

Salton Sea Management Program

Draft Public Engagement Plan

Last revised 10/2/19

This document outlines a conceptual approach and a roadmap for engaging local communities in the planning and implementation of the Salton Sea Management Program. It describes the current context, high-level components of the engagement process, proposed tracks and tactics, and a summary of near-term next steps.

Current Context

- The Newsom Administration is committed to addressing air quality and ecological threats at the Salton Sea. The sea's ongoing decline and exposure of playa affect thousands of residents, many of whom suffer from serious respiratory issues.
- The California Natural Resources Agency is working with the Department of Water Resources and the Department of Fish and Wildlife to plan and implement projects as part of the Salton Sea Management Program, a 10-year plan that prioritizes construction of dust suppression and habitat projects on exposed playa and areas expected to be exposed by 2028.
- Project delivery is behind schedule, and communities around the sea have expressed concern with the state's lack of progress to date. Community members also have expressed interest in seeing community amenities such as recreation and access to the sea incorporated into project design.
- The state team is intensely focused on moving projects forward, starting with the 3,770-acre Species Conservation Habitat (SCH) project at the southern end of the sea in the New River area. Site access issues were resolved in May 2019, and the state is moving forward with the contracting process to complete project design and construction. The project is scheduled to be completed by the end of 2023.
- Beyond the SCH, the state team is developing plans for additional habitat projects near the Alamo and Whitewater rivers and for about 15,000 acres of other dust suppression projects.

Engagement Purpose and Intended Outcome

- The state team seeks to work with local leaders and community members to build a long-term, respectful approach to engage with Salton Sea community members, listen to their ideas and concerns and incorporate local input into the state's process and decisions where possible.
- The overarching intended outcome is to:
 - Keep community members informed
 - Establish clear expectations about the state's process to plan and implement projects at the sea as well as a transparent community engagement process
 - Design projects that incorporate community input and help meet community needs in conjunction with the state requirements to mitigate dust and create habitat
 - Potentially create long-term community buy-in for work at the Salton Sea.

Key Elements of Proposed Approach

- Commit to meaningful and sustained community engagement effort
- Acknowledge deficiencies in state's past community involvement and demonstrate long-term commitment to improve and work together on issues important to the community
- Provide a roadmap for community engagement with clear feedback loops so community members can understand how their input is addressed

- Present information in clear and accessible formats
- Establish a consistent state presence at the sea and explore office / staff facilities that can meet both state and community needs
- Dedicate a person for outreach and engagement
- Utilize regular venues or events for the community to engage with the state team
- Prioritize opportunities to use local work force in project implementation
- Use community input to develop one or more pilot projects that can provide amenities to residents in the short term while larger projects are designed and potentially use participatory budgeting
- Utilize youth ambassadors to reach communities on specific projects and engagement opportunities, when possible
- Partner with community groups to bring engagement opportunities to community members where they are (i.e., pop-up events, kiosks, etc.)
- Identify early “good faith” actions to build trust
- Create specific community advisory committees and engagement strategies for each major project during the concept stage
- Identify annual or per-project budget for community engagement
- Ensure inclusion of RFP language that requires design-build contractors to continue community engagement throughout design and construction

Proposed Community Engagement Approach

The community engagement process is envisioned along three interrelated tracks, each with a main objective and specific tactics.

Engagement Tracks

Track	Objective	Structure / Tactics	Role
Community Leadership	Engage leaders of local community groups to get input and leverage outreach through their communications channels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use SSMP Engagement Committee as primary venue • Convene regular meetings near the sea to provide forum for updates • Solicit input on topics / issues of concern • Identify needs for materials, collaterals, graphics, etc. • Develop schedule for community engagement meetings • Use newsletters, listservs and other channels maintained by groups to extend reach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure coordination and inclusions • Identify priority topics • Provide knowledge and insight into community needs • Help advise / shape broader community engagement effort • Address longer term needs

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify pilot project(s) • Recruit youth ambassadors 	
Local Experts Group	Provide expert local input, perspectives on solutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experts identified by community leaders (e.g., in areas of technical, socioeconomic, or public health) • Receive guidance from and report back to Engagement Committee • Participate in public outreach (to provide community perspective on progress) 	☑ Work with Engagement Committee on priority topics related to air quality, project design, workforce, recreation, etc.
Community Engagement	Familiarize community with SSMP and specific projects, and gather input on priorities, concerns and ideas to help shape specific projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes place in a variety of locations and formats • Work with community groups • Create Community Advisory Groups for each major project • Establish feedback loop so residents can see how their input is being used • Develop mechanisms to provide regular updates to community members • Establish state presence / point of contact for community members • Incorporate input from Engagement Committee and Local Experts Group when possible 	☑ Community engagement on SSMP and specific projects to inform project design and implementation

Near-Term Next Steps in the Process

1. Share SSMP Draft Community Engagement Plan with working group (Engagement Committee co-chairs, state leads, CBI and Burke Rix Communications) and incorporate feedback (October 2).
2. Incorporate input from October 17 community engagement forum in conjunction with Salton Sea Summit (October).
3. Share revised plan with full Engagement Committee and hold workshop to discuss (November).
4. Determine state budget for community engagement effort (November).
5. Develop schedule for community engagement meetings and determine scope (December).
6. Identify pilot project(s) to that can provide amenities to residents in the short term while larger projects are designed and potentially use participatory budgeting (November – January).
7. Organize youth ambassadors (November – January).