

REDESIGNING FUNDING FOR LOS ANGELES



*Advancing Equity to Support
Community-Led Green Infrastructure
Projects*

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AUTHORSHIP

This report was authored by [Council for Watershed Health \(CWH\)](#) and was directly informed by Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), Tribal entities, and Funders from across Los Angeles County who engaged in our research. Established in 1996, the mission of the CWH is to advance the health and sustainability of our region's watersheds, rivers, streams and habitat - both in natural areas and urban neighborhoods. We do this through science-based research, education, and inclusive engagement.

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We would also like to extend gratitude and deep thanks to all CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders who engaged in this research. Your trust and insights represent the backbone of this report.

CWH MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to advance the health and sustainability of our region's watersheds, rivers, streams and habitat - both in natural areas and urban neighborhoods. We do this through science-based research, education, and inclusive engagement.



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Council for Watershed Health (CWH) recognizes and acknowledges the ancestral and unceded territory of the Gabrielino Tongva, Fernandeano Tataviam, Gabrielino Kizh, Ventureño Chumash, and the Serrano Peoples, that is now known as Los Angeles County. We honor their Elders, past and present, and their descendants, and we recognize that the First Peoples have stewarded these lands and waters since time immemorial and that they are still here. We recognize a painful history of erasure on the unceded territory we now occupy and commit to being allies and partners.

We gratefully acknowledge the Native Peoples on whose homelands we live and who are the ancestral stewards of the land and water. We make this acknowledgement out of respect for their long-standing connection to and protection of Los Angeles County's lands and watersheds. We recognize that we cannot achieve the sustainability and health of our watersheds without Tribal partnership and meaningful Tribal engagement. We are committed to uplifting Tribes in our work and ensuring meaningful engagement of Tribes in all spheres of watershed stewardship.

We encourage you to reflect on how you can uplift the culture, heritage, and legacy of the First Peoples of Los Angeles County while meaningfully engaging with and compensating Tribal governments in your ongoing and future work. We invite readers of this report to connect with the original stewards of Los Angeles County and support the efforts of local Tribal governments and organizations, including but not limited to the following:

- [Fernandeano Tataviam Band of Mission Indians](#)
 - [AcknowledgeRent](#)
 - [Tataviam Land Conservancy](#)
 - [Pukuu Cultural Community Services](#)
- [Gabrieleno \(Tongva\) Band of Mission Indians](#)
- [Tongva Taraxat Paxaavxa Conservancy](#)
- [Gabrielino Tongva Indians of California Tribal Council](#)
- [Gabrieleño Band of Mission Indians – Kizh Nation](#)
- [San Manuel Band of Mission Indians](#)
- [San Fernando Band of Mission Indians](#)
- [Xaapchivitam Clan of Eastern San Gabriel Mountains](#)

More information on Los Angeles County's past, present, and ongoing harms against local Tribes can be found here:

- [“We Are Still Here. A report on Past, Present, and Ongoing Harms Against Local Tribes.”](#)

Learn more about Tribal allyship in this Sacred Places Institute's training:

- [Tribal Allyship Training](#)

TERMINOLOGY AND ABBREVIATIONS

We offer the terms below to establish a common language around funding and ReDesignLA's approach to technical assistance and capacity building, which serves as a critical framework throughout this report.

- **Capacity Building:** The process of strengthening the local coordination, leadership, knowledge, skills, expertise, and access to resources in California Tribes and under-resourced communities with the goal of helping to develop or increase the ability of that community to independently compete for grants and implement projects in the future (Strategic Growth Council, 2022).
- **California Native American Tribe or California Tribe:** A Native American Tribe located in California that is on the contact list maintained by the Native American Heritage Commission for the purposes of Chapter 905 of the Statutes of 2004 (Pub. Resources Code, § 21073).
- **Communities of Focus:** Distinctive communities where a CBO or Tribal entity has built trust and established strong relationships.
- **Cultural Humility:** An attitude of humility and respect toward other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot possibly know everything about other cultures and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process (Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.).
- **Climate Resilience:** The ability of a community, ecosystem, or system to withstand, adapt to, and recover from climate-related impacts such as heat, drought, and flooding. Climate resilience planning focuses on reducing risk and strengthening long-term sustainability.
- **Community-Based Organizations (CBOs):** Local, nonprofit, or grassroots groups that work directly with residents to address community needs. These organizations play a key role in outreach, education, cultural connection, and equitable project planning.
- **Community Engagement:** A collaborative process in which community members contribute to decision-making, planning, and project development. Strong community engagement improves project outcomes and ensures that a project meets the needs and wants of a particular community (Simon Fraser University, n.d.).*
- **Distributive Equity:** The fair and equitable distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens across communities that ensures communities experiencing the greatest inequities are prioritized.
- **Environmental Justice:** The principle that all people should have equal protection from environmental harms and equal access to environmental benefits regardless of race, color, culture, national origin, income, and educational level. It is a response to environmental racism (Renee Skelton & Vernice Miller, 2025).

- **Green Infrastructure:** A network of natural and engineered systems that manage stormwater using vegetation, soils, and infiltration or filtration. Green infrastructure reduces flooding, improves water quality, replenishes groundwater, and provides parks, shade, and habitat benefits (Office of Coastal Management, 2015).
- **Federally Recognized Tribe:** Tribal entities recognized as having a government-to-government relationship with the United States, with the responsibilities, powers, limitations, and obligations attached to that designation. This includes eligibility for federal programs, services, and protection because of their relationship with the federal government (Strategic Growth Council, 2023).
- **Nature-based Solution (NbS):** Address societal challenges through sustainable actions that protect and restore living ecosystems and their functions to ensure human well-being and benefit biodiversity (See [NbS Blue Ribbon Panel Recommendations Report](#)).
- **Non-Federally Recognized Tribe:** Indigenous communities that are not currently recognized as governments by the federal government, although they existed before the formation of the United States. Many non-federally recognized Tribes are still acknowledged as Tribes by the State of California, for the purposes of consultation. These Tribes are not considered state-recognized Tribes, as California lacks an official process for state recognition (Strategic Growth Council, 2023).
- **Procedural Equity:** Fair, transparent, and accessible decision-making processes built on trust and accountability.
- **Local Funding:** Financial resources, primarily derived from tax revenue, that are allocated to and distributed by city, county, and municipal agencies through grant programs.
- **Philanthropic Funding:** Financial resources in the form of grants or donor-advised funds distributed by public, community, or family foundations, philanthropic organizations, and corporate giving programs.
- **Technical Assistance (TA):** Support provided by experts to help communities, agencies, or organizations understand requirements, design projects, develop/access resources, or build capacity. Technical assistance often includes training, analysis, guidance, and hands-on problem-solving (Strategic Growth Council, 2023).
- **Tribal Entity:** Tribal governments, their authorized organizations, and Tribally-led nonprofit organizations.
- **Safe, Clean Water Program (SCWP):** A Los Angeles County program established by Measure W to fund stormwater capture and infiltration, water quality, and multi-benefit projects.

- **State Funding:** Financial resources, primarily derived by tax revenue, distributed by state agencies through grant programs.
- **Stormwater:** Rainwater that flows across surfaces such as roofs, pavement, and soil. Stormwater can pick up pollutants as it moves, which makes proper management essential for water quality and flood prevention (California Department of Transportation, n.d.).
- **Stormwater Harvesting:** The process of collecting and storing stormwater so it can be used, treated, or allowed to infiltrate into the ground. Stormwater harvesting reduces runoff, improves water supply, and supports groundwater recharge (St. Johns River Water Management District, n.d.).
- **Structural Equity:** Designing policies and systems to minimize obstacles and change incentives in ways that promote equity (Balu et al., 2023).
- **Sub-Applicant:** An organization or entity that partners with a lead applicant to apply for a grant opportunity.
- **Watershed:** An area of land where all rainfall drains to a common waterbody such as a river, lake, or ocean. Watersheds connect upstream and downstream communities and are a foundation for water resource planning (U.S. Geological Survey, 2019).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Leo Politi Elementary School
Credit: Martha Benedict

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.A. Purpose and Context

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Tribal entities play a critical role in advancing community-led green infrastructure projects that provide multiple benefits across Los Angeles County. Yet despite their central role in advancing these projects and their deep relationships with the communities most affected by the climate crisis, many CBOs and Tribal entities face significant burdens and barriers in accessing and managing public funding. Over the past decade, CWH's ReDesignLA program has partnered closely with CBOs and Tribal entities working to implement community-led green infrastructure projects throughout the region. As of 2026, ReDesignLA's CBO and Tribal partners have collectively secured more than \$142 million in funding for project planning and implementation. These accomplishments have also highlighted important lessons about the challenges CBOs and Tribal entities in Los Angeles County face as they navigate an ever-evolving funding landscape.

