



# James Cary Smith Community Grant Program Evaluation

*Ripple Effect Mapping: Impacts Beyond  
the Grant Program*



Bay Area Air District

# James Cary Smith Community Grant Program Evaluation

## Ripple Effect Mapping: Impacts Beyond the Grant Program

This report was developed by RDA Consulting under  
contract with the Bay Area Air District  
RDA Consulting, 2025





# Acknowledgments

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A heartfelt thank you to the JCS grantee organizations who participated in this multiyear evaluation by offering your thoughts and perspectives during several focus groups and questionnaires, as well as the Ripple Effect Mapping workshops. This evaluation could not have been completed without your robust engagement.

Thank you to the community members who joined the Ripple Effect Mapping workshops to share your insight and experiences.

We remember Jim Smith, the Air District's former Community Outreach Manager who passed away in 2015 from ALS and whose vision of a more engaged and empowered community influenced this grant program.

Lastly, an acknowledgment to the RDA team who completed this evaluation: John Cervetto, Sarah Ferrell, Jamon Franklin, Julia Owens, and Dina de Veer.

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# Introduction

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## James Cary Smith Community Grant Program

The Bay Area Air District's ("Air District") **James Cary Smith (JCS) Community Grant Program** provides grants to community groups, neighborhood associations, and nonprofit organizations to uplift local efforts for capacity building in environmental justice work. Funds support community-based programs that address air quality and reduce exposure to air pollution by fostering authentic community participation in planning activities. These efforts support Goal 2 of the Air District's [2024-2029 Strategic Plan](#), advancing environmental justice by supporting, partnering with, and uplifting communities overburdened by pollution.

Through Cycle 1 of the JCS Community Grant Program (2022 - 2025), the Air District awarded \$6.4 million to 33 organizations over three years. The JCS program includes:

- **Multi-year funding** for up to three years of up to \$100,000 per year, per grantee.
- **Capacity building resources**, such as workshops on air quality data, peer-led learning sessions, translated resources, Google group for grantee-to-grantee communication
- **A technical assistance provider** for: coaching and support on grant reports, invoicing, and project strategies

*Learn more about the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program [here](#).*

# Ripple Effect Mapping Approach

Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) is a versatile **participatory evaluation tool** that was used to understand the effect of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program on grantee organizations and the communities they serve. Staff and program participants from 20 organizations funded through Cycle 1 JCS grants participated in REM workshops in February and March 2025 during the third, final year of Cycle 1 grantees' award.

Across three workshops, the REM facilitators guided grantees in identifying how the grant program impacted their organizations, program participants, community members, their local environment, and broader systems.



This report will guide readers through each level of impact, presenting the various ways that the JCS grant program impacts rippled out beyond the funded projects. Although this report will follow the map across levels from left to right and within levels from top to bottom, it is important to note that the impacts are interrelated. Many grantees identified that the ways the impacts influenced and built upon each other within their programs may have differed slightly from other grant-funded programs.

See below for a full list of grantees & funded projects.



*Grantees and community participants from each of the three workshops*

# Grantees

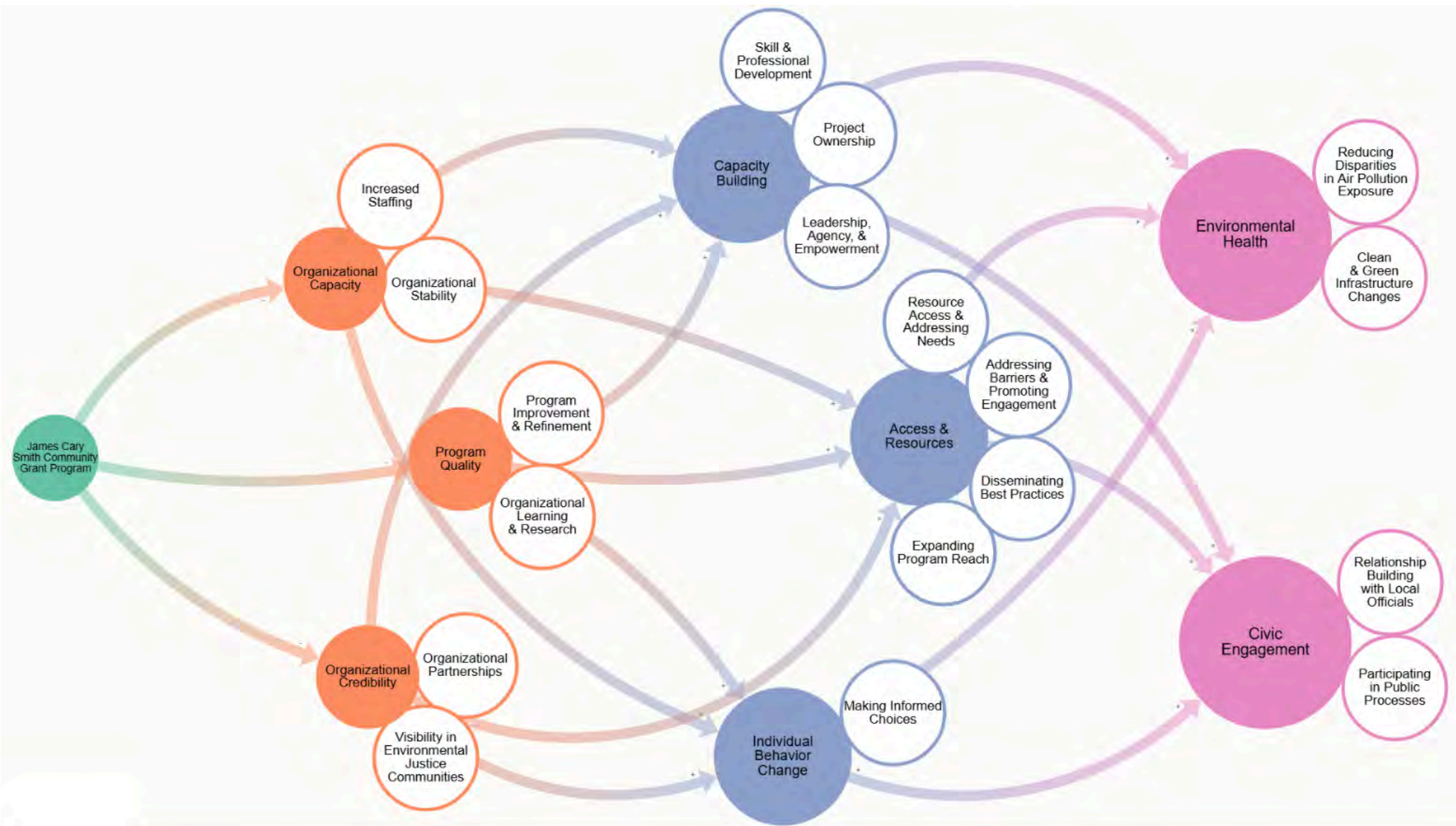
The following 20 grantee organizations participated in the REM workshops and their perspectives are included cumulatively in the Ripple Effect Map.

Organization	JCS Grant Funded Program
<a href="#">Acterra: Action for a Healthy Planet</a>	Raising Awareness of E-Mobility Strategies for Community Action
<a href="#">Bike East Bay</a>	Community Organizing for Mobility Justice
<a href="#">Breathe California of the Bay Area, Golden Gate, and Central Coast</a>	Community Action for Increasing Health Equity
<a href="#">BrightAction Communities</a>	Empowering San Jose Residents to Reduce Air Pollution
<a href="#">Brightline Defense</a>	The Brightline "Our Community, Our Air" Alliance
<a href="#">Citizen Air Monitoring Network</a>	Incentivized learning leading to the internship and workforce development
<a href="#">Earth Team</a>	Youth For Clean Air
<a href="#">International Children Assistance Network</a>	Vietnamese Community Air Quality Ambassadors
<a href="#">La Clínica de La Raza</a>	Air Quality Community Advocates Project
<a href="#">Latinos United for a New America</a>	Approaching Environmental Justice through Education on the East Side



<a href="#">Marin City Climate Resilience</a>	Marin City Air Quality Needs Assessment and Community Engagement
<a href="#">Rise South City</a>	Mobile Pollution Education, Outreach, and Empowerment
<a href="#">San Francisco Transit Riders</a>	30 x 30: The Rapid Rider Network
<a href="#">Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition</a>	Local Teams
<a href="#">Strategic Energy Innovations</a>	Youth Community Advocacy and Action through Energize Schools' Earth Day Challenge and Energy and Air Quality Challenge
<a href="#">Sustainable Contra Costa</a>	East County Clean Air Coalition
<a href="#">Tri-Valley Air Quality Climate Alliance</a>	Ensuring Future Air Quality in the Tri-Valley
<a href="#">Urban Habitat</a>	Improving Environmental Health by Cultivating Community Leaders
<a href="#">Valley Verde</a>	Community Compost Initiative
<a href="#">White Pony Express</a>	Improving Air Quality in Contra Costa County Through Food Rescue

