendations for evidence of community support, the degree of documented support necessary for a project based on project characteristics, and incorporation of CSNA input. It is expected that future guidance will further describe how community support can additionally influence the SCW Program and use ongoing engagement efforts to inform the continued refinement of processes for evaluating community support and/or opposition.
 - a. The "Estimating Disadvantaged Community Benefits Using Place-Based Measures" section of this chapter provides clarification regarding the presumptive attribution and calculation of projects' Water Quality, Water Supply, and Community Investment Benefits as they pertain to DACs. Future guidance is expected to build upon this clarification using further developments from the Watershed Planning Framework and Initial Watershed Plans.
- 4. Further clarifying what constitutes a "community": A community can be defined by several factors, such as geographical boundaries, socioeconomic characteristics, and population demographics. A definition and discussion of what constitutes a "community" is provided in the Community Engagement and Support section of this 2025 Interim Guidance. Included is a definition of "community", developed for the specific context of the SCW Program, and a discussion of the considerations that should be made when distinguishing communities within the context of a given SCW

Program project. Within the SCW Program, Census Block Groups are specifically used for the identification of DACs. The current policy, as described above, directs the consideration of Census Block Groups while acknowledging that the Regional Program is conceptually focused on projects that provide regional benefits. This means that projects can benefit multiple communities that are distant from the physical project. When considering "disadvantaged communities" as the beneficiary of investments in the Regional Program, who and what constitutes a "community" requires additional guidance to be developed in collaboration across multiple interested parties in the SCW Program. Additional information (see Table 4) may be used to determine Direct Benefit information. The alignment between scales – the scale of the Regional Program's focus on Watershed Areas, the scale of community boundaries, and the scale of the benefit area of projects – is expected to be explored further once the recommendations in this section are implemented. Future guidance is intended to include efforts to bring more certainty for community members, elected leaders, municipal and county staff, Project Proponents, and decision-making bodies inside the SCW Program about how to judge or quantify the beneficiaries of a project.

- 5. Revisiting inclusive language: Multiple policies at the state and regional levels, including the SCW Program, use the term "disadvantaged community" to explain how aspects of the program are intended to provide enhanced or targeted support to communities that are low-income, pollution burdened, underserved, or historically and currently marginalized or underrepresented. Future guidance within the program may include incorporation of additional inclusive language that better captures the richness and complexity of these communities.
- 6. Strengthening anti-displacement policies: The Regional Program Fund Transfer Agreement, when describing the Stakeholder and Community Outreach/Engagement Plan required of every signatory, refers to "activities and measures to mitigate against displacement and gentrification." It also requires the plan to include commitments to comply with "any County-wide displacement policies" and "specific anti-displacement requirements associated with other funding sources." The role of projects in the SCW Program Regional Program to support anti-displacement is one that could be strengthened in future guidance, as the County and cities adopt additional practices and policies, and as additional policies are added to other funding programs. Currently, there are no readily available anti-displacement policies explicitly listed at the County-level for Los Angeles County. However, interested parties can refer to other anti-displacement policies at various levels of government elsewhere in California for guidance on potential ways to undertake displacement mitigation efforts. Examples of such policies include California's Tenant Protection Act of 2019 (AB 1482), which has provisions for both rent control and "just cause" eviction requirements.
- 7. Advancing workforce development: The SCW Program has explicit goals to support workforce development. Primarily, this is being carried out within the District Program, as an element of the broader Education Program, and is still early in its development. Many WASCs have considered, and heard public comments regarding, the role of

projects within the Regional Program providing workforce development and jobs that benefit all communities, but also specifically members of DACs. Future guidance is expected to discuss the relationship between elements of the Regional Program and the workforce development within the District Program, and how those SCW Program elements could leverage benefits to members of DACs.

The SCW Program's pending adaptive management framework is expected to influence aspects of the long-term vision for DAC benefits and related policies in the SCW Program. This will include, but not be limited to, increased CSNA development/incorporation, addressing definitional gaps, and updates to both short and long-term strategies and targets. Additional developments in this context will be included in future updates to this *2025 Interim Guidance*, currently anticipated in late 2025.



Appendix A: Terms & Concepts Glossary

Terms and definitions presented here are intended to support a shared language and understanding of concepts used throughout Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program) documents. The **SCW Program**^{††} is a collaborative approach to address LA's water needs. Through a **Special Parcel Tax** that provides local, dedicated funding for **Stormwater** initiatives, it supports **SCW Program Goals** and general Program objectives to increase regional water supply, improve water quality, and enhance **Communities** throughout **Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD or District)** boundaries. By doing so, it allows for communities to help design and implement local infrastructure improvements that lead to **Water Quality Benefits**, **Water Supply Benefits**, and **Community Investment Benefits**[†] and prioritizes nature-based approaches, such as green spaces and recreation areas, that combat heat and improve neighborhoods.