Simultaneously, broader changes in the funding landscape have heightened the importance of accessible and equitable funding systems. Federal funding opportunities for climate and infrastructure projects have grown more uncertain, while state and local funding sources, such as California's Proposition 4 Climate Bond and Los Angeles County's bond measures, are administratively complex and increasingly competitive. Although these public funding streams represent critical opportunities to advance community-led projects, longstanding procedural inequities continue to shape which communities can access and manage these funds.

This report, "ReDesigning Funding for Los Angeles," lays the groundwork for more extensive investigations into procedural equity and funding accessibility for CBOs and Tribal entities throughout our County and California. This report seeks to address the following questions:

- How can local, state, and philanthropic funding be made more accessible to CBOs, non-federally recognized Tribes, and Tribal entities?
- What policy changes are needed to address procedural burdens and structural barriers in local and state funding processes?
- What models and grantmaking approaches from philanthropy could inform more accessible and flexible grantmaking from local and state grant agencies?
- How can local, state, and philanthropic funding work together to create more accessible funding for community-led projects?

This report is an important first step in examining some of the administrative burdens and capacity challenges faced by Los Angeles County's CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribal entities across local, state, and philanthropic funding streams. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach that includes surveys and in-depth interviews with CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders, this report identifies equitable grantmaking strategies and highlights key obstacles and challenges encountered by funders and grantees throughout the grant process. This report also explores how local, state, and philanthropic funders can better align their efforts and collaborate to support community-led projects.

1.B. Summary of Key Findings

This report summarizes findings from mixed-method research, revealing that procedural, structural, and administrative barriers play a major role in determining which CBOs and Tribal entities are able to access and manage funding for green infrastructure projects throughout Los Angeles County. Across interviews and survey responses, several key themes emerged:

Capacity Building is Essential to Funding Equity: Organizational capacity emerged as a central factor in determining access to funding. Capacity includes staffing, financial systems, administrative infrastructure, and organizational knowledge needed to manage complex grant programs. Without intentional investments from local, state, and philanthropic funders in capacity building efforts, procedural and structural reforms alone are unlikely to fully address inequities in access to funding.

Administrative Burdens Create Barriers to Entry: CBOs and Tribal entities consistently described local and state funding as significantly more burdensome than philanthropic funding, citing complex grant applications, intensive reporting requirements, restrictive financial policies, and reimbursement-based funding models. For lower-capacity applicants, these requirements represent considerable financial and staff capacity burdens. This dynamic creates a cycle in which CBOs and Tribal entities need funding to build their organizational capacity, yet many lack the staff capacity to successfully navigate these policies and requirements.

Reimbursement-Based Funding Models Create Financial Strain: Reimbursement-based funding models were identified as one of the most significant financial burdens and barriers for CBOs and Tribal entities. These models require applicants to pay project expenses upfront and wait weeks to months for reimbursement. For grantees with limited cash reserves, this system can create major financial risks and discourage participation in larger funding opportunities.

Tribal Entities Face Additional Structural Barriers: Tribal governments and Tribal nonprofits face a distinct set of legal, administrative, and structural challenges when navigating public funding systems. In Los Angeles County, where there are no federally recognized Tribes, Tribal entities face additional challenges, including eligibility restrictions and administrative requirements tied to federal recognition policies. These barriers compound capacity challenges and can limit Tribal governments' ability to access and manage public funding opportunities.

Philanthropic Funding Provides Flexibility But Still Has Its Limits: CBOs and Tribal entities view philanthropic funding as an invaluable player in our current funding ecosystem because flexible, trust-based, and relational grantmaking models more closely align with the realities of building trust and engaging frontline communities. While philanthropic funding does not have the resources or bandwidth to fill federal funding gaps alone, there is a unique opportunity for philanthropic funders and local and state agencies to partner to roll out public funding more equitably.

1.C. Key Recommendations

Based on these findings, this report outlines several recommendations to improve access to funding and procedural equity across philanthropic, local, and state funding systems.

Across All Funding Types:

1. Conduct an Equity Audit to Inform A Grantmaking Action Plan
2. Adopt a Capacity Building Framework Into Your Grant Programs
3. Explore Cross-Sector Partnerships to Equitably Administer Public Funds
4. Offer Multi-Modal and Relational Reporting As Alternatives to Traditional Narrative Reports
5. Release Grant Opportunities At Least 60 Days and Ideally Up to 90 Days In Advance
6. Reimagine the Role of Grant Officers to Advance Trust-Based and Relational Grantmaking
7. Prioritize Multi-Year Grant Awards

For Tribal Grantmaking:

1. Increase Tribal Set Asides and Ensure Geographic Equity
2. Provide Sabbatical Funding for Tribal Elders and Leadership
3. Offer Funding for Tribes to Convene with One Another And Without Set Expectations
4. Require Cultural Humility and Tribal Sovereignty Training for Staff

For Local and State Funders:

1. Address Reimbursement Model and Cash Flow Barriers
2. Facilitate Partnerships Between CBOs, Tribal Entities, and Public Agencies
3. Adopt a Common Grant Application Platform
4. Expand Eligible Costs to Include Community and Tribal Engagement-Related Expenses
5. Design Grants to Fund Community and Tribal Engagement

For Philanthropic Funders:

1. Approach Grantmaking With Urgency and A Recognition of the Intersectionality of Ongoing Social, Environmental, and Political Injustices
2. Align Investments With Organizational Commitment to Equity and Justice
3. Increase Focus on Tribal Grantmaking
4. Sustain Funding Commitments in Frontline Communities

1.D. Conclusion

CBOs and Tribal entities are essential partners in advancing climate resilience and community-led green infrastructure projects across Los Angeles County. Their deep connections to frontline communities enable them to authentically engage their communities of focus throughout the identification and development of projects that address their local needs and priorities. However, this research reinforces that current funding systems disproportionately burden the very CBOs and Tribal entities best positioned to lead these community-driven solutions. Without reforms to grantmaking processes and strategic investments in organizational capacity building, many CBOs and Tribal entities will continue to face barriers to accessing funding opportunities. By implementing the recommendations outlined in this report, funders can take significant steps towards redesigning funding systems to be more equitable and to empower bottom-up planning throughout Los Angeles County.

BACKGROUND



Merced Avenue Greenway

2. BACKGROUND

Established by environmental visionary Dorothy Green in 1996, Council for Watershed Health (CWH) was founded to advance the health and sustainability of our region's watersheds, rivers, streams and habitats, in both natural and urban neighborhoods. At the time, Dorothy Green saw a need to convene siloed water agencies across the region and reshape how they interact with one another and the communities they serve. Over the last 30 years, CWH has focused on science-based research and implementation of green infrastructure projects, education and engagement in partnership with Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Tribes, and technical assistance for underserved communities that have resulted in multi-benefit projects improving local water supply, water quality, habitat, and equitable open space. Through these efforts, CWH has gained extensive experience leading and implementing technical assistance programs among community partners, schools, and small municipalities across the State of California, and specifically within LA County.

After completing a [Disadvantaged Community \(DAC\) Outreach Evaluation Study](#) in 2014, CWH was interested in flipping the script of green infrastructure and climate funding across LA County. The Study inspired CWH to lead a series of Community Dialogues and introduce underserved communities to water resource issues and green stormwater infrastructure. Rather than having funding and projects be funneled into communities without any community ownership or feedback, CWH was interested in building community leaders who could go after infrastructure funding to develop community-led projects that not only address a myriad of climate and water harvesting concerns but also address community needs and offer multiple benefits to the neighborhood and region. Informed by the Study and the Community Dialogues series, CWH worked with The Water Foundation to brainstorm the foundation of a technical assistance program that would later become ReDesignLA.

In 2015, CWH officially kicked-off the ReDesignLA Program, a mentor-mentee model that recruits, trains, engages, and builds the capacity of CBOs and Tribal entities interested in implementing green infrastructure and climate resiliency projects in their communities of focus, but who lack the technical expertise or capacity. Participating CBOs and Tribal entities enter as mentees, gain knowledge, and then transition to a mentor role. Each CBO and Tribal partner within ReDesignLA receives individualized technical assistance and capacity building support to identify how known and learned community needs join with climate and stormwater harvesting opportunities, access funding for design and implementation, and steward multi-benefit green infrastructure projects within their communities of focus.

Over the last decade, ReDesignLA has successfully transformed the conversation around community-led projects and supported community leaders who now represent their organizations and Tribes in decision-making boards and funding committees. During this time, ReDesignLA has experienced exponential growth, starting with two CBOs in 2015 and expanding to 13 CBOs and Tribal partners by 2026 (see *Figures 1 and 2*). As of March 2026, CBO and Tribal partners in the ReDesignLA program have been awarded over **\$142 million** in funding for project planning and implementation across Los Angeles County. With these accomplishments come many lessons learned. This report highlights some of the challenges and lessons learned around funding accessibility for CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes in the region, an important piece of the

puzzle for creating a more equitable and prepared Los Angeles County, and ultimately building and stewarding community-led green infrastructure projects across our communities.