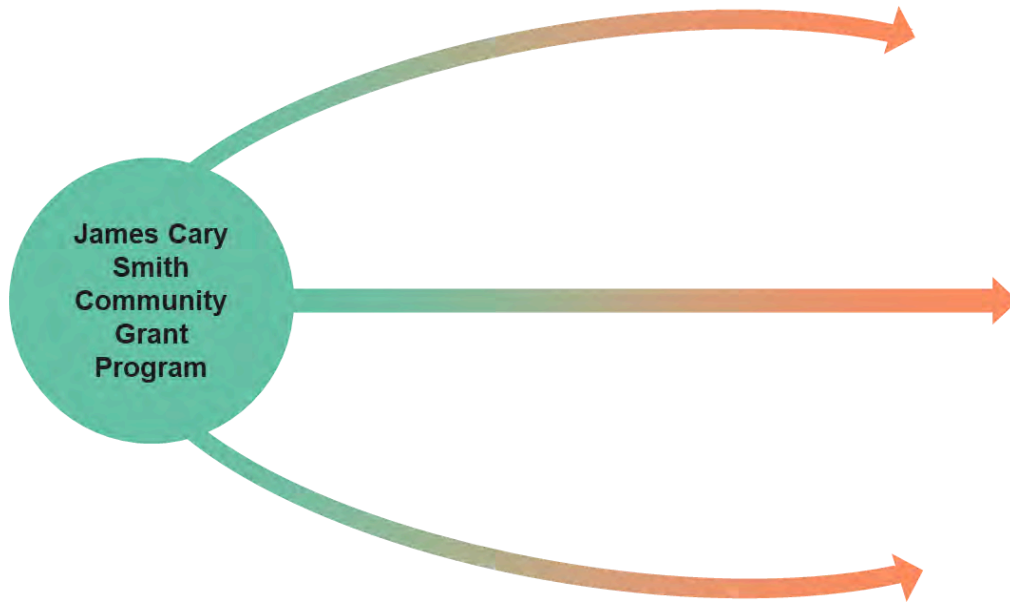




*An online interactive version of this Ripple Effect Map is available by clicking [this hyperlink](#)*

# The James Cary Smith Community Grant Program

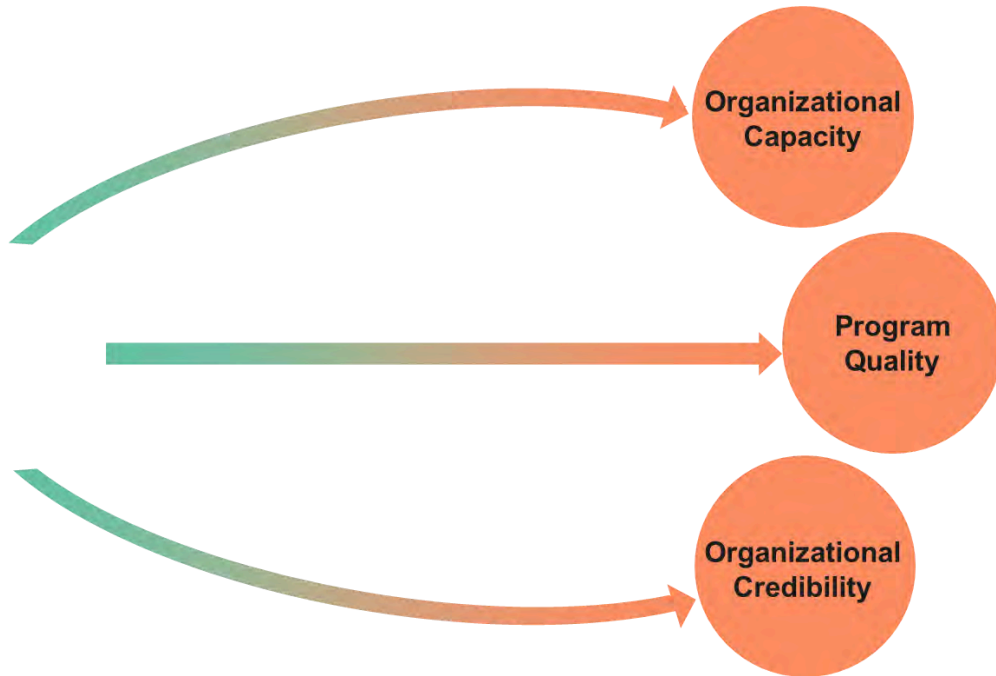
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*The James Cary Smith Community Grant Program is at the core of the Ripple Effect Map. Each level of impact ripples out from the resources the grant program provides to grantees.*

# Organizational Impacts

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*The James Cary Smith Community Grant Program contributes to positive impacts for grantee organizations.*

Through the Ripple Effect Mapping process, grantees identified ways that the JCS program contributed to

- **Organizational Capacity:** JCS grant funds contributed to increased staffing resources and organizational stability for grantees.
- **Program Quality:** Grantees used JCS grant funds to improve and refine their programs and projects and increase organizational learning and research.
- **Organizational Credibility:** Grantees used JCS grant funds to expand collaboration with partners and increase their visibility as trusted partners in Environmental Justice communities.



## Increased Staffing

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With JCS grant funds, many grantees *increased staffing resources* by hiring full-time and/or part-time staff or providing stipends for volunteers, community leaders, and/or interns.

Having financial resources to increase staff capacity **contributed to staff retention.**

Grantees shared that growing and retaining their staff meant that **staff could dedicate more time** for grant-funded programs, **focusing specifically on capacity building for air quality and environmental justice projects.**



# Spotlight

## Increased Staffing



In Years 2 and 3 of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program, grantees used JCS grant funds to increase **staffing resources**

**238**

Individuals\* who were hired or compensated through grant funds and lived within neighborhoods receiving grant-funded services

\* Years 2 and 3 combined

**60%**

Grantees\* hired or supported individuals who live within neighborhoods receiving grant-funded services

\* Year 3

JCS grant funds were used for:

**41**

Full Time  
Jobs

**55**

Part Time  
Jobs

**59**

Roles with  
Stipends

**120**

Paid  
Internships

\* Years 2 and 3 combined



## Organizational Stability

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JCS grant funds contributed to **organizational stability** by increasing **financial sustainability**.

**Multi-year JCS grants** allowed grantees to **improve the continuity of their programs** by weaving in participants, graduates, and other returning stakeholders to their projects. For example, **nearly all grantees** used JCS grant funds to provide stipends to **bring program alumni back to work with new program participants**. Continued participant engagement is another example of sustainable capacity building expanding beyond a single grant program.

Grantees built on their participation in the JCS grant program **to seek new funding opportunities** from federal and state grants, and philanthropic institutions.

# Spotlight

## Organizational Stability



### Grantees leveraged James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to secure additional funding

Eight JCS grantees received a Cycle 5 Community Air Grant from the California Air Resources Board (CARB), intended to “build local capacity, improve air quality, and support community participation in the Community Air Protection Program (CAP Program).” Awards range from a total of \$300,000 to \$500,000 for approximately two years depending on the project type. **This CARB grant award is an example of grantees using their JCS programs to identify and secure additional grant funding** for organizational stability and financial sustainability.

The following JCS grantees received a total of **\$3,498,132** through Community Air Grant Cycle 5 awards from CARB:

- Communities for a Better Environment
- Community Climate Solutions
- Earth Team
- Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice
- Higher Ground Neighborhood Development Corporation
- Rise South City & Coastal Quest
- Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
- San Leandro 2050





## Program Improvement & Refinement

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Over the course of the grant program, grantees used JCS grant funds to *improve and refine their programs and projects*.

Grantees had the organizational resources and staff capacity to **revise and strengthen the quality of capacity building programs**. Changes included adding air quality information to educational materials and implementing **hands-on demonstrations and teaching tools** in community education events or program curricula.

Additionally, grantees made their programs more accessible and responsive to community needs by **tailoring content for youth** or **conducting capacity building activities in more languages**.

Grantees used JCS grant funds to **invest in organizational and program infrastructure**, such as increasing a facility's ability to compost at high volumes and recycle additional paper and cardboard materials. Other JCS grantees created and expanded digital applications that engage community members in their air quality and environmental justice programs.



# Spotlight

## Program Improvement & Refinement



With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Urban Habitat integrated Environmental Justice principles and history in preparing leaders to serve on local Boards and Commissions



*"[We] brought in more experts and were able to incorporate indigenous practices into equitable land use, transportation and housing rights. The [JCS] grant gave us a lot of **space and flexibility to change the curriculum, working with alumni the first year and refining over the next few years...we weren't rushed to get it right the first time.**"*

*- Urban Habitat, REM Workshop 2025*

Urban Habitat's Boards & Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI) **prepares community members to participate in public processes** through intentional co-governance training modules. **Urban Habitat further refined their program over the three-year grant period** to expand environmental justice lessons as well as Indigenous history to prepare community members to serve on public decision-making bodies. Many BCLI participants live in Environmental Justice communities and are now better equipped to address air quality and health disparities by applying an intersectional lens to local governance issues.