The SCW Program is complex in nature, consisting of many different components with varying functions and being supported by several distinct resources. This Glossary is intended to alleviate the ambiguity of frequently used terms and concepts with utility in various Program-related contexts, thus maximizing efficiency in communication and decision-making processes. Many definitions presented here are derived or directly taken from the **LACFCD** Municipal Code. Others are being considered and refined by external committees, such as the **Nature-Based Solutions** Blue Ribbon Panel. Additional policy/technical definitions can be found in the separate *SCW Program Definitional Needs* document.

Terms and concepts included in this Glossary will be useful to any individuals or parties involved with SCW Program activities and/processes. Specifically, it is intended for use by **Watershed Area Steering Committees (WASCs)**, **Watershed Coordinators (WCs)**, the **Scoring Committee (SC)**, **Infrastructure Program Project Applicants/Developers**, **Project Proponents**, governmental agencies and representatives, local community members, and other stakeholders.

[†]: As defined in Chapter 16 of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District Code for the Safe, Clean Water Program Implementation Ordinance (Ord. 2018-0044 § 1, 2018.)

[‡]: As defined in Chapter 18 of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District Code for the Safe, Clean Water Program Implementation Ordinance (Ord. 2019-0042 § 11, 2019.)

α: As defined in the Regional Program Fund Transfer Agreement.

β: As defined in the Municipal Program Fund Transfer Agreement.

^{††:} Bolded font indicates terms that are defined elsewhere in the Glossary.

Adaptive Management: An iterative adaptive approach to evolve stormwater management practices to optimize resource use, periodically reassess strategies, and implement changes based on monitoring outcomes, new data and/or changing environmental, social, or political conditions.

Agreement^{α, β}: Refers to an individual (either Regional or Municipal) **Fund Transfer Agreement**, including all exhibits and attachments thereto.

Anticipated Benefits: The expected outcomes of a given **SCW Program Project**, typically referring to either **Water Quality Benefits**, **Water Supply Benefits**, and/or **Community Investment Benefits**.

Asset: In the context of the **SCW Program**, an asset typically refers to a tangible component of a project or infrastructure. Examples of SCW Program assets are storm drains, pipes, drains, etc.

Baseline: Pre-implementation conditions of a project site or geographic SCW Program area prior to water quality improvement or water supply augmentation activities. Baselines support the development of **SCW Program Targets**, identification of **Watershed Area Needs**, and the communication of progress.

Board[†]: Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, acting as the governing body of the **LACFCD**.

CalEnviroScreen¹: A mapping tool that helps identify California communities most affected by various sources of pollution as well as where people are typically most vulnerable to the effects of pollution. It uses environmental, health, and socioeconomic data to produce scores for each census tract statewide, mapping the scores to allow for comparison of different communities.

Census Block Group[†]: As defined by the United States Census Bureau, a statistical division of census tracts, which are generally defined to contain between 600 and 3,000 people, and are used to present data and control block numbering. A Census Block Group consists of clusters of blocks within the same census tract. Each census tract contains at least 1 Census Block Group and each Census Block is uniquely numbered within the census tract.

Code^β: Los Angeles County Flood Control District Code.

Community: The term Community refers to a group of individuals or entities that hold and recognize something in common, for instance, a geographic area, culture, needs and interests, goals, or other social bonds. Community boundaries can be defined by formal political or informal social geographies that have meaning for the community members. In the context of the **SCW Program**, community members can be self-defined and may include residents, **CBOs**, local businesses, public institutions, agencies, and other **Interested Parties**

¹<u>https://oehha.ca.gov/calenviroscreen/about-calenviroscreen</u>

who are either directly or indirectly influenced by the development of a **Project** and the associated benefits that support their quality of life.

Community-Based Organization (CBO): A typically non-profit entity that operates within a specific **Community** or geographical area, aiming to address local needs and challenges and improve the well-being of community members. CBOs play an important role alongside governmental efforts by catering to the unique needs and desires of local communities.

Community Engagement: Activities that solicit, address, and incorporate input from Community members for SCW Program activities/projects. Community engagement activities may include public meetings or forums, tabling, survey-based assessments, etc.

Community Investment Benefit (CIB)[†]: A benefit created in conjunction with a **Project** or **Program**, such as, but not limited to: improved flood management, flood conveyance, or flood risk mitigation; creation, enhancement or restoration of parks, habitat or wetlands; improved public access to waterways; enhanced or new recreational opportunities; and greening of schools. A Community Investment Benefit also includes a benefit to the **Community** derived from a **Project** or **Program** that improves public health. This is typically done by reducing heat island effect, increasing shade or planting of trees or other vegetation that increase carbon reduction/sequestration and improve air quality, and/or making improvements to surface water quality in community-accessible areas.

Community Strengths and Needs Assessment (CSNA): Intended to support ongoing Watershed Planning efforts, the CSNA collects responses from communities served by the SCW Program. It consists of a survey to gather input from the public about community needs, strengths, and priorities, as well as a GIS-based Dashboard that visually depicts survey results and tracks response trends over time.

Community Support: Tangible support from and/or partnerships with the local **Community** as a result of engagement throughout **Project** development. It is possible for Community Support to exist without engagement, and engagement does not necessarily guarantee Community Support.