Figure 1: ReDesignLA Program Partners in 2016

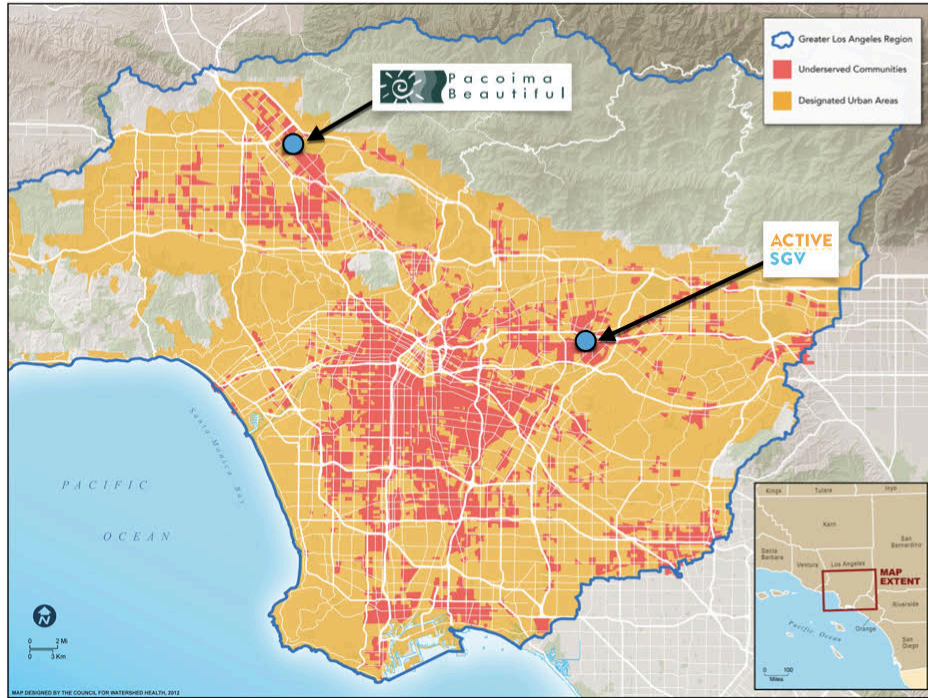


Figure 2: ReDesignLA Program Partners in 2026



2.A. Overview of Los Angeles County



Present-day “Los Angeles County” is the largest and most densely populated county in the United States, spanning more than 4,000 square miles, with a population density of more than 2,000 people per square mile, and serving as home to over 10 million residents. Los Angeles County is a culturally, linguistically, and geographically diverse region; however, this diversity exists alongside deeply entrenched inequities shaped by historical genocide and displacement of Indigenous peoples, redlining, racially restrictive housing policies, and decades of discriminatory planning decisions that have concentrated environmental burdens in communities of color.

Today, Los Angeles County’s built environment reflects these legacies. Approximately 312,435 acres, nearly 488 miles, in Los Angeles County are covered in pavement, contributing to extreme heat, localized flooding, limited tree canopy, and persistent public health inequities (ARLA & Hyphae Design Laboratory, 2026). According to the 2021 Los Angeles County Climate Vulnerability Assessment, 5.7 million residents, or 56 percent of the county’s population, live in communities highly exposed to severe climate impacts, with low-income communities and communities of color disproportionately represented (LA County Chief Sustainability Office, 2021). Many of these neighborhoods face overlapping environmental and public health injustices, including a lack of parks and open space, exposure to toxic hazards, elevated asthma rates, and poor air and water quality.

These inequities are further shaped by the region’s Tribal history and present-day realities. While Indigenous peoples have stewarded the lands of what is now Los Angeles County for generations and remain an integral part of the region’s communities, there are currently no federally recognized Tribes within the county. This lack of federal recognition creates unique challenges for Tribal governments and entities seeking to access public funding, restore their ancestral homelands, and advance Tribally-led climate resilience efforts. Currently, there are no federally recognized Tribes within Los Angeles County, a reality that complicates funding access for Tribal governments and entities working to restore stewardship of ancestral lands and advance Tribally-led climate resilience efforts. These conditions underscore the scale and urgency of investing in community-led, multi-benefit green infrastructure projects and highlight the importance of equitable planning, design, and community engagement processes that ensure historically underinvested communities shape the infrastructure investments intended to serve them.

2.B. What is Capacity Building?

Traditionally, capacity building is understood as the process of strengthening individuals' and organizations' knowledge, skills, resources, partnerships, and internal infrastructure to successfully implement their missions and achieve their goals. Compared with traditional capacity building models that distinguish those who “lack” expertise or knowledge from those who are “experts,” ReDesignLA’s model of capacity building flips this script (see *Figure 3*). Foundational to ReDesignLA and our approach to capacity building is the shared belief that everyone is an expert in their own lived experience. CBOs and Tribal entities participating in ReDesignLA bring deep expertise in building community trust and engaging their communities of focus. Through peer-to-peer learning opportunities and facilitated discussions, ReDesignLA approaches capacity building as a co-learning process where CWH, mentors, and mentees learn alongside and from one another. This emphasis on co-learning reflects ReDesignLA’s belief that effective capacity building is reciprocal, relational, and grounded in lived experience. By partnering with CBOs and Tribal entities that are deeply rooted and have longstanding relationships with communities across Los Angeles County, ReDesignLA equips CBOs and Tribal entities with additional resources and technical expertise to connect green infrastructure projects to their communities' existing priorities and access new sources of funding.

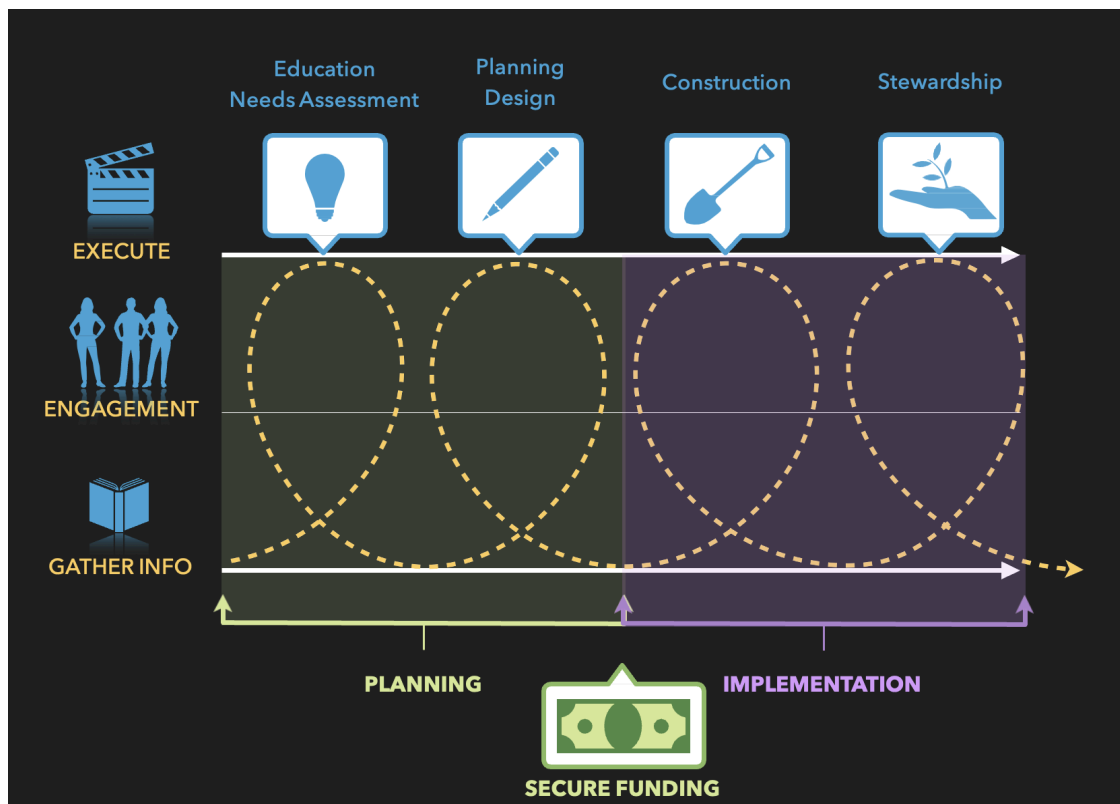
While funding is not unfamiliar to organizations that join ReDesignLA, additional capacity building and technical assistance are often needed to navigate the complexity of green infrastructure funding, which is predominantly accessed through local, state, and federal grant programs. Green infrastructure funding typically involves significant procedural and administrative requirements, adding layers of bureaucracy for CBOs and Tribal entities to navigate, especially when they do not own the land on which their project sites are located. These structural conditions reinforce how capacity building and access to funding are deeply interconnected. Green infrastructure projects provide multiple benefits to the communities that they are designed by and for. ReDesignLA primes CBOs and Tribal entities to connect the dots for funders so that funding that addresses climate or stormwater harvesting can also address existing community safety and active transportation needs.