## Organizational Learning & Research

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JCS grant funds contributed to many opportunities for *increased organizational learning and research*.

Some grantees conducted **needs assessments** to learn directly from community members about barriers, opportunities, needs, and values. Grantees used this information to improve programs and ensure their goals and priorities are aligned with community members.

Grantees also conducted **evaluation surveys** to better understand what program participants were learning and/or identifying areas for improvement. With such surveys, grantees have been better able to understand their organization's impact.

Grantees also **engaged in professional development opportunities** for staff to learn relevant skills, like community organizing and capacity building, as well as environmental health topics, like vegetative barriers. Staff identified opportunities to **improve their quantitative and qualitative analysis skills** for community health surveys. With JCS grant funds, some grantees engaged external stakeholders and experts to promote their own learning, through activities such as **research-focused partnerships with universities**.

# Spotlight

## Organizational Learning & Research



### Community Climate Solutions used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to continually assess the impact they have on attendees

**Community Climate Solutions** administers **questionnaires** before and after community events as part of their efforts to understand the community's perceptions and concerns about air quality. **Community member feedback is carefully reviewed and used to inform ongoing adaptations and improvements to their presentations**, as well as add crucial information about emerging environmental challenges that the community faces.

#### Key Data from Year 3 program questionnaires:

Three-quarters of survey respondents expressed low ratings of the air quality in their neighborhood. Respondents rated air quality as "so-so" or "poor"

48%

24%

72%

Nearly all survey respondents expressed concern about their health due to pollution in their neighborhoods

90%

Nearly all survey respondents reported increased understanding of air pollution causes and solutions after attending a community educational presentation

94%



## Organizational Partnerships

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Grantees used JCS grant funds to *expand collaboration with a variety of partners*, thereby **increasing the number of community members** they could reach to **promote access to important air quality information**.

Examples of the types of partnerships that developed, which grantees attributed to their participation in the JCS grant program, include:

- **Partnerships & Collaboration with other JCS grantees:** Many grantees participated in the grant program's Grantee Coalition, shared resources with each other, and collaboratively planned and executed joint community events.
- **Partnerships & Collaboration with (non JCS grantee) organizations and city programs:** Some grantees created coalitions in their county/region while others conducted outreach to identify partners in their local vicinity.
- **Bay Air Center:** Many grantees engaged with the Bay Air Center to access resources and experts to hone the focus of their programs, identify evidence-based solutions, and improve their educational materials.
- **Research Partnerships:** Grantees fostered partnerships with research institutions like UC Berkeley, UC Davis, Stanford, and an independent student researcher.



# Spotlight

## Organizational Partnerships



### Sustainable Contra Costa used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to launch the East Bay Clean Air Coalition to harness and strengthen aligned regional efforts

Sustainable Contra Costa identified that numerous organizations were working to address air quality concerns in Antioch, Pittsburg, and Bay Point. Now established, the Coalition is comprised of 45 organizations, **including eight JCS grantees**: Acterra, Earth Team, East Bay Bike Coalition, La Clinica de la Raza, Sustainable Contra Costa, Strategic Energy Innovations, Urban Habitat, and White Pony Express.

#### Coalition current and future efforts:

Community Education to Address Local Air Quality

Resource Sharing Among Coalition Members

Community Dinners & Public Events

Air Quality Bootcamp

Community Needs Assessments

Engage Community Members in Air Quality Research

Prepare Members to Participate in Community Meetings

Sustainable Contra Costa described the Coalition as an effort “to collectively work to improve air quality in Antioch, Pittsburg and Bay Point by coordinating resources and ensuring the interests of local residents are represented.”



## Visibility in Environmental Justice Communities

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With JCS grant funds, **programs expanded and strengthened relationships with communities** and *increased their visibility as trusted partners among their base.*

With increased staff capacity and/or program improvements, grantees strengthened their relationships within existing Environmental Justice communities to **more effectively collaborate with community members to address inequities and protect public health.**

Grantee organizations benefited from these new and strengthened relationships by enhancing partnerships and **increasing overall visibility of their organization among other community-based organizations.**

The JCS grant award and organizational partnerships contributed to a **more prominent reputation and sense of legitimacy** in the broader sector for several grantees. Some grantees received special opportunities since the JCS grant award, such as being invited by city governments to collaborate on programs or having congresspeople come to learn from grantee organizations.

# Spotlight

## Visibility in Environmental Justice Communities



**Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to dedicate staff resources towards intentional base-building among community leaders in East San José, East Palo Alto, and San Mateo County**

“Historically, the environmental and transportation advocacy movements—including the bike advocacy space—have been dominated by more affluent, white, and privileged voices. This funding allowed us to intentionally **shift our focus and dedicate the majority of our advocacy staff time and resources** to building relationships and **supporting advocacy leadership within...communities disproportionately impacted by climate injustice.**”

- Silicon Valley Bike Coalition, August 2025



# Spotlight

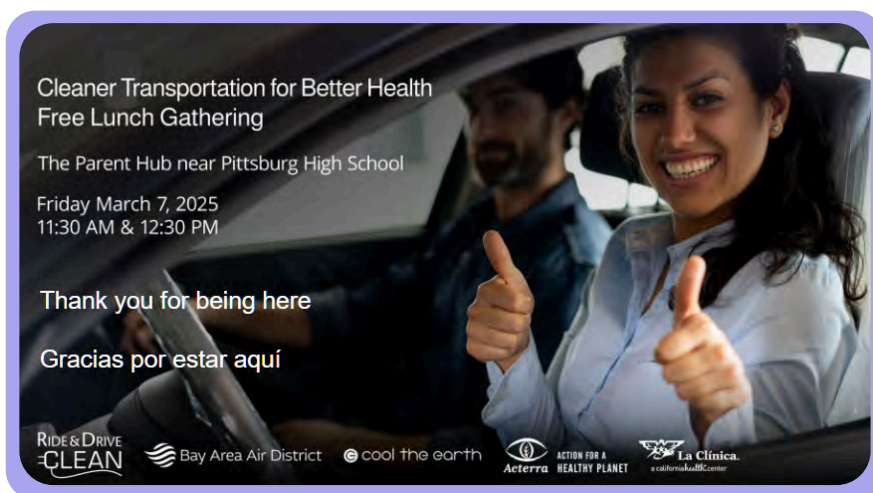
## Visibility in Environmental Justice Communities



### Acterra leveraged James Cary Smith Community Grant funds and partnerships with other grantees to expand the reach of their community events

Acterra partnered with La Clínica, another JCS grantee, and Cool the Earth to hold successful bilingual Spanish/English community events in Pittsburg. Acterra's community events share information on health effects of poor air quality and connections to infrastructure and transportation.

Through their partnership with La Clínica, Acterra refined their outreach materials and programming. They **connected with local community networks** in Pittsburg, including schools and parent hubs, and co-presented events with La Clínica staff, to **ensure community members received the information from trusted community leaders**.



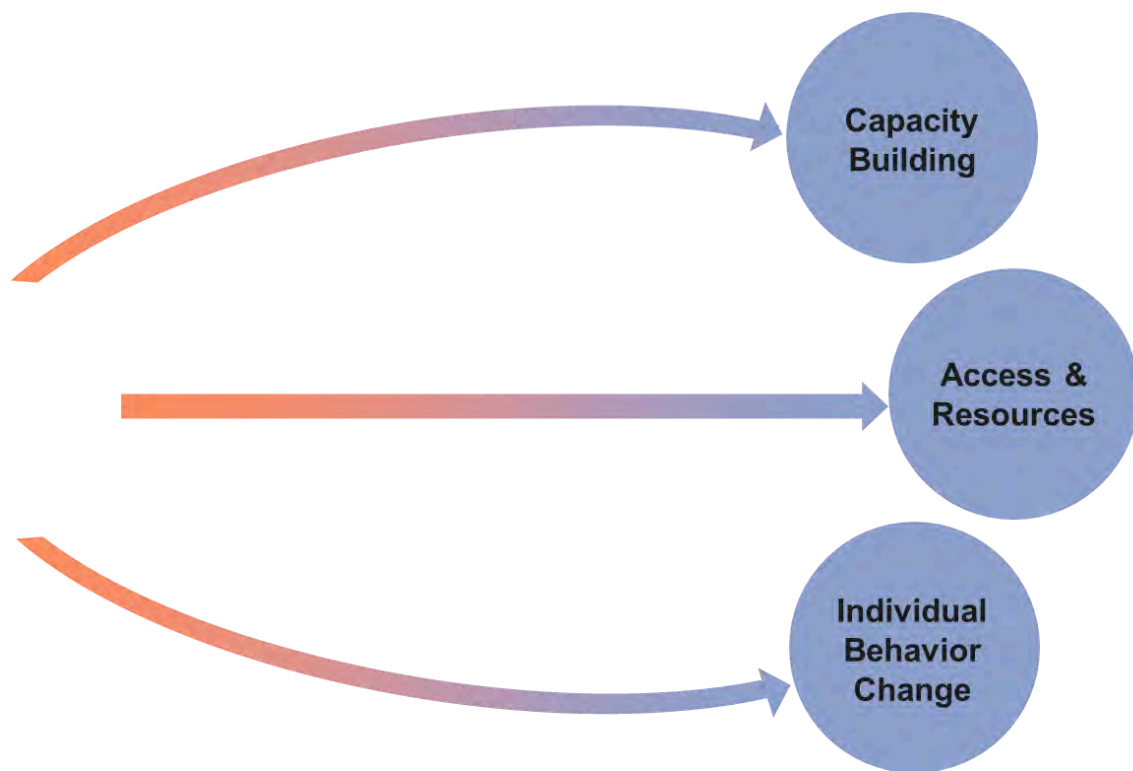
Community event attendees completed Promise to the Planet cards, committing to clean transportation actions to reduce emissions (e.g. test drive an EV or ebike, sign up for tree planting, or commit to using public transit).