Construction/O&M Funding Phase: One of the two funding phases for which **Infrastructure Program Project Applicants** can apply for funding, as identified in the *Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines*. The Construction/O&M Funding Phase includes **Project** designs that have advanced to 60-percent or beyond. Construction/O&M funding requests may also include additional design funding to advance from 60-percent to 100-percent design.

Construction Phase: The phase of an **Infrastructure Project's Lifecycle** that involves carrying out physical construction of a Project's infrastructural components including site preparation, demolition, excavation, material delivery/handling, and construction activities as well as assurance of the regulatory compliance of these activities.

County[†]: The County of Los Angeles.

Design-Only Funding Phase: One of the two funding phases for which Infrastructure **Program Project Applicants** can apply for funding, as identified in the *Supplemental Guidance to Support Feasibility Study Guidelines*. The Design-Only Funding Phase includes funding for planning and design of **Project** concepts for which 60-percent plans have not yet been developed.

Design Phase: The phase of an **Infrastructure Project's Lifecycle** that involves the creation of engineering designs for a Project's infrastructural components including technical drawings, material specifications, environmental assessments, and permitting requirements.

Desired Outcomes: The intended impacts/outcomes of a **Project**. In the context of **SCW Program** projects, these typically refer to **Water Quality Benefits**, **Water Supply Benefits**, or **Community Investment Benefits**.

Direct Benefit: Typically determined by Watershed Area Steering Committees (WASCs) on a project-by-project basis, Direct Benefits refer to **Project** environmental and/or social benefits that are directly applicable to a specific **Community**. They strongly rely on documented public support from community members that they not only agree that the benefit is applicable to their community, but also that the community desires that benefit. Applicability of Direct Benefits to specific Communities is often based on accessibility, which can in turn be determined by strategies such as the **Walkshed** methodology.

Direct Water Supply End Use: The ways in which water is used directly from a potable water source without any prior treatment or reuse. Examples are drinking, bathing, watering gardens, washing cars, etc.

Disadvantaged Community (DAC): Community within **Census Block Group(s)** that have an annual median household income (MHI) of less than eighty percent (80%) of the Statewide annual median household income (as defined in Water Code section 79505.5).

Disadvantaged Community and Community Enhancement White Paper: Commissioned by the LACFCD as part of the Metrics and Monitoring Study (MMS), this report provides advice drawn from research and stakeholder engagement that is intended to enhance the District's ability to measure Community Engagement and DAC Benefits in pursuit of achieving equitable impact through the SCW Program. A key aspect of this report is recommendations for the establishment of metrics that can be used for these purposes.

Disadvantaged Community Benefit: A **Water Quality Benefit**, **Water Supply Benefit**, and/or **Community Investment Benefit** located in a **DAC** or providing benefits directly to a DAC.

Disadvantaged Community Benefit Policy: A goal of the **SCW Program**, as stated in LACFCD Code Section 18.04 (J), is to "provide Disadvantaged Community Benefits, including **Regional Program** infrastructure investments, that are not less than one hundred ten percent (110%) of the ratio of the [Disadvantaged Community] population to the total population in each Watershed Area."

District[†]: Los Angeles County Flood Control District.

District Education Program²: Intended to encourage and support efforts by the people of Los Angeles County to take action in support of **SCW Program Goals**. Overseen by the District, it includes programs such as public education and **Community Engagement** programs, local workforce job training, and school education and curriculum programs.

District Program[†]: One of three sub-programs within the **SCW Program**. The District Program funds and facilitates program administration as well as **District Projects**, education and curriculum programs, and local workforce job training.

Dry Weather Project: In the context of the **SCW Program**, Dry Weather **Projects** refer to Projects designed to treat runoff from 0.25-inch rain events or below.

Engagement Fatigue³: A phenomenon that occurs when **Community Engagement** is consistently performed but without the presence of observable impacts that result from the solicitation of public input. **Community** members may experience Engagement Fatigue if they are being given ample opportunity to voice their opinions/concerns, but do not feel that their views are being incorporated into a **Project's** decision-making process.

Equitable Benefits: The **SCW Program's** emphasis on Equitable Benefits stems from general historical inequity in the implementation of infrastructure projects and the distribution of their associated benefits. Prioritization of equity in implementation is a foundational provision of the SCW Program and is primarily addressed through **Disadvantaged Community Benefit Policy**.

Feasibility Study[†]: A detailed technical investigation and report that is conducted to determine the feasibility of a proposed **Project**.

Feasibility Study Guidelines^{‡4}: The guidelines for the preparation of **Feasibility Studies** as described in Section 18.07.B.3 of **LACFCD Code**.

Federally Recognized and Non-Federally Recognized Tribes⁵: Federally Recognized Tribes are American Indian or Alaska Native tribal entities that have a recognized government-togovernment relationship with the United States and are eligible for funding and services from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. They also possess certain inherent rights of self-government, and are entitled to receive certain federal benefits, protections, and services. Non-Federally Recognized Tribes lack this status and eligibility for the associated benefits.