ReDesignLA also understands that funding itself is an important component of capacity building. Organizations and Tribal governments need adequate and flexible funding to invest in staff time,

organizational development, and long-term learning. In ReDesignLA's experience, when CBOs and Tribal entities are funded to build their capacity, staff are better positioned to develop technical expertise in green infrastructure, advance community-led project opportunities, and pursue additional funding to push their project forward.

Within the context of this report, capacity building is central to understanding the procedural and administrative barriers that limit CBOs' and Tribal entities' ability to access and manage funding for these green infrastructure projects. By centering ReDesignLA's CBO and Tribal partners' lived experiences and our Program's lessons learned, this report highlights how equitable funding systems and intentional capacity building investments must go hand in hand to effectively redesign Los Angeles County. In the context of funding and the purposes of this report, capacity building is central to examining the procedural and administrative barriers that prevent CBOs and Tribal entities from accessing and managing funding for green infrastructure projects in our region.

Figure 3: ReDesignLA's Model of Capacity Building



2.C. Purpose of This Report

Local, state, and philanthropic funding represent crucial sources of funding for CBOs and Tribal entities leading the development of community-led green infrastructure projects across Los Angeles County. With unprecedented changes across the federal funding landscape, there is

growing uncertainty around the future of funding for climate resilience and community-led green infrastructure projects. As a result, philanthropic funding continues to play an increasingly vital role in sustaining CBOs and Tribal entities' operations. Meanwhile, state and local funding opportunities have become even more competitive and play an even more critical role in addressing communities' funding needs. At the state and local level, Proposition 4, California's \$10 Billion Climate Bond, and Los Angeles County's existing local bond, such as Measures W, A, and M, represent needed and important funding streams for CBO and Tribal partners to tap into. However, longstanding inequities persist in determining who can access and manage these public funds.

This report, "ReDesigning Funding for Los Angeles: Advancing Equity to Fund Community-Led Green Infrastructure Projects," examines how philanthropic and public funding mechanisms support CBOs and Tribes in advancing community-led green infrastructure projects. It identifies key barriers, particularly for under-resourced CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes, and proposes solutions to improve funding access. The report also explores how local, state, and philanthropic funding can better align to support community-led projects. Our research examines the following questions:

- How can local, state, and philanthropic funding be made more accessible to CBOs, non-federally recognized Tribes, and Tribal entities?
- What policy changes are needed to address procedural and structural burdens and barriers in local and state funding processes?
- What models and grantmaking approaches from philanthropy could inform more accessible and flexible grantmaking from local and state grant agencies?
- How can local, state, and philanthropic funding work together to create more accessible funding for community-led projects?

LITERATURE REVIEW



Bradley Alley and Plaza

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Procedural burdens and structural barriers in funding systems, such as complex application processes, compliance requirements, and eligibility requirements, can significantly limit which CBOs and Tribal entities are able to access and manage grant funding. While there is substantial research on these burdens and barriers at the federal funding level, there is limited research on the experiences of CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes and how these burdens and barriers present within local, state, and philanthropic funding specific to Los Angeles County. Additionally, there is a lack of discussion on opportunities for co-learning between public and philanthropic funding sectors to improve access for CBOs and Tribal entities.

This literature review evaluates siloed areas of research in the United States from 1996 to 2025 on procedural and structural inequities in public grantmaking processes, administrative burdens, the structural and legal barriers faced by Tribal entities, and the role of trust-based grantmaking in creating more equitable grantmaking within philanthropy. As a result, this review aims to connect these siloed areas of research to this project's goal of understanding how local, state, and philanthropic funding can work together to make funding more accessible for CBOs and Tribal governments leading the development of community-led green infrastructure projects in Los Angeles County.

3.A. Procedural, Distributive, and Structural Equity

Studies focused on procedural, distributive, and structural equity provide valuable frameworks for analyzing inequities in grantmaking and funding systems. Procedural equity refers to fair, transparent, and accessible decision-making processes that are built on trust and accountability ([Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023; Fitzgerald, 2022](#)). Existing literature, rooted in environmental justice scholarship, defines distributive equity as the fair and equitable distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens across communities, ensuring that those experiencing the greatest inequities are prioritized ([Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023; Manal J. Aboelata et al., 2022](#)). To differentiate between procedural and distributive justice, Ashley describes procedural justice as “processes by which social decisions are made” while distributive justice is more concerned with “the outcomes of the process” ([Ashley, 2014](#)). In the context of funding and historically disinvested communities, structural equity is an important framework to consider. It acknowledges the historical inequities and past harms caused by institutions and systems of power. Structural equity addresses institutional rules, policies, and structural factors that “gave rise to inequities and commits to correcting past harm and preventing future unintended consequences” ([Dsouza et al., 2023; Manal J. Aboelata et al., 2022](#)). In applying these equity frameworks to grantmaking, Buchanan and Wozniak Brown argue that funders or “grantmakers must design both the process of grantmaking (such as the application instructions, forms, and requirements) and the outcome of grantmaking (such as the selection of grantees and distribution of funds) in order to meet equity goals” ([Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023, p. 120](#)). As a result, all three equity frameworks are pivotal for understanding and assessing grantmaking because they contribute to the concept of administrative burdens, a key factor in evaluating equitable funding.

3.B. Administrative Burdens

Administrative burdens can be defined as the “costs” or “frictions” individuals face while encountering public services (Herd et al., 2023). According to a 2018 framework developed by Pamela Herd and Donald Moynihan, administrative burdens can be categorized into three main types of costs: learning costs, compliance costs, and psychological costs. Based on Herd and Moynihan’s original framework, learning costs refer to the challenges individuals face when searching for information about public services. Compliance costs are “the material burden of following administrative rules and requirements” (Herd & Moynihan, 2018, p. 2). Lastly, psychological costs encompass “the stigma of applying for or participating in a program with negative characterizations, a sense of loss of personal power or autonomy in interactions with the state, or the stresses and frustrations of dealing with administrative processes” (Herd & Moynihan, 2018, p. 15). While Herd and co-authors agree that Herd and Moynihan’s (2018) categorization of costs is an insightful framework to understand and evaluate administrative burdens, the authors also argue “...this diagnostic process should not obscure the broader picture of burdens as a cumulative experience” (Herd et al., 2023, p. 11). As a result, the framework of administrative burdens must evaluate and assess the cumulative impact of these burdens to holistically understand the ramifications that public processes and services can have on individuals and organizations.

For this report, administrative burdens represent an important framework because they are connected to procedural, structural, and distributive equity. Grant funding represents an invaluable public service, one that enables communities to address environmental, social, and political challenges. However, like many public services, access to public funding is determined through and mediated by administrative processes that can create significant challenges. In the context of public services, such as funding, administrative burdens are inequitably distributed and oftentimes, create an “administrative burden Catch-22: those needing the most help are less well positioned to overcome the barriers on which that help is conditioned” (Herd et al., 2023, p. 10). As a result, administrative burdens disproportionately affect individuals with the fewest resources to navigate and overcome such burdens. Similarly, Herd and co-authors take this argument further by stating that administrative burdens “... do not just reinforce patterns of inequality; they are also the product of inequality” (Herd et al., 2023, p. 10). When applied to the context of grant funding, administrative burdens reflect procedural, structural, and distributive inequities stemming from the cumulative learning, compliance, and psychological costs associated with the institutions (structural), the process (procedural), and the outcomes (distributive) of grantmaking. Given this report’s focus on CBOs and Tribal entities’ experiences with different types of funding, it is also critical to consider the psychological costs of administrative burdens.

In Los Angeles County, the current funding landscape is deeply shaped by historical and ongoing inequities that influence how resources are distributed and who is able to access them. Legacies of disinvestment, redlining, and exclusionary planning practices have concentrated environmental burdens and economic injustices in specific communities, many of which are the same communities actively seeking to address those harms. At the same time, funding systems are often structured in ways that advantage larger, well-resourced organizations with established administrative infrastructure, existing relationships with funders, and the capacity to navigate complex application and compliance requirements. These dynamics create uneven access to

funding, where CBOs and Tribal entities face greater barriers to entry, despite being closest to and most trusted by frontline communities. This report examines how these layered inequities manifest through administrative burdens and structural barriers that ultimately shape what funding communities are able to access and under what conditions. Fundamental to this analysis is the recognition that designing funding systems that work for communities most impacted by these injustices and disparities advances equity and leads to broader, system-wide benefits.

3.C. Administrative Burdens and Grant Funding

Based on a survey distributed to grant managers across all levels of government and the nonprofit sector, more than half of the respondents identified inefficient processes as a central challenge to administering grants ([Heather Morgan & Rujuta Waknis, 2022](#)). However, existing research lacks specificity about which processes are inefficient and how these inefficient processes and their associated administrative burdens differ across funding types. This report aims to bridge this gap by surveying and interviewing local CBOs and Tribal entities to better identify and evaluate the various administrative burdens and barriers that contribute to procedural inequities in the grantmaking process. This report categorizes grantmaking into four main phases: the grant application phase, the pre-award and grant contracting phase, the active grant award management phase, and the post-award phase (see *Figure 4*). The sections below summarize key barriers and proposed solutions from the existing literature for each phase of the grantmaking process.