# Participant & Community Impacts

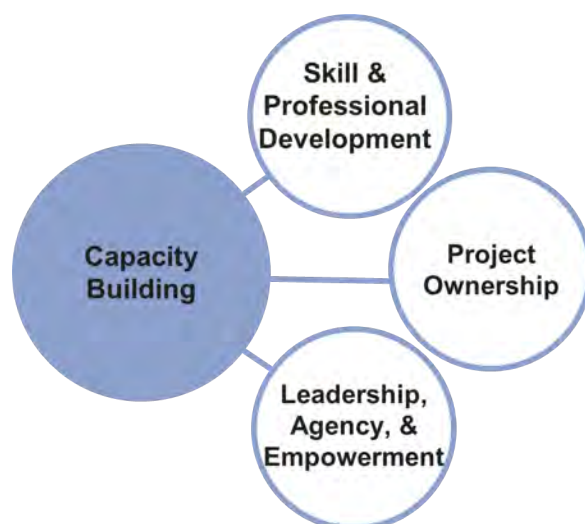
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*The positive impact that the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program has on grantee organizations contributes to changes among participants and communities.*

Through the Ripple Effect Mapping process, grantees identified ways that the JCS program contributed to:

- **Capacity Building:** JCS grant funds contributed to skill and professional development, project ownership, and a sense of leadership, agency, and empowerment among community participants.
- **Access & Resources:** Grantees used JCS grant funds to provide access to resources and address needs, address barriers and promote engagement, disseminate best practices, and expand program reach among participants and within communities.
- **Individual Behavior Change:** Grantees' use of JCS grant funds in programs contributed to program participants and community members being able to make informed choices.



## Skill & Professional Development

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Community participants in JCS grant-funded programs *developed important skills transferable to climate-focused education and professions.*

Many JCS grant-funded programs provide training, preparation, and project-based experiences through addressing local air quality and environmental justice issues. **Such training simultaneously benefits the individual participants as well as the overall grant-funded program**, which are successful due to the efforts and skills of local leaders.

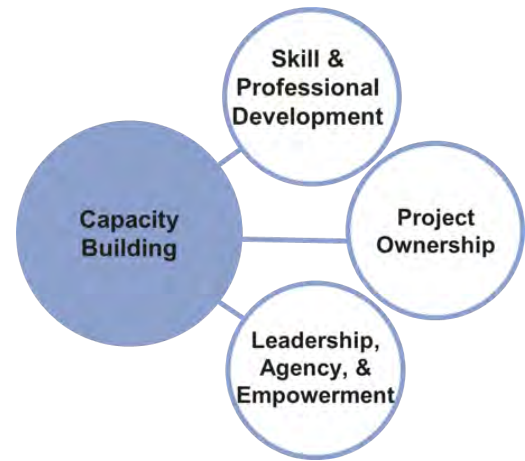
Building participants' skills **is a long-term investment that benefits communities far beyond the life of a grant program.**

**Grantees wove skill development into nearly all JCS-grant funded programs:**

- **Community Education:** Developing Promotores, Community Health Workers, and peer educators
- **Base-building and Outreach:** Preparing volunteers for door-knocking, tabling at community fairs, and communicating about air quality
- **Independent Projects:** Launching independent volunteer-based efforts that enhance air quality and/or addressed critical air quality-related issues

# Spotlight

## *Skill & Professional Development*



**Breathe CA used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to provide 48 Emerging Community Leaders (ECLs) with extensive training**

*Notably, past ECLs sustained these skills, returning to support training of new ECLs*

### ***Facilitating Community Education - Training Topics:***

- Conducting community outreach
- Identifying community stakeholders
- Leading door-knocking campaigns
- Planning, preparing, and executing community events
- Public speaking and presentations

### ***Conducting Evaluations - Training Topics:***

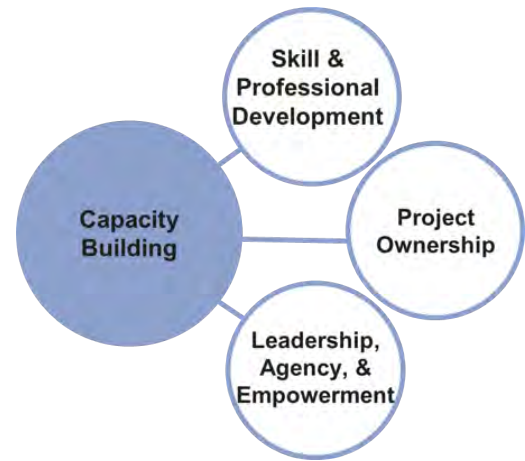
- Collecting qualitative data
- Analyzing qualitative data
- Conducting needs assessments
- Facilitating focus groups
- Logic models



These **trainings proved essential** as **ECLs collected 202 surveys, facilitated a focus group with 15 participants, and analyzed the data** as part of a needs assessment for addressing community members' primary air quality concerns.

# Spotlight

## *Skill & Professional Development*



**Marin City Climate Resilience used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to prepare participants of the Summer Youth Environmental Science Academy with critical skills and professional development in Environmental Justice leadership.**

MCCR emphasizes youth education and engagement as both a process and an outcome. The Youth Environmental Science Academy engaged youth a variety of hands-on projects throughout 2024 & 2025:



- **Research & Learning:** conducted research about health issues stemming from poor air quality, air quality monitors, hazardous sites and highway pollution, and eco-design, as well as career paths related to air quality and the environment



- **Needs Assessment:** conducted a needs assessment of Marin City by collecting more than 100 surveys and 15 Key Informant Interviews



- **Community Education:** led door-knocking campaigns, gave presentations for community groups, and shared information at health fairs



- **Solutions:** integrated findings from research and needs assessment and focused their efforts on applying for money for air filters; worked with Hyphae Design Labs, the Bay Air Center, and UC Berkeley Professor Dr. Ivey to design and model an ecological-vegetation barrier which could mitigate some of the poor air quality impacts of the highway in their community



## Project Ownership

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Through grant-funded programs, community participants *took ownership over projects*, which demonstrates the impact of **investing in the capacity building and development of local leaders** who promote environmental justice efforts beyond the reach of a single program or organization.

Many community participants **led projects independently in the community**. For example, Promotores and “Ambassadors” organized and led educational sessions throughout numerous Bay Area communities. Other participants planned and led their own tree planting events in neighborhoods and organized volunteers for other community-based projects.

In numerous grant programs, **past participants returned to work with and developed current program participants**, demonstrating the expanding ripples of capacity building.

**Young leaders in school-based programs shared information and lesson content among their peers**, ultimately educating even more youth about air quality and climate change. Relatedly, as a result of the free curriculum and tools provided to educators, **teachers continued teaching about air quality and environmental justice beyond the grant-funded programs**. By taking ownership over these initiatives, youth and teachers alike increase community capacity to address environmental and health concerns.



# Spotlight

## *Project Ownership*



### With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Citizen Air Monitoring Network trained more than 45 Clean Air Ambassadors to mobilize community members in improving air quality

When community members raised concerns about a concrete facility in Vallejo, a **Clean Air Ambassador successfully led their own initiative to document, spread information, and organize others to bring the issue to the attention of the Air District.** The Air District conducted an investigation and administered a violation and cease-and-desist order to the facility.



**"Clean Air Ambassadors" successfully brought regulatory attention to an unpermitted concrete facility harming the air quality in their neighborhood, securing the facility's closure.**

Citizen Air Monitoring Network (CAMN) trained and paired Ambassadors with mentors and provided each a stipend. CAMN has found that the Ambassador training successfully nurtured environmental justice leaders and fostered deep engagement. Overall, Ambassadors have led important awareness and education efforts in the community, including an initiative to address odors from a waste treatment facility. Another Ambassador was hired as staff, demonstrating how **grant-funded programs can build capacity and cultivate local leadership that continues beyond the grant period.**

# Spotlight

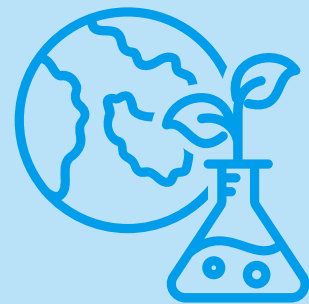
## *Project Ownership*



**With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Strategic Energy Innovations helped more than 150 students launch 40+ Environmental Justice & Sustainability campaigns**

**Students demonstrated effective project management skills to move through SEI's three-pronged campaign approach:**

- Learn about environmental justice issues and air quality
- Learn how to use the CalEnviroScreen tool to understand disparate air quality impacts, and
- Envision and launch a sustainability campaign.