² <u>https://dpw.lacounty.gov/wp/safecleanwaterla/education/</u>

³ <u>https://www.stantec.com/content/dam/stantec/files/PDFAssets/technical/001/equity-in-stormwater-investments-stantec-ucla.pdf</u>

⁴https://library.municode.com/ca/los_angeles_county/codes/code_of_ordinances/379113?nodeld=FLCODIC O_CH18SACLWAPRIMOR_18.07REPRIM

⁵ <u>https://www.bia.gov/faqs/what-federally-recognized-</u>

tribe#:~:text=A%20federally%20recognized%20tribe%20is,Alaska%20Native%20tribes%20and%20villages

First Flush Flow: The initial portion of **Stormwater** runoff that occurs in the beginning of a rainfall/storm event in which the concentration of pollutants is generally higher than during the latter portions of the storm event.

Funded Activity^a: The **Infrastructure Program Project**, or **Scientific Study** described in the Scope of Work, including the Stakeholder and Community Outreach Plan and all other tasks and activities described in the Scope of Work.

"Good", "Better", and "Best" Engagement: Benchmarks associated with the attainment of different levels of community outreach and engagement. The community outreach and engagement efforts of a given **Project** are evaluated by **WASCs** and the **Scoring Committee (SC)** alongside other project details to carry out the scoring process and determine a project's eligibility for **Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP)** inclusion.

Grassroots Outreach: Efforts such as door-to-door canvassing, phone banking, focus groups and surveys, and the distribution of printed materials such as flyers. This method of community outreach is generally conducted with ongoing coordination with local **CBOs** and organizations.

Green Jobs: Any job or career generated as a result of the **SCW Program**.

Handbook for Municipalities⁶: Consolidates information on existing requirements and guidance, focusing on the **Municipal Program**. Concepts covered within the document include Municipal Program Ordinance Requirements of the **LACFCD** Code, **Fund Transfer Agreement** requirements, timelines for the Municipal Program, eligible and ineligible expenditures, FAQs, and other various ongoing and related efforts that may be useful to municipalities for **SCW Program** implementation.

Impermeable Area[†]: A parcel area covered by materials or constructed surfaces such as buildings, roofs, paved roadways, sidewalks, driveways, parking lots, brick, asphalt, concrete, pavers, covers, slabs, sheds, pools, and other constructed surfaces or hardscape features. Impermeable areas do not include permeable surfaces such as vegetated areas, grasses, bushes, shrubs, lawns, bare soil, tree canopy, natural water bodies, wetland areas, gravel, gardens and planters on bare soil, rocky shores, and other natural areas.

Indicator: A high-level metric that measures progress toward achieving **Program Goals**. Indicators roll up **Performance Measures** by Watershed Area and on a **SCW Program**-wide scale to quantify cumulative benefits of SCW Program funded **Projects** and **Programs** to communicate and track progress toward Program Goals.

Infrastructure Program[†]: Part of the **Regional Program**, this program shall implement multibenefit watershed-based **Projects** that have a **Water Quality Benefit**, as well as either a **Water Supply Benefit** or **Community Investment Benefit**, or both.

⁶ https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2023/01/Handbook-for-Municipalities-202301.pdf

Infrastructure Program Project Applicant[†]: Any individual, group, business or governmental entity, including, but not limited to, the **District**, a Municipality, watershed management group, joint powers authority, public utility, special district, school, **CBO**, **NGO**, non-profit organization, **Federally-Recognized Indian Tribe**, State Indian tribe listed on the Native American Heritage Commission's California Tribal Consultation List, or mutual water company, that submits a proposed **Project** or **Feasibility Study** for consideration for funding by the **SCW Program**.

Infrastructure Program Project Developer[†]: The individual, group, or entity that carries out or causes to be carried out part or all of the actions necessary to complete a **Project**.

Infrastructure Project: A multi-benefit **Project** funded through the **SCW Program's Infrastructure Program.**

Initial Watershed Plans: Illustrative documents created by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works as part of the SCW Program that include relevant, individual watershed-specific information including, but not limited to: a summary of Watershed Area characteristics, a snapshot of the Baseline of Municipal and Regional Program funded Projects, SCW Program-wide and Watershed Area-specific Targets, Watershed Area Needs, Priority Goals and Strategies, Opportunity Areas, recommendations and findings, and key data gaps and limitations.

Interested Parties⁷: In the context of the **SCW Program**, Interested Parties refer to municipalities, NGOs/CBOs, **Communities**, and individual members of the public with personal or organization stake in the implementation and outcomes of SCW Program activities. Interested Parties include, but are not limited to: SCW Program Governance Committees (**Scoring Committee**, **WASCs**, **ROC**, **WCs**, ROC Water Quality Working Group), **Municipalities**, Subject Matter Experts and SCW Program Consultants, **Los Angeles County** Public Works staff, **Community** members, **CBOs**, and any other entity who provides public comment or participates in SCW Program dialogue or activities. These Interested Parties are all entities that have a vested interest in the SCW Program and related activities/processes.