Figure 4: *The Grant Process*



3.C.1. The Grant Application Phase

The grant application phase is the process of identifying and evaluating funding opportunities, reviewing grant guidelines and eligibility requirements, and preparing and submitting a grant application. While each funder’s grant application uses a different platform and includes specific requirements, the grant application phase reflects the various learning and compliance costs applicants face when pursuing funding opportunities. The grant application phase represents the first major barrier to entry in accessing public funding for many CBOs and Tribal entities due to lengthy and time-consuming grant applications, complex and unclear grant guidelines, and restrictive funding requirements ([Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023](#); [Strategic Growth Council](#)).

[2023](#)). For many nonprofits, lengthy grant applications and confusing grant guidelines demand a considerable investment of staff time and expertise. Even when CBOs and Tribal nonprofits have the internal infrastructure and capacity to proceed with submitting a grant application, Deutsch and co-authors argue that the process has a “high-burden effort” ([Deutsch et al., 2023](#)). As a result, more time and labor-intensive grants disproportionately favor applicants with ample staff, capacity, and financial resources to meet these requirements, which creates an immediate barrier to entry for small and low-capacity CBOs and Tribal entities. To summarize existing literature on the grant application phase, *Table 1* summarizes key administrative barriers and existing solutions identified.

Table 1: Grant Application Phase Administrative Barriers and Proposed Solutions

Barriers Identified by Existing Literature	Solutions Proposed in Existing Literature
Time and Labor-Intensive Application Process (Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Streamline the application process by reducing the length and complexity of application materials (Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023). Create a multi-phase application process that involves pre-proposal and full application phases (Strategic Growth Council, 2023).
Lengthy and Unclear Grant Guidelines (Bettis & Pepin, 2019 ; Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep the RFA succinct and jargon-free. “Clearly state the types of applicants that are eligible, the types of projects that will be funded, the funding structure, the grant amount, the expected deliverables, how applications will be evaluated, and how soon applicants can expect to hear back”(Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023)
Match Funding Requirements (Kris Smith Ph.D, 2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eliminate match funding requirements (Kris Smith Ph.D, 2023). Expand the definition of what is considered “match” funding or make match funding requirements a deliverable to fulfill by the end of grant period (Environmental Policy Innovation Center, 2022).

Additionally, existing literature on federal funding highlights matching funding requirements as a critical procedural burden and barrier during the grant application process. Match funding requirements mandate applicants contribute a percentage of a project’s total cost through in-kind contributions or leveraging local, state, or federal funding ([Kris Smith Ph.D, 2023](#)). For applicants with limited capacity and revenue, match funding requirements pose a significant structural and procedural barrier as they have fewer opportunities to raise the necessary revenue and require applicants to piecemeal their project’s funding ([Environmental Policy Innovation Center, 2022](#);

[Grace Gibson et al., 2024](#); [Kris Smith Ph.D., 2023](#)).¹ Since organizations with diversified financial resources can more readily meet match thresholds and invest the necessary staff time into applying for and securing match funding, this requirement reinforces existing inequities. Match funding requirements contribute to broader procedural and distributive inequities ([Environmental Policy Innovation Center, 2022](#)). While there is extensive literature on match funding requirements, additional research is needed to understand the extent to which match funding requirements are a barrier for CBOs and Tribal entities at the state and local funding levels.

Existing Recommendations

Existing literature proposes several reforms to the grant application process to mitigate these administrative burdens and barriers. To address lengthy and time-consuming grant applications, researchers recommend that funders eliminate questions that are not directly related to the evaluation criteria and ensure the length of the grant application is proportional to the amount of funding provided by the grant program. Additionally, the Strategic Growth Council identifies multi-phase application processes as one way to ensure applicants do not invest their time and resources into a grant opportunity that does not align with an applicant's proposal ([Strategic Growth Council, 2023](#)). While this strategy alleviates administrative burdens for grant applicants whose initial proposals are not a good fit, this approach does not necessarily alleviate procedural burdens during the full application process.

In regards to match funding requirements, existing literature outlines several solutions to reduce associated burdens in addition to fully eliminating the requirement ([Kris Smith Ph.D., 2023](#)). When it is unfeasible for funders to eliminate match funding requirements, the Environmental Policy Center (2022) proposes that funders allow grantees to count match funding at the end of the project period rather than during the grant application. Similarly, Smith (2023) recommends that funders expand the definition of match funding to include in-kind expenses such as pre-award costs and long-term maintenance expenses. These strategies provide funders with opportunities to alleviate procedural burdens and structural barriers associated with the grant application phase of the grant process; however, additional research is needed to understand which of these strategies will most benefit CBOs and Tribal entities during the grant application process. For this reason, this report aims to address this gap by centering the lived experiences of CBOs and Tribal entities in identifying additional procedural burdens and structural barriers during the grant process, as well as in developing recommendations to funders.

3.C.2. Pre-Award and Contracting Phase

The pre-award and contracting phase refers to the processes and paperwork that occurs after an applicant is informed of a grant award, but before their grant is executed. Existing literature reveals that grant applicants face learning and compliance costs similar to the grant application process throughout the pre-award and grant contracting phase due to slow and complex contracting processes that create administrative burdens. In addition to onerous paperwork and contractual

¹ While piecemealing a project's funding often creates additional administrative burdens, it is important to point out that some may argue that this approach diversifies a project's funding sources which can be beneficial in a turbulent funding landscape.

language to review, long, drawn-out contracting processes create challenges for grant applicants because of the associated financial burdens and uncertainty created for the applicant organization’s operations ([Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023](#)). Since most funders do not allow their grant funding to cover a grantee's staff time during the pre-award process, the additional sunk costs created by long and onerous contracting create significant financial burdens for grantee organizations. Simultaneously, contracting delays and subsequent impacts to project timelines can threaten a grantee’s secured match funding. When the pre-award and contracting phase is significantly delayed, “...partners often must move on to other projects, which can scuttle previous match commitments, and leave the primary applicant scrambling to build new match sources” ([Environmental Policy Innovation Center, 2022](#)). Since the applicant organization has already committed a significant amount of staff time and resources to advance a grant application thus far, research reveals that applicant organizations often commit to sticking to the course, which brings additional financial risks if match funds and new partners cannot be secured. While existing literature recommends that funders simplify their pre-award and grant contracting processes, there is no discussion of specific strategies for funders to implement to reduce this procedural burden. Overall, additional research on the pre-award and contracting phase is needed to better understand if there are additional administrative burdens and how funders can effectively develop equitable contracting processes for CBOs, Tribal nonprofits, and Tribal governments.

3.C.3. Active Grant Management Phase

The active grant management phase is the period in which a grantee is under an active grant contract and is focused on accomplishing their deliverables. Existing research reveals that several administrative burdens exist related to a grantor’s funding policies and onerous invoicing and reporting requirements. By applying Herd and Moynihan’s concept of compliance costs as a type of administrative burden, the following sections aim to evaluate the different kinds of “compliance costs” that exist during the active grant management phase and the broader ramifications these costs have on CBOs and Tribes. For an overview of the existing barriers and proposed solutions identified in current literature, see *Table 2* below. This table provides an overview of key barriers and proposed solutions identified within existing literature along with supporting evidence.

Table 2: Active Grant Management Administrative Barriers and Proposed Solutions

Barriers Identified by Existing Literature	Solutions Proposed in Existing Literature
Reimbursement-Based Payment Structures (Bettis & Pepin, 2019; Deutsch et al., 2023; Increasing Federal Funding to Community-Based Organizations, 2022)	Advance Payment Policies “It is critical that resources flow quickly and directly to CBOs, because they provide the nimble and adaptive community infrastructure that the public sector, both federally and locally, lacks” (Increasing Federal Funding to Community-Based Organizations, 2022, p. 2)
Stringent Indirect Cost Policies	Tiered Approach Based on Grantee’s Organizational

<p>In the realm of philanthropy, grantees “cited funder budget policies as the number one barrier, locking grantees into fixed overhead rates or one-year grant cycles” (Milway et al., 2022).</p>	<p>Budget Size (Jennifer Adams, 2024)</p>
<p>Limited Eligible Costs</p> <p>“Relationship-building costs are often ignored when ‘effort’ is being defined for service” (Deutsch et al., 2023, p. 1417).</p>	<p>Enable flexibility of eligible costs where possible and of payment structures.</p> <p>“For example, if the program prioritizes community engagement; it may be appropriate for grant funds to be used for compensation for community members’ time in the engagement process. Asking community members from under-resourced communities to volunteer their time and expertise for free can cause an undue burden and reduce the success of public participation efforts” (Strategic Growth Council, 2020a).</p>

Funding Policies and Funding Models

Across existing literature on federal and state funding, reimbursement-based payment structures, stringent indirect cost rate policies, and limited eligible costs represent commonly cited funding policy-related barriers in public grant processes. As part of a Ford Foundation-commissioned study into equitable grantmaking, funders and nonprofits cited a funder’s budget policies as the number one barrier to accelerating equitable grantmaking (Milway et al., 2022). A similar study analyzing participatory grantmaking design and the effectiveness of grant review processes in advancing equity found that small nonprofits can face funding challenges regardless of how equitable the review process is (Wojcik et al., 2020). These findings underscore how funding policies and requirements are a key component to addressing procedural and administrative inequities in grantmaking.