Additionally, **individual teachers independently oversaw** all of the 2025 grand prize winning campaigns, **demonstrating the importance of investing in educators' knowledge and capacity** around air quality, environmental justice, and quantitative data.



## Leadership, Agency, & Empowerment

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JCS grant-funded projects contributed to participants' ever-expanding *leadership, agency, and empowerment*.

Based on their observations and participant surveys, grantees assessed that participants experienced numerous benefits related to capacity building:

- **Confidence for self advocacy and civic participation** within families & home life, programs, among community groups, and in public processes
- **Inspiration** for improving air quality
- **Motivation** for participating in and leading environmental justice efforts
- High levels of civic and program **engagement**
- **Feeling supported** by program staff and participants

Participants formed meaningful relationships with each other growing their own professional and social **networks** and organically sparking **mentoring** relationships.

# Spotlight

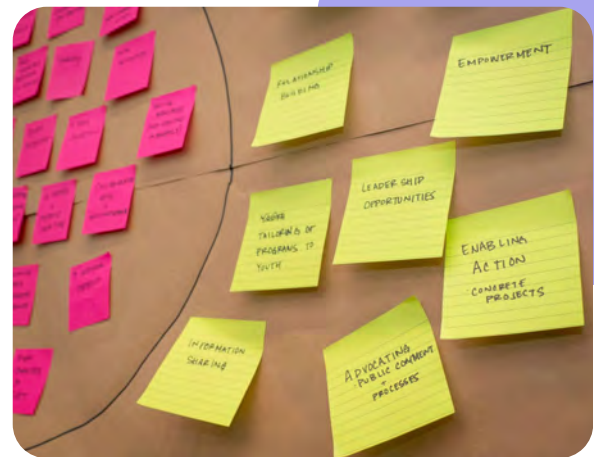
## Project Ownership



**James Cary Smith Community Grant program participants contributed their leadership and knowledge to evaluation efforts through Ripple Effect Mapping workshops**

Participants of JCS-funded programs shared their direct experience of grantees' capacity building efforts and provided insight into the impacts they witnessed in their community and environment during **Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) workshops**.

A key theme elevated frequently throughout each of the workshops was how participants of grant-funded programs **expanded their own sense of empowerment and took on leadership opportunities within projects**.



“[Brightline's] training sessions have been a success...[they] are preparing us to educate our community.”  
- Brightline program participant, REM workshop 2025

“One of the most impactful experiences was the connection with the roots and ancestors in this country...We have connections with people who have suffered with this problem, it makes us want to be leaders so we can change things.”  
- Urban Habitat program participant, REM workshop 2025



## Resource Access & Addressing Needs

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Many participants benefitted from JCS-funded programs because they *received concrete resources that addressed their needs*, enabling them to change and maintain **air quality improvement-focused behaviors** as individuals or with their families.

Grantees **distributed resources** to community members, including:

- Air filters
- Bikes and safety equipment
- Induction cooktops
- Incentives for electric vehicles
- Rebates for battery-powered equipment
- Referrals for mold abatement and indoor air quality resources
- Transit passes



# Spotlight

## Resource Access & Addressing Needs



**With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, International Children Assistance Network co-hosted an induction cooktop workshop for the Vietnamese community**

*ICAN held a cooking workshop with Vietnamese Top Chef alum Tú David Phu, in partnership with the Santa Clara Office of Sustainability.*

Chef Tu demonstrated how he makes fried rice using an induction cooktop, addressing the need for culturally-relevant ways to support the transition from gas to induction cooktops for the Vietnamese community to improve the indoor air quality in their homes.

ICAN also connected workshop participants to resources and rebates for personal induction cooktops, including a program via the city of San José that loans induction cooktops to households for trial periods.





## Addressing Barriers & Promoting Engagement

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Grantees addressed barriers to participation so that **more community members could participate in grant-funded programs** compared to prior years.

Grantees increased participation for **youth** and **Spanish- and Vietnamese-speaking** community members by holding events in accessible locations and languages. Grantees also addressed barriers to participation by providing **stipends, incentives, and meals** to participants.

# Spotlight

## Addressing Barriers & Promoting Engagement



With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Brightline co-designed Spanish “Air Quality 101” workshops held in the Tenderloin



Brightline and La Voz Latina developed workshop content that was relevant to the audience, addressing barriers to ensure that Single Room Occupancy (SRO) residents, people with chronic respiratory conditions, and monolingual Spanish speakers were able to fully participate.

This partnership enabled Brightline to ***get essential information to more residents of SROs, who are often more impacted by poor air quality than people in other housing environments*** but who face barriers to improving indoor air quality.

Brightline reports that their collaboration with La Voz and the Tenderloin Museum, as well as Central City SRO Collaborative, has helped them ***provide air purifiers and in-language workshops on air quality and local governance to 600 people.***



## Disseminating Best Practices

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Grantees *disseminated capacity-building best practices and program materials*, demonstrating **how the investment of JCS grant funds into capacity building efforts spreads environmental justice strategies beyond the grantee network.**

**The JCS grant program provided opportunities for grantees to share materials with each other** via quarterly JCS Grantee Coalition meetings on Zoom, a Grantee Resource Library, and individual meetings.

Grantees also shared best practices and materials from their JCS-funded programs **with their broader networks**, including studies and needs assessments, community education informational materials and curricula, and air quality data and monitoring resources. Grantees reduced duplicative efforts among partners with similar focus areas, allowing each organization to continue **strengthening program materials** rather than starting anew.

# Spotlight

## Disseminating Best Practices



### The Inaugural James Cary Smith Community Grantee Coalition enabled grantees to form meaningful partnerships and leverage tools to enhance Environmental Justice efforts

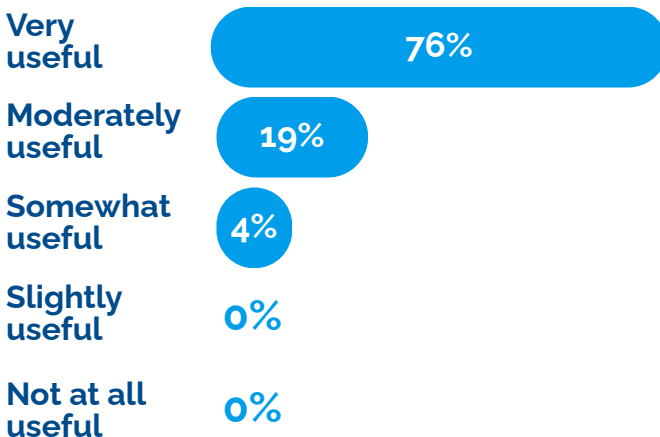
The inaugural JCS Community Grantee Coalition arose from grantees recognizing each others' valuable experiences and strategies and identifying a need for more collaboration. After a successful "peer learning session," a few grantee representatives organized ongoing opportunities for **sharing best practices and materials, thought partnership, and problem solving.**

Several grantees contributed substantive time to organizing and strengthening the Coalition. Many grantees, such as Rise South City, **leveraged their community organizing expertise** to set the direction for the group, identify topics and presenters, and be responsive to the group's feedback after each session.

***"I'm deeply proud of the collaboration that emerged through the JCS Grantee Coalition - a true testament to the power of community-driven work and shared learning."***

*- Julio Garcia, Executive Director at Rise South City*

**For the 7 sessions, three-quarters of participants rated the sessions as "very useful"**



### Session Topics

- Coalition Vision
- Identifying Opportunities for Grantee Partnerships
- Grantee Roundtables & Networking: Learnings, Effective Partnerships, Case Studies
- Public Funding Opportunities & Community Investments Office Overview
- Climate Change & Bay Area Regional Climate Action Plan(s)
- Disaster Preparedness
- Bay Air Center Overview





## Expanding Program Reach

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Grantees *expanded the reach of their programs to more people compared to past years* with JCS grant funds, ensuring that **more community members in Environmental Justice communities benefit** from essential air quality information and capacity building opportunities.

Perhaps most notably, **seven grantees employed leadership development models** – such as Train-the-Trainers, Community Action Model, and Promotores or Community Health Workers – to invest JCS grant funds in the capacity building of local, trusted community members who in turn reached hundreds of others. Relatedly, at last four organizations used JCS grant funds to **compensate youth and young adult interns for participating in leadership development and training**. By investing in community leaders, grantees were able to **advance base-building for their organization** and expand the organization's overall impact.