Interim 2022 Guidance: Developed as a supporting document for the **Regional Program**, providing important information for various audiences regarding Regional Program guidelines, details, and requirements. Although primarily developed to support the Regional Program call for projects, scoring, and **SIP** processes, Interim Guidance information also provides utility for the **District Program** and **Municipal Program**. Focuses on the following areas: Community Engagement and Support, **Water Supply**, **Nature-Based Solutions**, and **Disadvantaged Community** Policies.

Known or Perceived Needs: An aspect of project development which **Program Applicants** are obligated to identify as part of the **SCW Program Projects Module**. Essentially refers to a justification of why the **Desired Outcomes** of a **Project** are relevant and applicable to a

⁷ <u>https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2024/11/Deliverable-3.2.4-FINAL-Framework-Appendices.pdf</u>

specific **Community** or Watershed Area based on the needs and wants of that community or Watershed Area.

Local Media Outreach: Newsletters, local and regional newspaper publications, and local television and radio-based outreach efforts. Contacts for these sources are typically available via internet search and/or direct contact.

Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD): Created in 1915 under the Los Angeles County Flood Control Act, the LACFCD's mission is to construct, operate, and maintain an advanced system for flood protection and water conservation, while improving water quality and maximizing habitat, open space, and recreational opportunities. LACFCD boundaries encompass approximately 2,752 square miles. Major programs within the LACFCD are categorized as flood control, water conservation, and **Urban Runoff** and **Stormwater** quality.

2024 Metrics and Monitoring Study (MMS)⁸: The MMS was designed to develop **Program** methods, metrics, and monitoring criteria to inform tracking, planning, reporting, and decision-making within the **SCW Program**. Conducted by a consultant team in collaboration with the **LACFCD** and informed by stakeholder involvement. MMS recommendations are intended to inform ongoing **Watershed Planning** and adaptive management efforts including updates to guidance documents, scoring criteria, monitoring, and project development.

Module Score⁹: A preliminary score given by the **SCW Program Projects Module** based on a **Project's** Feasibility Study, which is subsequently verified by the **Scoring Committee (SC)** prior to the project's consideration for **SIP** inclusion.

Multi-Benefit Project[†]: A **Project** that has: (1) a **Water Quality Benefit**, and (2) a **Water Supply Benefit** or a **Community Investment Benefit**, or both.

Municipal Program[†]: One of the sub-programs within the **SCW Program**. The Municipal Program distributes funds across the 86 Los Angeles County municipalities to fund project initiatives within those municipalities and create benefits for the communities within them.

Municipal Program Transfer Agreement: Functionally, a Transfer Agreement between the LACFCD and a Municipality to distribute Municipal Program funds, which are divided amongst Municipalities proportionate to the revenue they have generated for the Municipal Program. Each Municipality may receive their portion of Municipal Program revenue within 45 days after execution of a Municipal Program Transfer Agreement by the District or within 14 days of the District's receipt of the Annual Plan, whichever comes later. Components of the Agreement include an Annual Plan, a description of Nature-Based Solutions BMPs, O&M guidance, and general terms and conditions.

Municipality[†]: A city within the **District**, or the **County**, pertaining to unincorporated areas within the District.

⁸ https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2023/04/SCWP-MMS-Fact-Sheet-20230412.pdf

⁹ https://portal.safecleanwaterla.org/scw-reporting/map

Nature-Based Solution (NBS)[†]: A **Project** that utilizes natural processes that slow, detain, infiltrate or filter **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff**. These methods may include relying predominantly on soils and vegetation; increasing the permeability of impermeable areas; protecting undeveloped mountains and floodplains; creating and restoring riparian habitat and wetlands; creating rain gardens, bioswales, and parkway basins; and enhancing soil through composting, mulching, and planting trees and vegetation, with preference for native species. Nature-Based Solutions may also be designed to provide additional benefits such as sequestering carbon, supporting biodiversity, providing shade, creating and enhancing parks and open space, and improving quality of life for surrounding communities.

NBS Blue Ribbon Panel: A task force convened by the **County** tasked with the development of standards and standardized definitions for the implementation of **Nature-Based Solutions** for water management across the County to improve the health of **Communities** and ecosystems. This includes the implementation of priority tasks from the County Water Plan.

Non-Governmental Organization (NGO): Mission-driven advocacy or service organizations that typically operate in the nonprofit sector, independent of governmental operations. NGOs differ from **CBOs** in that they do not necessarily operate within a specific **community** or geographical area, or at least not at the same local scale that CBOs operate.

Online Media Outreach: Email blasts, social media efforts, and website publications.

Operations & Maintenance (O&M): Refers to a set of efforts/activities that ensure a facility, equipment, or other asset is functioning properly and safely. This includes day-to-day running of the asset as well as maintenance activities that prevent problems from occurring over various timescales.

O&M/Monitoring Phase: The phase of an **Infrastructure Project's Lifecycle** that involves the ongoing operations, maintenance, and monitoring of a Project to ensure continued functionality and effectiveness. This includes any necessary physical operation of project components, maintenance activities to ensure continued functionality and prevent degradation, and monitoring of project effectiveness and outcomes relative to overall Project goals/objectives and making necessary adjustments over time.