Of the funding policies and models discussed in existing literature, reimbursement-based funding models and restrictive eligible cost and indirect cost rate policies represent particularly burdensome funding policies for grantees. Reimbursement funding models are particularly challenging for CBOs, nonprofits, and Tribal governments with tighter organizational budgets. Reimbursement models require grantees to spend money before they get paid, which requires them to have sufficient cash or a line of credit and absorb any interest that is accumulated (AB 590 State-Funded Assistance Grants and Contracts: Advance Payments, 2023; Bettis & Pepin, 2019; Deutsch et al., 2023). A report developed by Enterprise Community Partners also reveals that reimbursement models increase smaller CBOs’ exposure to risk if and when there are delays to or denial of reimbursement payments (Increasing Federal Funding to Community-Based Organizations, 2022). For smaller CBOs and Tribal governments, reimbursement models can also become a key structural barrier by precluding applicants that do not have the financial resources to cover upfront costs or wait for reimbursements (Bettis & Pepin, 2019; Buchanan & Wozniak-Brown, 2023). In addition to the financial impacts, reimbursement models also require grantees to have sufficient staff capacity and

expertise to complete comprehensive invoicing and reporting requirements associated with reimbursements. Oftentimes, a grant's reporting requirements vary little based on a grant's amount ([Bettis & Pepin, 2019](#)). As a result, grantees that apply for smaller grant award amounts are required to complete the same rigorous invoicing and reporting paperwork required of grantees receiving larger grant awards.

Indirect costs are administrative and operational expenses that are incurred necessary for an organization or entity's overall functioning and are not easily attributable to individual projects. Indirect cost rate policies, which determine the allowable percentage of indirect costs covered by a grant, pose significant administrative burdens and financial repercussions for organizations. When funders impose restrictive indirect cost rate policies, funders limit a grantee's ability to recover overhead and administrative expenses ([Deutsch et al., 2023](#)). The results from a 2019 study conducted by the Bridgespan Group on nonprofits' indirect costs reveal that most grantees are unable to secure funding to cover 100 percent of a project's associated indirect costs. Furthermore, the study determined "the participating funders paid an average of 88 cents for every dollar of grantees' actual expenses, creating a shortfall of roughly \$12,000 for every \$100,000 worth of work executed by the organization" ([Altshuler & Tirona, 2019](#)). This 12 percent shortfall exemplifies the extent to which a funder's restrictive indirect cost rate policy can financially impact CBOs and Tribal governments. Likewise, Deutsch and colleagues describe, "managing grant funding then strains infrastructure, as grant management for multiple small grants often requires more effort and infrastructure than what indirect funding provides. Taken together, this cycle results in CBOs and Tribal entities obtaining 'just enough' funding for survival, with little opportunity for growth" ([Deutsch et al., 2023, p. 1412](#)). Both studies reveal that restrictive indirect cost rate policies create additional financial risks for CBOs and Tribal governments and perpetuate "the nonprofit starvation cycle" ([Gregory & Howard, 2009](#)). The nonprofit starvation cycle, a term coined by Ann Goggins Gregory and Don Howard, is a vicious cycle fueled by funders underfunding indirect costs and nonprofits underspending or underreporting their actual indirect expenses because of pressure from funders to meet their unrealistic expectations ([2009](#)). Ultimately, the cumulative impact and costs of reimbursement models and indirect cost rate policies reinforce Herd's concept of an "administrative burden Catch-22" and create significant compliance and psychological costs for grantee organizations.

Existing Recommendations

Existing literature identifies several recommendations, including advanced payment policies and increased funder flexibility around eligible costs and reporting to address the compliance and psychological costs associated with active grant management. According to a report published by Enterprise Community Partners, "It is critical that resources flow quickly and directly to CBOs, because they provide the nimble and adaptive community infrastructure that the public sector, both federally and locally, lacks" ([Increasing Federal Funding to Community-Based Organizations, 2022](#)). When funders adjust their indirect cost rate and reporting policies to be more flexible, research reveals that a grantee's ability to deliver grant outcomes increases ([Bettis & Pepin, 2019](#)). By implementing advanced payment models and flexibility around reporting and indirect cost rates, funders enable grantees to focus more time and energy on implementing their work and meeting the needs of their community and Tribal members. As a result, this research report's surveys and

interviews include reimbursement models as part of its investigation into procedural burdens and structural barriers.

3.C.4. Post-Award Phase

Lastly, the post-award phase of the grant process occurs during and after the closeout of an active grant award. This process typically involves final reporting, final reimbursements, and compliance closeouts. While there is extensive literature on the barriers and challenges that arise during previous phases of the grant process, there is limited research on the procedural barriers that CBO and Tribal partners face during the post-award phase. For this reason, this report examines CBO and Tribal entities' post-award experiences to better understand whether any barriers arise during this phase and how funders can alleviate these burdens.

3.D. Burdens and Barriers Faced by Tribal Applicants

In addition to the administrative and procedural burdens outlined in the previous section, Tribal governments and Tribal nonprofit organizations face a distinct set of legal, administrative, and historical barriers when navigating local, state, and philanthropic funding systems. Distributional inequities in funding further compound these burdens and barriers. A 2018 report from the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reveals the scale of distributional inequity at the federal funding level:

Federal funding for Native American programs across the government remains grossly inadequate to meet the most basic needs the federal government is obligated to provide. Native American program budgets generally remain a barely perceptible and decreasing percentage of agency budgets. Since 2003, funding for Native American programs has mostly remained flat, and in the few cases where there have been increases, they have barely kept up with inflation or have actually resulted in decreased spending power ([p. 4](#)).

In interviewing Tribal staff to evaluate their experiences with the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board's (OWEB) grantmaking practices with Tribes, Alli Miller (2021) identified four main categories of challenges and barriers: legal, capacity, communication, and administrative ([Alli Miller, 2021](#)). Similarly, a report from the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that the five key barriers Tribes may face when accessing federal grant programs and services include "capacity limitations, financial constraints, limited agency communication, remoteness of Tribes, and federal agencies' limited awareness of tribal traditions and cultures" ([U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2024b](#)). Although GAO and Miller's reports focus on federal versus state funding streams, both reports stress that Tribes navigate legal, capacity, cultural, communication, and administrative barriers when applying for and managing grant funding. While this study is focused on procedural equity and administrative burdens, Herd and co-authors' (2023) argument highlights how these burdens and barriers are layered and need to be evaluated simultaneously to understand their cumulative impact. Given Herd's framing, the following sections assess the unique legal, administrative, cultural, and communication burdens and barriers experienced by Tribal governments, as well as their associated learning, compliance, and psychological costs.

3.D.1. Legal Barriers

California has more non-federally recognized Tribes than any other state in the United States ([Chilcote, 2024](#)). According to a 1996 report, over 55 Tribes in California remain unrecognized by the federal government. Two decades later there are still no federally recognized Tribes in present-day Los Angeles County ([Ashley Dobson & Tremayne Nez, 2023](#); [Carole Goldberg, J.D. & Duane Champagne, Ph. D., 1996](#)). Since 1978, only one of the 81 California Tribes that have sought federal recognition has secured it ([Chilcote, 2024](#)). Federal recognition represents a significant legal barrier to accessing grant funding and a burdensome process for Tribal governments when applying for and managing it. Under federal law, federally recognized Tribes are treated as domestic dependent nations, which requires the federal government to provide Tribal governments with certain benefits ([Cherokee Nation v. Georgia, 1831](#); [Salazar, 2016](#)). Olivia Chilcote describes:

The [federal recognition] process is part of a long lineage of colonial policies designed to establish federal authority over Native communities. In pursuing federal recognition, tribes confront the United States' enduring power to define Indigenous identities on its own terms. Even as unrecognized tribes work to assert their inherent sovereignty, settler structures serve to disempower us (2024).

While a Tribe's existence, identity, and inherent sovereignty do not rely on recognition from the federal government, federal recognition provides Tribal governments with access to additional financial and economic opportunities, including federal funding and federal protection ([Carole Goldberg, J.D. & Duane Champagne, Ph. D., 1996](#); [Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#)). Simultaneously, the federal recognition process is complicated, often spanning several decades, and requires Tribal governments to provide extensive historical records, genealogy documents, and Tribal history ([Salazar, 2016](#); [Sr. Chiotakis, 2021](#); [Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#)). According to a report prepared for the LA City and Los Angeles County Native American Indian Commission (LANAIC) titled "We Are Still Here," the authors and contributing Tribes shared "the continued denial of Tribal sovereignty, identity, and significance in the eyes of the Federal government and local governments, including the County, works to diminish the growth of Tribes and contributes to Tribal erasure" ([Ashley Dobson & Tremayne Nez, 2023, p. 18](#)).