Many grantees expanded **programs into new communities** by:

- **Doorknocking in Environmental Justice neighborhoods** to engage community members
- **Forming partnerships with more schools** than previous years
- **Forming partnerships with neighborhood associations** and other hyperlocal groups with whom they were not previously partnering
- **Expanding programs into new cities** for regional impact

In addition, some programs enhanced and grew their infrastructure; for example, Valley Verde increased the amount of compost that could be processed at their site in Santa Clara County, and **reached more community members as a result**.

# Spotlight

## Expanding Program Reach



**La Clínica invested James Cary Smith Community Grant funds into the leadership development and capacity building of Promotores who supported outreach and community education efforts at numerous health and resource fairs.**



Promotores provided vital health information to their fellow community members about respiratory health, how to reduce exposure to pollutants in the home, and how to mitigate risks associated with pesticides. Promotores also provided air filters to families managing asthma and other respiratory conditions.

As part of their training, Promotores used the 'PhotoVoice' technique to learn about, document, and communicate the impacts of poor air quality in their communities.

*"I've lived in Pittsburg for 5 years near Downtown Pittsburg. Almost every day it smells bad, of burning, of chemicals, no matter what time of year. Together with my daughters, we made air quality measurements, it was always bad. They talk about cars and cigarettes, but we see this every day. I wonder if anyone really knows the emissions we have, and what's more, if anyone cares that the incidence of diseases and asthma grow "spontaneously", it is like looking and looking the other way and pretending that nothing happens."*

- PhotoVoice project from Promotore, 2025





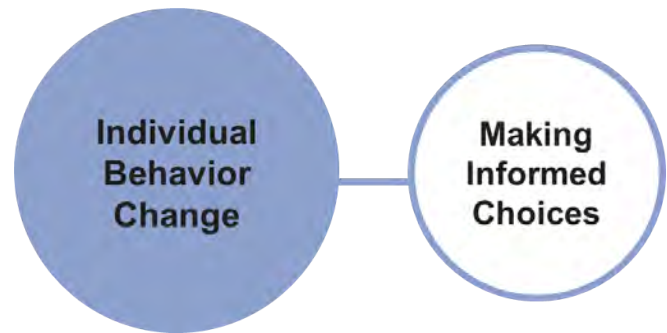
## Spotlight

### *Expanding Program Reach*

**Tri-Valley Air Quality Climate Alliance used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to grow the skills of their staff and expanded the organization's reach among K-12 schools.**

With the support of JCS grant funds, Tri-Valley Air Quality Climate Alliance (TVAQCA) **expanded their program into local schools.** The organization's Schools Outreach Director pursued training on the Miyawaki method of creating "Pocket Forests", an innovative community-led intervention to improve local air quality. **As a result of the staff development in this area of expertise, the Livermore Valley Joint Unified School District reached out to TVAQCA** to develop the Christensen Middle School Pocket Forest using the Miyawaki method, incorporating community participation, native plant information, and climate proactivity in programs that expanded their reach into new school communities.





## Making Informed Choices

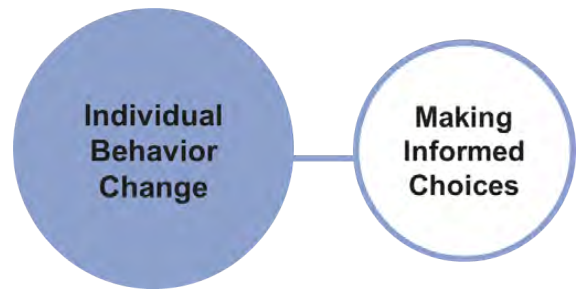
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Community members who participated in grant-funded programs often *changed their behaviors* as a result of the programming, education or information they received in ways that **supported their overall health** and **reduced carbon footprints** in both homes and local businesses.

Grantees and participants described:

- Accessing **healthcare** for asthma and lung-related concerns
- Increasing use of **green transportation**, such as biking and public transit
- Purchasing **electric vehicles**
- Installing and using **electric appliances** instead of indoor gas stoves
- Using **indoor air filters**
- Starting **composting** at home and encouraging others to compost

Participating in **food recovery** efforts to **reduce greenhouse gas emissions** and increase food security



## Spotlight

### *Making Informed Choices*

With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Bike East Bay launched their Transportation & Environmental Justice Clubs

60

Students

3

High Schools in Contra  
Costa County

The Club was accessible to Spanish-speaking students and Bike East Bay provided bikes, helmets, locks, and other supplies at no cost.

**Bike East Bay prepared students to make informed choices** about choosing eco-friendly transit options and addressing factors that contribute to environmental justice issues

**Skill enhancement through training, group rides, and repair classes**



**Increased comfort using bicycles as their regular transportation**



**Promoted bicycle transportation among their families and communities**

Students learned the history of redlining policies and historical disinvestment in communities, which influenced the information they presented to public bodies, including Concord City Council, Concord Pedestrian Advisory Committee, East Bay Parks, and the Contra Costa Water District





Individual  
Behavior  
Change

Making  
Informed  
Choices

## Spotlight

### *Making Informed Choices*

#### **With James Cary Smith Community Grant funds, Valley Verde expanded composting programs**

Valley Verde engages community members around reducing food waste, improving soil health, and reducing overall carbon footprints. They **provide participants education and supplies for home composting**, and many have begun gardening at home.

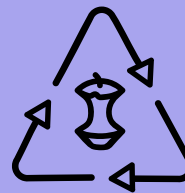
*Since 2023, the Compost Hub has*



**Distributed 550 lbs of  
finished compost**



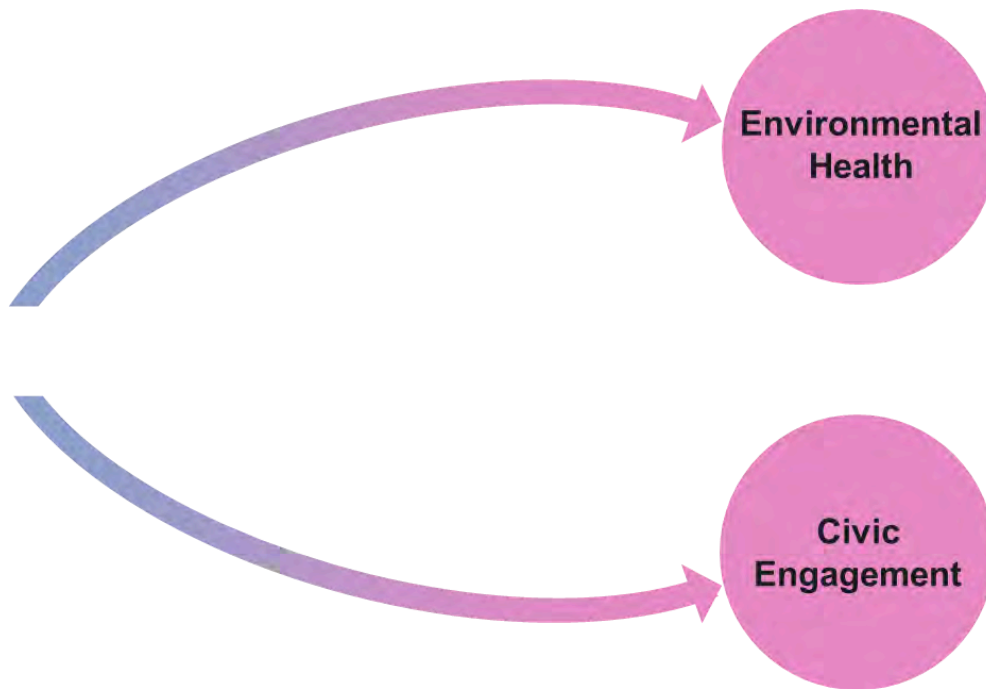
**Collected 1,550 gallons  
(3,600 lbs) of food waste**



Valley Verde's Community Compost Hub allows households to drop off food waste and pick up compost for their gardens. The hub has **increased interest from companies, schools, and local scout troops** in addressing food waste, and has **made composting accessible to households who may not be able to compost in their own spaces.**

# Environment & System Impacts

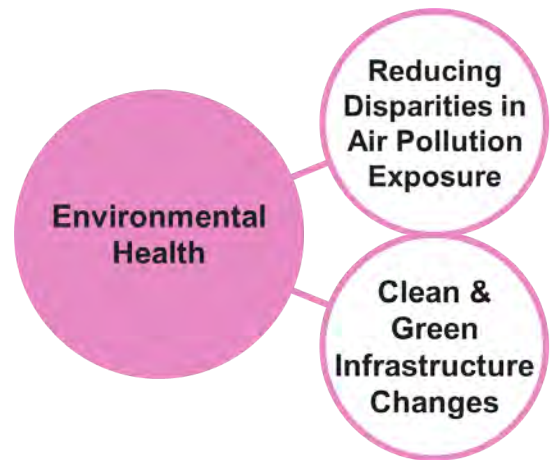
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*Impacts from the JCS Community Grant Program ripple out to the environment and system levels.*

Through the Ripple Effect Mapping process, grantees identified ways that the JCS program contributed to:

- **Environmental Health:** JCS grant funds contributed to clean and green infrastructure changes and reduced disparities in air pollution exposure.
- **Civic Engagement:** Grantees used JCS grant funds to increase relationship building with local officials and participation in public processes.