Parcel[†]: A Parcel of real property situated within the **District**, as shown on the latest equalized assessment roll of the **County** and identified by its **Assessor's** Parcel Number, and that is tributary to a receiving water identified in the Water Quality Control Plan for the Los Angeles Region in effect as of January 1, 2018. Parcel shall not include a possessory interest based on private, beneficial use of government-owned real property.

Performance Measure (PM): Quantitative or qualitative metric that quantifies benefits provided by individual **Projects** and **Programs**, inventoried and tracked to support **SCW Program** assessment. Select PMs are rolled up across the Watershed Area and Program to support progress tracking toward achievement of **Indicators** / **SCW Program Goals**.

Planning Phase: The phase of an **Infrastructure Project's Lifecycle** that involves the initial creation of a Project's overall plans, including needs assessment, preliminary planning and

concept creation, **Stakeholder** identification, community engagement, identification/leveraging of funding sources, teaming, and a **Feasibility Study**.

Program[†]: A planned, coordinated group of activities related to increasing **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** capture or reducing Stormwater or Urban Runoff pollution in the **District**.

Project[†]: The development (including design, preparation of environmental documents, obtaining applicable regulatory permits, construction, inspection, and similar activities) and operations and maintenance (including monitoring) of a physical structure or facility that increases **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** capture or reduces Stormwater or Urban Runoff pollution in the **District**.

Project Lifecycle: In the context of the SCW Program, the Project Lifecycle is comprised of **Planning Phase**, **Design Phase**, **Construction Phase**, and **O&M/Monitoring Phase**.. Applications for funding through the **Regional Program** are organized into two categories based on Project Lifecycle phase: **Design-Only Funding Phase** applications and **Construction/O&M Funding Phase** applications.

Project Proponent: A community member, **Project Developer**, or other stakeholder(s) with a tangible interest in promoting a given **Project** and assisting in the eventual realization of its claimed benefits.

Public Education and Community Engagement Grants Program: Administered by the **District** in partnership with the Water Foundation, this **Program** is meant to support education and **Community Engagement** efforts related to **Stormwater** and **Urban Runoff** capture. Proposals for funding through the Program are evaluated by the Water Foundation, and grant funds are subsequently awarded for the most appropriate/eligible applicants.

Regional Benefits: Benefits that are realized across multiple **Communities**, **Municipalities**, or **Watershed Areas**.

Regional Oversight Committee (ROC)[†]: The body created by the LA County Board of Supervisors (Board) whose responsibilities include, but are not limited to, assessing and making recommendations to the Board regarding whether the **SCW Program Goals** are being achieved at a program-wide scale.

Regional Program[†]: One of the sub-programs within the **SCW Program**. The Regional Program receives fifty percent (50%) of the annual revenues from the **Special Parcel Tax** to fund the **Infrastructure Program**, a **Technical Resources Program**, and a **Scientific Studies Program**. Watershed Areas shall be established to facilitate implementation of the Regional Program. Each Watershed Area shall be overseen by a **WASC** that includes municipalities, agencies, and other Stakeholders.

Regional Program Transfer Agreement: An agreement that must be executed for Infrastructure Program Project Developers and Scientific Study Applicants after the LA County Board of Supervisors has approved the SIPs. Functionally, it is a Transfer Agreement between the approved applicant/developer and the LACFCD to allocate funds through the Infrastructure Program or **Scientific Studies Program**. Components of the Transfer Agreement include a scope of work, general terms and conditions, special conditions, addendum to agreement, discussion of **Nature-Based Solutions**, and an **O&M** guidance document, as well as a designation of the project developer.

Safe, Clean Water Program (SCW Program)[†]: The **Program** established by Chapter 16 of the **LACFCD** Code, including the administration of revenues from the **Special Parcel Tax** levied pursuant to the ordinance, and the criteria and procedures for selecting and implementing **Projects** and Programs and allocating revenues among the **Municipal**, **Regional**, and **District Programs**.

Scientific Studies Program[†]: Part of the **Regional Program**, this **Program** shall provide funding for eligible scientific and other activities, such as, but not limited to: **Scientific Studies**, technical studies, monitoring, modeling, and other similar activities. The **District** will administer this Program and will seek to utilize independent research institutions or academic institutions to carry out or help design and peer review activities carried out by other entities. All activities implemented through this Program shall be conducted in accordance with accepted scientific protocols.

Scientific Study: Scientific research that is performed to help with understanding where and what watershed/community-specific needs are, and how they can best be addressed through the SCW Program.

Scoring Committee (SC)[‡]: A group of six (6) subject-matter experts in **Water Quality Benefits**, **Water Supply Benefits**, **Nature-Based Solutions**, and **Community Investment Benefits** created by the **Board** to review and score **Projects** and Feasibility Studies in connection with the **Infrastructure Program**. The SC works with **Public Works** to review and finalize scores for **Projects** being considered by each **Watershed Area Steering Committee** for the **Regional Program**.