Federal recognition also poses a significant grant eligibility barrier for unrecognized Tribes because federal recognition is often embedded into funding eligibility requirements and policies at the local and state levels. A clear example of this is California's advanced payment policy that was amended under State Assembly Bill 3017. Approved by Governor Newsom in 2024, AB 3017 expanded the definition of "recipient entities" eligible to request advance payment from California State Agencies to include federally recognized Tribes ([AB 3017: State-Funded Assistance Grants and Contracts: Advance Payments, 2024](#)). While this bill is an important step forward for federally recognized Tribes in California, AB 3017 exemplifies the consequential effect federal recognition has on other state and local policies. For Tribes in Los Angeles County, all of which lack federal recognition, this ongoing and painful reality exemplifies the cumulative impacts and harms created by government processes and the associated compliance and psychological costs of administrative burdens that Tribal governments are required to endure. For these reasons, this report aims to understand and highlight the experiences of Tribal entities in accessing philanthropic, state, and local grant funding.

3.D.2. Administrative Burden Catch-22

In addition to legal burdens and barriers related to recognition, Tribal governments' limited capacity and experience with administrative burdens result in an "administrative burden Catch-22" and a similar "starvation cycle" that nonprofit organizations face ([Gregory & Howard, 2009](#); [Herd et al., 2023, p. 10](#)). Similar to the administrative burdens and financial challenges previously outlined, grant programs that require Tribal governments to provide significant amounts of funding up front, such as cost-share requirements and reimbursable contract requirements, can pose barriers to Tribal applicants and put larger projects out of reach for smaller and low-capacity Tribes. Existing research at the state and federal levels reveals that Tribal governments, especially those that are not federally recognized, often lack the staff capacity and resources needed to develop competitive grant applications ([Office of Management and Budget & United States Digital Service, 2022](#); [Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#)). As a consequence, onerous grant applications as well as reporting and invoicing requirements prevent Tribes from accessing and maximizing critical funding opportunities developed specifically for Tribal applicants ([U. S. Government Accountability Office, 2024b](#)).

To address and break this "administrative burden Catch-22" for Tribal governments, existing research outlines various recommendations for federal agencies to better meet the needs and capacities of Tribes; however, there is limited discussion of recommendations at the state and local funding levels. At the federal level, the Office of Management and Budget and US Digital Service call on the federal government to "increase its collective understanding of the burdens and barriers to access for Tribal Nations" in order to "meet its overall trust responsibility, exemplify a true Nation-to-Nation relationship, and support Tribal sovereignty" ([2022](#)). A GAO report on Justice40 funding from 2024 outlines recommendations specific to each federal agency managing Justice40-funded grant programs. Notable recommendations at the federal funding level include providing Tribal governments with financial assistance to build their capacity; streamlining grant applications; adopting uniform templates, policies, and procedures across agencies; and offering self-determination contracts and self-governance compacts to allow for flexible program delivery ([Office of Management and Budget & United States Digital Service, 2022](#)). While the first two recommendations are relevant and applicable to state and local grant funding, self-determination contracts and self-governance compacts only apply to federally recognized Tribes. Recommendations specific to state funding in California are limited to developing Tribal technical assistance programs to alleviate the burden of grant applications ([Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#)). However, technical assistance programs often fail to address the root causes of these burdens. Simultaneously, literature reveals that a critical barrier at the federal funding level is "limited agency capacity to provide technical assistance to Tribal recipients" ([U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2024a, p. 8](#)). In evaluating existing literature on Tribes accessing grant funding, there is minimal discussion of the experiences of non-federally recognized Tribes across the three funding types discussed in this report. To ensure grant funding is awarded to non-federally recognized Tribes, including those in Los Angeles County, it is essential that the lived experiences of non-federally recognized Tribes are understood, acknowledged, and uplifted to ensure funders collectively address this administrative burden Catch-22 and its cumulative impacts.

3.D.3. Cultural Humility and Communication Burdens

Researchers highlight communication challenges and the lack of culturally humble staff within agencies as factors that further complicate legal and administrative barriers for Tribes. According to a report from the U.S. GAO, limited agency communication and outreach with Tribal governments can result in missed grant opportunities and delayed payments, creating additional administrative burdens ([U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2024b](#)). As defined by the California Governor’s Office of Tribal Affairs, cultural humility refers to “an attitude of humility and respect toward other cultures that pushes one to challenge their own cultural biases, realize they cannot possibly know everything about other cultures and approach learning about other cultures as a lifelong goal and process”. In comparison cultural humility, existing literature notes that the concept of “cultural competence” implicitly places non-Western cultures as “other” that “can possibly be mastered with enough effort” ([Office of the Tribal Advisor, n.d.](#)). Similarly, when a state or federal agency’s staff lack cultural humility and sensitivity and are not provided in-depth training on Tribal consultation and Tribal Sovereignty, agencies further harm and perpetuate the government’s history of ill-treatment and erasure of Tribes ([Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#); [U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2024a](#)). Additional harm and cultural erasure can be perpetuated when funding agencies utilize a “one-size-fits-all” approach and fail to recognize that each Tribe has its own unique history, culture, and identity ([Strategic Growth Council, 2020](#)). Together, gaps in cultural awareness and communication clearly exemplify the cumulative impact of legal barriers and administrative burdens confronted by Tribal governments and the psychological costs that Tribes endure as a result. Despite growing research on Tribal access to federal and state funding, a significant gap remains in understanding the experiences of non-federally recognized Tribes navigating local, state, and philanthropic funding systems.

3.E. Trust-Based and Participatory Philanthropy

Existing literature on philanthropic funding predominantly focuses on the frameworks of trust-based and participatory philanthropy. Given the extensive administrative burdens and barriers that exist within public funding processes, philanthropic funding plays a critical role in providing nonprofit organizations and CBOs with more accessible and less administratively burdensome funding. Across the philanthropic community, there has been a growing acknowledgement of the need for philanthropic organizations and foundations to implement more equitable and participatory grantmaking practices.

Over the last two decades, the models of trust-based and participatory philanthropy have gained significant momentum within the philanthropic sector. In contrast to traditional-grantor-grantee relationships, trust-based philanthropy centers relationship building and grantee expertise to address longstanding power imbalances between funders, grantees (particularly nonprofits), and the communities they serve ([Christopher Cardona & Shireen Zaman, 2024](#); [Love & Olliff, 2025](#); [McGrath & Wong, 2020](#); [The Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, n.d.](#)). Trust-based philanthropy deprioritizes funder control and encourages funders to prioritize facilitating trust and transparency between grantees and funders. According to a Ford Foundation-commissioned study, the four qualities of in grant program officers that support building mutually beneficial partnerships are “inclusiveness that elevates the grantee as expert, a service orientation that puts the grantee in the driver seat, an equity mindset and network weaving that connects grantees with key partners, and

stakeholders to elevate their impact” ([Christopher Cardona & Shireen Zaman, 2024](#)). By reimagining the role of grant officers and program managers, the model of trust-based philanthropy approaches grantees as mutually beneficial partnerships, where grantors and grantees collaborate to achieve shared goals.

Similarly, participatory grantmaking seeks to address issues of procedural and distributive equity by shifting away from traditional closed-door grantmaking processes and adopting more bottom-up and participatory decision-making throughout the grant process ([Gibson, 2017](#); [Love & Olliff, 2025](#); [Wojcik et al., 2020](#)). Participatory grantmaking calls for transparency and participation across all facets of a foundation or philanthropic organization, including but not limited to governance, grant administration, and evaluation processes ([Love & Olliff, 2025](#)). While there is extensive research that highlights participatory grantmaking, a report commissioned by the Ford Foundation from 2017 reveals that few foundations have actually committed to integrating participatory practices into their culture and strategies. Further, the report calls on philanthropy to draw from the learnings of community organizers on participation to navigate how to ensure broader adoption of participatory grantmaking by institutional philanthropy ([Gibson, 2017](#)).

While participatory grantmaking and trust-based philanthropy are relatively new models and continue to evolve, both emerged from a recognition that traditional top-down funding approaches can be overly bureaucratic and reinforce inequitable power dynamics between funders and grantees that burden rather than empower grantees. Given the extensive administrative burdens associated with public funding systems, there is a growing opportunity for philanthropic, local, and state funders to learn from these grantmaking models. This report builds on these insights by examining how practices from both public and philanthropic funding systems can inform more equitable approaches and improve access to funding for CBOs and Tribal entities leading green infrastructure projects across Los Angeles County.