## Reducing Disparities in Air Pollution

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JCS grant-funded programs engaged a variety of stakeholders to *address disparities in air quality and pollution exposure* across Environmental Justice communities in the Bay Area.

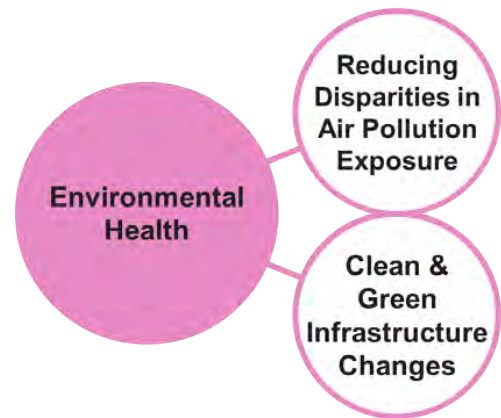
JCS grantees conducted research, organized volunteers, and developed systems to **take concrete action towards improving air quality** in communities overburdened by pollution. Examples include:

- Engaging community volunteers or Promotores to **increase local tree canopy**
- **Reducing greenhouse gas emissions** by promoting access to electric vehicles, increasing use of sustainable transit (e.g., buses, bikes), and reducing food waste while increasing composting.
- **Reducing secondhand smoke exposure in public parks.**

In addition, the increased staff capacity, organizational credibility, and other organization-level impacts meant grantees were well-positioned to participate in the distribution of air filters through a separate [Air District program](#), thereby supporting residents in Environmental Justice communities to improve their indoor air quality.

# Spotlight

## *Reducing Disparities in Air Pollution Exposure*

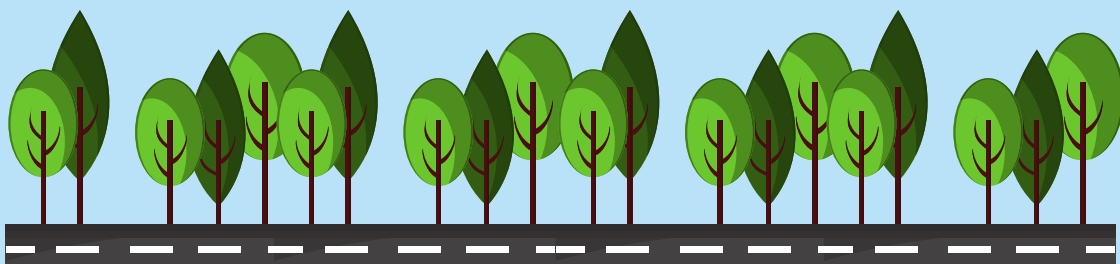


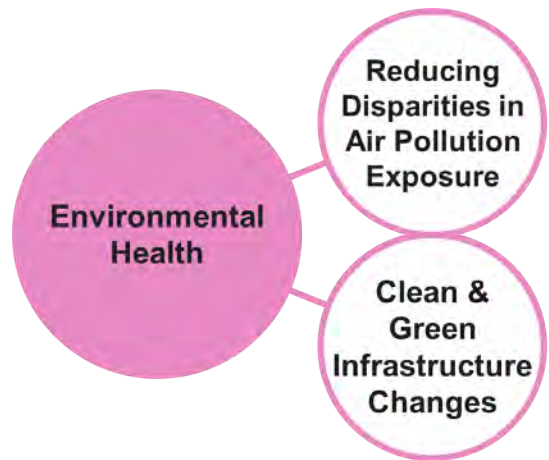
### **LUNA invested James Cary Smith Community Grant funds into multi-year leadership development and community capacity building to reduce disparities in air pollution exposure**

Through tree planting at the small scale, combined with education and capacity building, LUNA and community leaders are moving the needle on tree canopy infrastructure development in East San José.

- Environmental Justice Academy participants were prepared to lead their own civic engagement efforts, such as building planters from unused tires and leading tree planting events
- Promotores were trained on interpreting air quality data for educational and awareness initiatives
- LUNA and community leaders researched the benefits of developing vegetative barriers to improve air quality around key highways
- LUNA and team have secured a commitment from Canopy-Certified Community Forestry School to accommodate monolingual Spanish speaking community leaders

**Together, these investments will have a cascading effect of increasing tree canopy infrastructure to address poor air quality in one of the highest-impacted Environmental Justice communities in the Bay Area.**





## Clean & Green Infrastructure Changes

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JCS grant-funded programs have positively impacted the local environment through *developing and enhancing local infrastructure* that address common air pollution issues.

JCS-funded programs contributed positively to **enhancing green transit infrastructure and reducing greenhouse gas emissions:**

- Additional, safer bike lanes
- Improved access to public transit
- Increased Electric Vehicle (EV) charging in multifamily units
- Increased maintenance reports to cities to address potholes and road hazards

JCS-funded programs **addressed air quality hazards in the built environment:**

- Prevented millions of pounds of greenhouse gas production by expanding food recovery program
- Reduced utilization of gas-powered landscaping equipment
- Supported efforts to phase out leaded aviation fuel at local airports
- Collaborated with residents and researchers to address odor sources at a wastewater treatment plant



# Spotlight

## *Clean & Green Infrastructure Changes*



*In year three of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program*  
**White Pony Express...**

**Prevented**

**8,433  
metric  
tons**

**Greenhouse Gas  
Emissions**

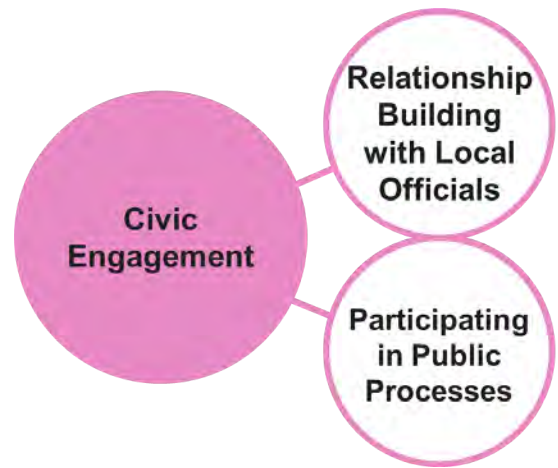
**Redistributed**

**5,209,425  
pounds**

**Rescued  
Food**

White Pony Express also **raised awareness and educated thousands of community members** about the impact of food recovery and the environmental consequences of food waste, **mobilizing community volunteers** to collect food from restaurants and other purveyors. Building off nearly a decade of successful efforts to reduce food waste, White Pony Express used JCS grant funds to develop a digital application that increased communication between food donors and volunteers, increasing the overall capacity and impact of the Food Rescue Hero program.





## Relationship Building with Local Officials

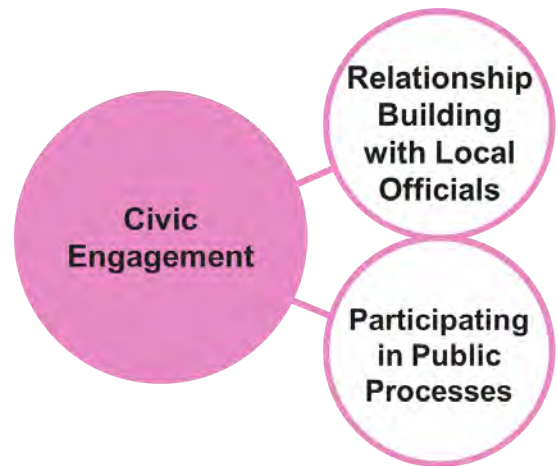
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As a result of capacity building programs, grantees and community members have *shared information and educated local leaders about air quality*. The increased visibility and credibility of JCS-funded organizations has resulted in public sector **leaders seeking out grantees' knowledge and expertise** on air quality as well as **receiving presentations about local needs and concerns**.

The ripple effects of organizational-level and participant/community-level impacts contribute directly to the connections grantees have formed with local leaders. **By engaging local leaders in air quality and environmental justice, grantees can advance system-level impacts** that contribute to enduring change.