Scoring Criteria: Presented as a component of the SCW Program's Feasibility Study Guidelines, the Scoring Criteria is used by entities such as WASCs and WCs to assess the degree to which Projects submitted to the Regional Program meet Program expectations. Via the Scoring Criteria, Projects are awarded points for categories such as Water Quality Benefits, Water Supply Benefits, Community Investment Benefits, Nature-Based Solutions, and Leveraging Funding and Community Support based on the characteristics of the Feasibility Study that is submitted to the SCW Program Projects Module.

SCW Program Goals (Goals)¹⁰: The fourteen (14) SCW Program Implementation Goals (A-N) outlined in Section 18.04 of the **LACFCD Code** for the **SCW Program** Implementation Ordinance.

SCW Program Projects Module: A tool through which **Program Applicants** can provide detailed information from their **Project's** Feasibility Study. The SCW Program Projects

¹⁰https://library.municode.com/ca/los_angeles_county/codes/code_of_ordinances/349596?nodeld=FLCODI CO_CH18SACLWAPRIMOR_18.04SCPRGO

Module provides a preliminary **Module Score** for a given project, which is then verified by the **Scoring Committee (SC)**. Projects must meet the **Threshold Score** to be considered for **SIP** inclusion.

SCW Program Watershed Planning (Watershed Planning): A dynamic process by the SCW Program involving establishing Watershed Area Targets to quantify progress towards SCW Program Goals, incorporating input from Interested Parties and community members and evolving Community priorities, and identifying opportunities for multi-benefit Projects. Watershed Planning is intended to guide prospective applicants, municipalities, and the District in developing projects and Programmatic investments that will best serve the Watershed Areas; supports the identification of Watershed Area Needs, Priority Goals and Strategies, and Opportunity Areas.

Special Parcel Tax[†]: The annual Special Parcel Tax in the amount of 2.5 cents per square foot of **Parcel Impermeable Area**. Further described in Section 16.08 of the **LACFCD** Code for the **SCW Program** Implementation Ordinance.

Stakeholder[†]: A person; **Municipality**; watershed management group; joint powers authority; citizens' group; homeowner or other property owner; business; **NGO**; social justice group; health advocate; local park representative; school board member; environmental group; labor union; academic institution; neighborhood council; town council; community group; water resources agency, such as a groundwater pumper or manager, or a private or public water agency; other governmental agency; or other interested party that has a direct or indirect stake in the **SCW Program**.

State Water Code^{11,12}: The California State Water Code is a comprehensive set of laws that governs the state's water resources, encompassing everything from water rights and water quality to dams and flood control. In the context of the **SCW Program**, the California State Water Code defines a **Disadvantaged Community** and a Severely Disadvantaged Community as having an MHI below 80% and below 60% of the statewide MHI, respectively.

Stormwater[†]: Water that originates from atmospheric moisture (rainfall or snowmelt) and falls or flows onto land, water, or other surfaces.

Stormwater Improvement[‡]: A structure or facility, or system of structures or facilities, that captures **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** or reduces **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** pollution in the **District**.

Stormwater Investment Plan (SIP)[†]: The SIP is a 5-year plan developed by a **WASC** that allocates funding for **Projects** and **Programs** in the **Regional Program's Infrastructure Program**, **Technical Resources Program**, and **Scientific Studies Program**. The SIP for the ensuing fiscal year and lays out tentative funding for 4 subsequent years. SIPs will be approved by the **Board** on an annual basis.

¹¹ CA Water Code § 79505.5 (2024)

¹² CA Water Code § 13476 (2024)

Strategies: Describe the means through which **Program Goals** will be achieved and **Watershed Area Needs** will be addressed; determined by working backwards from the desired outcomes to determine necessary actions. **Watershed Planning** is developing strategies that are specific to progress toward a given target to support achievement of Program Goals, while **Priority Strategies**, identified through engagement, focus on preferred actions for the respective Watershed Area or **SCW Program**-wide.

Surface Water[†]: Water that flows or collects on the surface of the ground.

Technical Resources Program (TRP)¹³: A form of **SCW Program** support which offers technical support from District staff to develop a feasibility study, intended to enable **Project Proponents** to subsequently apply to the **Infrastructure Program**. Eligibility for the TRP is based on whether the **Project** is determined to provide benefit by increasing local water supply, improving water quality, and/or providing community investment. Selection for the TRP entails that **District Technical Assistance Teams (TATs)** will work with project proponents to complete Feasibility Studies based on project concepts.

Threshold Score: The minimum score that **Projects** must meet or exceed in order to be eligible for **Infrastructure Program** funding.

Unmanaged Aquifer¹⁴: An area within a groundwater basin that is not managed by a Groundwater Sustainability Agency, an adjudication, or an alternative Groundwater Sustainability Plan and is not subject to deliberate human interventions such as artificial recharge efforts and relies solely on natural replenishment mechanisms.

Urban Runoff[†]: **Surface Water** flow that may contain, but is not composed entirely of, **Stormwater**, such as flow from residential, commercial, or industrial activities.

Walkshed: A strategy for determining the applicability of a **Project's** benefits to specific **Communities** based on that Project's accessibility for Community members. Determined on a project-by-project basis, influencing factors can include topography, geographical boundaries, public transportation quality/availability, and other contextual characteristics.

Water Quality Benefit[†]: Defined as a reduction in **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** pollution, such as improvements in the chemical, physical, and biological characteristics of Stormwater or Urban Runoff in the District. Activities resulting in this benefit include but are not limited to: infiltration or treatment of Stormwater or Urban runoff, non-point source pollution control, and diversion of Stormwater or Urban Runoff to a sanitary sewer system.

Water Supply Benefit[†]: Defined as an increase in the amount of locally available water supply, provided there is a nexus to **Stormwater** or **Urban Runoff** capture. Activities resulting in this benefit include, but are not limited to, the following: reuse and conservation practices, diversion of Stormwater or Urban Runoff to a sanitary sewer system for direct or indirect water

 ¹³ https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2021/09/Safe-clean-water-program-handout-2_eng.pdf
 ¹⁴ https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sgma/groundwater_basins/#:~:text=Groundwater%20Basins%20with%20
 Unmanaged%20Areas,by%20the%20State%20Water%20Board.

recycling, increased groundwater replenishment or available yield, or offset of potable water use.

Water Supply Benefit Magnitude: The total **Project** capacity for long-term volume captured; the annual additional water supply volume resulting from the project.

Water Supply Cost-Effectiveness: The total life-cycle cost per unit of acre foot of **Stormwater** and/or **Urban Runoff** volume captured for water supply.

Water Supply Scoring Adaptation Pilot Rubric¹⁵: Incorporates a newly developed, alternative (optional) **Scoring Criteria** for evaluating the **Water Supply Benefits** of a given **Project**. The new Scoring Criteria is intended to provide additional point scale flexibility so that Project score can be tallied at one-point increments (as compared to the current stepwise criteria) and would enable projects managing smaller drainage areas to earn points. This approach better aligns the **Cost-Effectiveness** and **Benefit Magnitude** scoring with the true range of program-worthy **Multi-Benefit Project** efficiencies and performance, and inherently accounts for **District**-wide opportunities, constraints, and economic changes over time.

Watershed Area[†]: The regional hydrologic boundaries as depicted on maps maintained by the **District** for the **SCW Program**, that are established in consideration of topographic conditions and other factors. The SCW Program includes the following nine (9) Watershed Areas: (1) Central Santa Monica Bay; (2) Lower Los Angeles River; (3) Lower San Gabriel River; (4) North Santa Monica Bay; (5) Rio Hondo; (6) Santa Clara River; (7) South Santa Monica Bay; (8) Upper Los Angeles River; and (9) Upper San Gabriel River.

Watershed Area Needs: Difference between the **Baseline** of an **Indicator** and the **Watershed Area Target** for that Indicator.

Watershed Area Steering Committee (WASC)[†]: A governing body created by the Board, one for each **Watershed Area**, for the purpose of developing **SIPs** and recommendations for other activities to be funded through the **Regional Program**.

Watershed Coordinator (WC)[†]: One or more persons assigned to assist a **WASC** with **Community** and stakeholder education and engagement and to guide **Projects** from concept to implementation..

Wet Weather: In the context of the **SCW Program**, **Wet Weather Projects** refer to Projects designed for rainfall events in excess of 0.25 inches.

¹⁵ https://safecleanwaterla.org/content/uploads/2023/06/Alternate-WS-Scoring-Pilot-202306.pdf

Acronyms

The list of acronyms presented here will evolve with the Initial Watershed Plan development.

Table 1. SCW Program Watershed Planning Framework Acronyms

Acronym	Definition
BMP	Best Management Practice
BoS	Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board)
CalEPA	California Environmental Protection Agency
СВО	Community-Based Organization
CIB	Community Investment Benefit
CSMB	Central Santa Monica Bay
CSNA	Community Strengths & Needs Assessment
DAC	Disadvantaged Community
FAQ	Frequently Asked Questions
LA	Los Angeles
LACFCD	Los Angeles County Flood Control District (District)
LACPW	Los Angeles County Department of Public Works (Public Works)
LLAR	Lower Los Angeles River
LSGR	Lower San Gabriel River
MHI	Median Household Income
MMS	Metrics and Monitoring Study
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NBS	Nature-Based Solutions
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NSMB	North Santa Monica Bay
O&M	Operations and Maintenance
PM	Performance Measure
RH	Rio Hondo
ROC	Regional Oversight Committee
SC	Scoring Committee
SCR	Santa Clara River
SCW	Safe, Clean Water
SCWP	The Safe, Clean Water Program
SIP	Stormwater Investment Plan
SSMB	South Santa Monica Bay
TRP	Technical Resources Program
ULAR	Upper Los Angeles River
USCR	Upper Santa Clara River
USEPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
USGR	Upper San Gabriel River
WASC	Watershed Area Steering Committee

Acronym	Definition
WC	Watershed Coordinator
WMG	Watershed Management Group
WMP	Watershed Management Plan
WQB	Water Quality Benefit
WSB	Water Supply Benefit