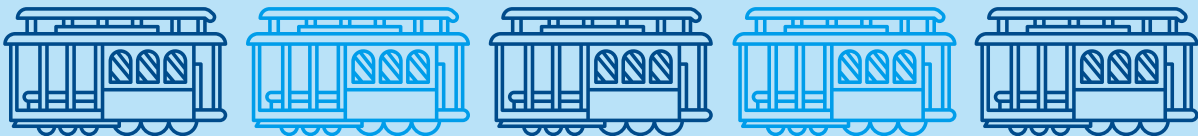
## Spotlight

### *Relationship Building with Local Officials*

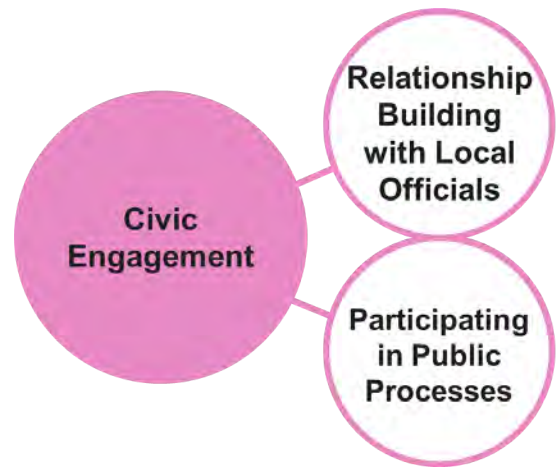


#### **San Francisco Transit Riders used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to build relationships with local officials**

Throughout the first two years of the program, JCS grant funds contributed to increased staff capacity for San Francisco Transit Riders (SFTR), allowing them to have a continuous presence and strengthened relationships in the Bayview Hunters Point community.



After conducting a thorough transit needs assessment – including engaging 262 residents, interviewing 30 respondents, and forming partnerships with 21 community-situated organizations – **SFTR shared the community needs survey results with local leaders.** SFTR was able to build upon organizational-level impacts to engage and develop the capacity of community-based leaders to **generate a better understanding of the infrastructure needs of the Bayview Hunters Point neighborhoods.**



## Participating in Public Processes

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A core goal of grantees' JCS-funded capacity building programs has been to *increase civic engagement* by enhancing community members' abilities to participate in public processes.

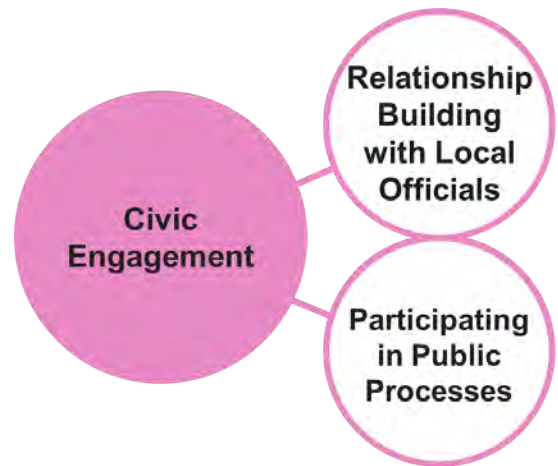
Examples of participation in public processes include:

- **Attending meetings to share their perspectives** with government agencies, such as departments of transportation
- **Reporting hazardous conditions**, like odors and potholes, using publicly-available tools
- **Sharing community survey results with local leaders**
- **Sharing air quality information** and **student presentations** to city councils, city commissions, and school boards

Capacity building is an investment in **community members' ability to sustain efforts for system-level change beyond the period of the grant program**, thereby **increasing the presence, voice, and efficacy of members of Environmental Justice communities** in policymaking spaces.

# Spotlight

## *Participating in Public Processes*



### **Earth Team used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to build the skills of high school interns in Antioch, Pittsburg, and San Leandro**

Students developed their research and public speaking skills to engage in public processes and advance environmental justice causes.



#### **Earth Team interns:**

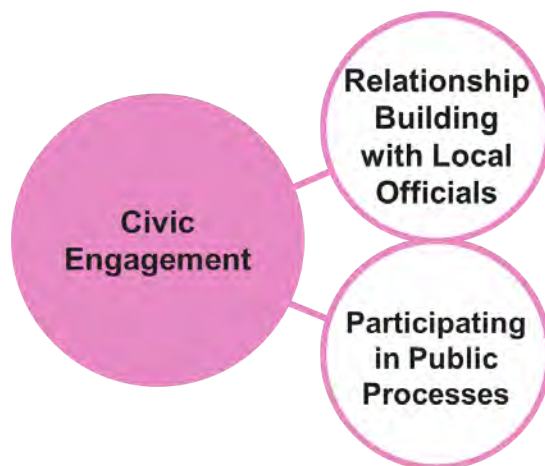
- Presented air quality information to the Antioch Council of Teens
- Participated in school district board meetings in San Leandro and Pittsburg
- Hosted an air quality workshop for Pittsburg Youth Advisory Commissioners
- Attended city council meetings in Antioch and Pittsburg
- Organized Youth for Clean Air projects





# Spotlight

## *Participating in Public Processes*



Urban Habitat used James Cary Smith Community Grant funds to improve their Boards and Commissions Leadership Institute (BCLI), enhancing the capacity of emerging leaders from low-income communities to serve on the boards and commissions that make decisions affecting their communities.



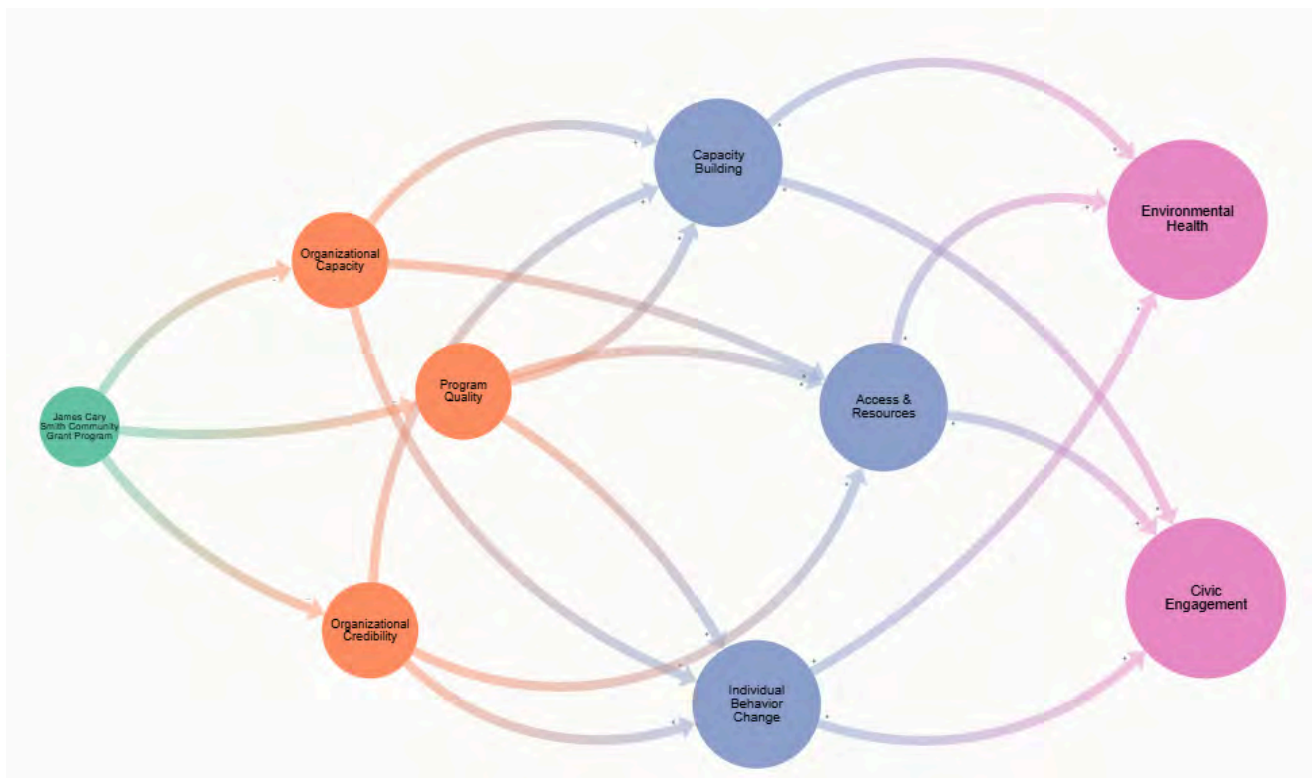
Urban Habitat provides ongoing support to alumni after participating in BCLI to ensure participants are successful in their new roles, many of whom are seated on Environmental justice-oriented commissions. **In Years 2 and 3 of the JCS Community Grant program, Urban Habitat celebrated 35 graduated fellows.**



# Conclusion

The experiences of capacity building among JCS-funded organizations continue to ripple out beyond any single grant program, paving the way for increased authentic community participation in planning activities across the Bay Area.

The impacts across grantees, program participants, community members, the environment, and broader systems are interrelated and often influence and build upon one another in unique ways across each program. Grantee organizations themselves benefit from increased staffing resources and program investments which, in turn, makes them able to reach a wider audience and deepen partnerships. Partnerships also enhance organizational capacity and program quality in a positive feedback loop. Capacity building efforts increase the accessibility of clean air resources and the promotion of best practices across communities so that grantees, their partners, and program participants are able to take action to improve environmental health, reduce disparities, and increase civic engagement.



Through this participatory approach to evaluation, it has become clear that investing multiyear, adaptive grant funds alongside technical assistance in local, trusted community organizations can build the capacity within and among Environmental Justice communities to address air pollution and promote civic engagement in public processes.