3.F. Conclusion/Research Gaps

Procedural and administrative barriers and burdens pervade public grant funding processes and disproportionately affect lower-capacity applicants, like CBOs and Tribal entities. In applying Herd and colleagues' framework of administrative burdens and their associated costs, existing research on the grant application, pre-application, contracting, and active grant management phases of a grant reinforces the finding that nonprofits, CBOs, and Tribal governments often face an “administrative barrier Catch-22” when trying to secure grant funding. Simultaneously, there are several gaps in existing literature on how these administrative burdens and barriers are experienced by CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes. More robust research is needed that investigates the administrative burdens and barriers specific to California state grant funding and local funding opportunities in Los Angeles County; the unique and layered burdens and barriers faced by non-federally recognized Tribes; and how local and state grant programs can learn from trust-based philanthropy and participatory grantmaking to reform their approach to grantmaking. These gaps in current literature on grant funding and procedures illustrate the unique intersection that this report intends to address. Based on the current gaps in existing literature and the on-the-ground realities of funding community-led green infrastructure projects in Los Angeles County, this report investigates:

1. How can local, state, and philanthropic funding be made more accessible to CBOs, non-federally recognized Tribes, and Tribal entities?
2. What policy changes are needed to address procedural burdens and barriers in local and state funding processes?
3. What models and grantmaking approaches from philanthropy could inform more accessible and flexible grantmaking at the local and state levels?
4. How can local, state, and philanthropic funding work together to create more accessible funding for community-led projects?

METHODOLOGY & RESULTS



Roosevelt Park

4. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.A. Overview

This report used a mixed-methods approach to examine the procedural barriers and capacity challenges that Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and Tribal entities face when accessing grant funding, as well as the associated administrative constraints faced by funders. This research combines surveys and semi-structured interviews to gather the experiences of CBO and Tribal entities as grant applicants and grantees, alongside the perspectives of local agencies, state agencies, and philanthropic organizations as funders. Together, these methods provide insight into how funding systems operate in practice and where opportunities exist to reduce administrative burdens and advance equitable grantmaking processes.

4.B. CBO and Tribal Partners Pre-Interview Survey

4.B.1. Pre-Interview Survey Design

To gain a better understanding of the unique experiences of CBOs and Tribal entities awarded grant funding, we invited 15 CBOs and Tribal entities involved in green infrastructure projects across Los Angeles County to participate in a pre-interview survey. The main intent of the pre-interview survey was to gather a baseline understanding of respondents' current funding and organizational capacity, as well as which phases of the grant process are the most administratively and procedurally burdensome and why. The pre-interview survey consisted of a Google form with 35 to 50 questions that aimed to gather each entity's experience accessing, applying for, and managing local, state, and philanthropic grant funding. To ensure survey participants only responded to questions relevant to the types of funding their organization has experience with, survey questions utilized display and skip logic. For this reason, not all survey participants answered all 50 questions. Survey questions were broken up into four main sections: organizational background and capacity; organizational experiences with grant application processes; organizational experiences with funding barriers; and reforming grant funding. To gather and quantify respondents' experiences with each phase of the grant process across all three types of funding, the survey asked respondents to rank the level of barriers from one (no barriers) to five (extensive barriers). The survey also utilized short-answer questions to gather specific examples of barriers faced at each phase of the grant process, from grant application to post-award. To evaluate and analyze these short-answer responses, inductive coding was used to identify key themes and patterns in challenges that exist across the three types of funding. This allowed us to glean any qualitative data from the survey that would otherwise be missed and not reflected in quantitative survey responses. By dispersing a survey to respondents before participating in the semi-structured interview, we were able to gather a baseline understanding of each respondents' experiences with different kinds of funding to effectively inform our interview discussion.

4.B.2 Pre-Interview Survey Results

This section summarizes findings from the pre-interview survey administered to CBOs and Tribal entities. The survey was designed to gather baseline information about respondents' organizational characteristics, funding portfolios, and experiences navigating philanthropic, local, and state funding. The survey also captured respondents' perceptions of administrative burdens across different phases of the grant process. Together, these results provide important context for the interview findings presented later in the report and help illustrate the structural and procedural factors that shape CBOs' and Tribal entities' ability to navigate and manage different kinds of grant funding.

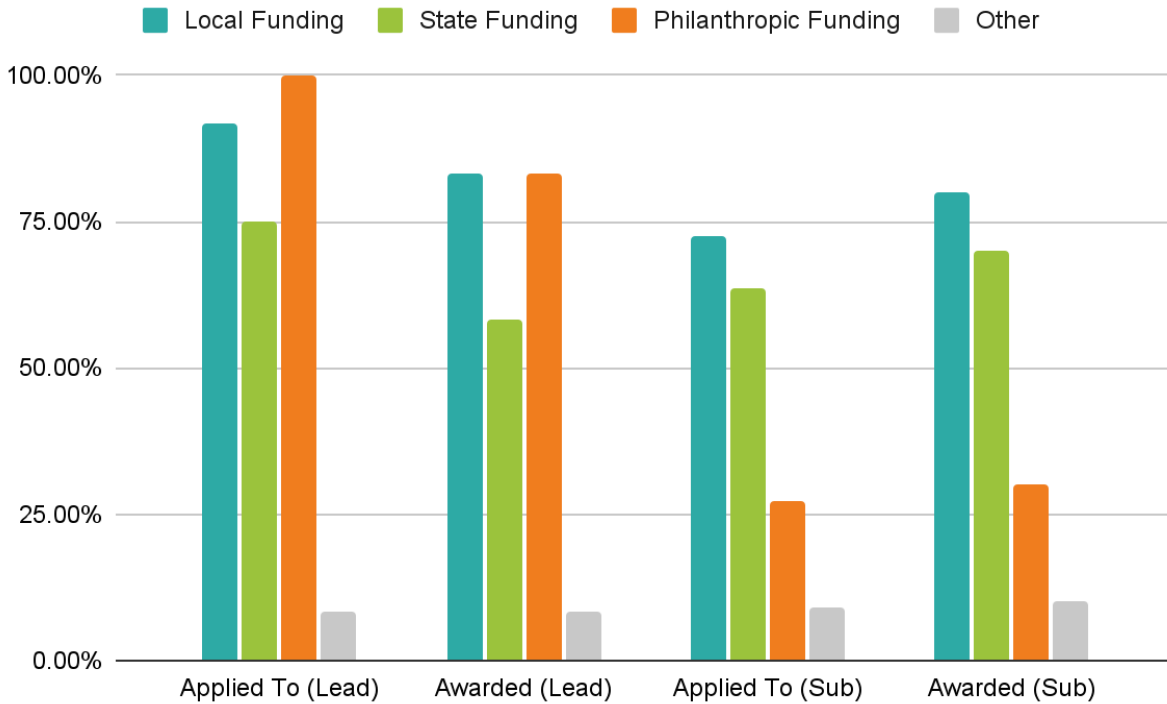
Overview of Survey Respondents

Of the 15 entities invited to participate in the survey, 12 responses were received from CBOs and Tribal entities. Eight of the 12 survey respondents requested that their organization's name remain anonymous in the report. Based on staff size and annual operating budgets, survey respondents represent a diverse range of organizations and entities, from very small entities with one to three full-time staff to larger organizations with 31 to 40 full-time staff. Annual operating budgets similarly varied from less than \$500,000 to \$10 million. Survey results indicate that 58.3 percent of respondents represent medium-sized entities with 11 to 30 full-time staff, while 33.3 percent represent very small entities. The remaining 8.3 percent represent larger entities with 31 to 50 full-time staff. Part-time staffing followed a similar pattern, with 45.5 percent of respondents having one to three part-time staff, and another 36.4 percent having between four and ten part-time staff. On average, respondents' annual operating budgets consisted of 41 percent philanthropic funding, 22 percent state funding, 21 percent local funding, and 10 percent federal funding. In the context of procedural equity and funding, both organizational staff size and annual operating budgets are important to quantify because these factors directly influence an organization's capacity to pursue, manage, and comply with grant funding requirements. Staffing levels and available financial resources often determine whether CBOs and Tribal entities can dedicate time to grant writing, financial management, and reporting, which are critical components of accessing and sustaining grant funding. These factors provide important context for understanding how capacity constraints shape organizations' ability to pursue different funding opportunities.

Organizational Experience with Funding

Respondents were also asked to share their experience applying for and being awarded local, state, and philanthropic funding as a lead applicant or a sub-applicant. A sub-applicant refers to an organization or entity that partners with a lead applicant to apply for a grant opportunity. All respondents indicated they have applied for philanthropic funding; however, significantly fewer respondents have applied to and been awarded philanthropic funding as a sub-applicant (30 percent) than as a lead applicant (83 percent) (see *Figure 5*). This difference is likely due to the relatively accessible and flexible nature of philanthropic funding, which allows CBOs and Tribal entities to apply for funding as lead applicants. Unlike many public funding opportunities, philanthropic grants are typically less administratively complex, include CBOs and Tribal entities as eligible lead applicants, and do not require the same level of financial infrastructure to manage.

Figure 5: Organizational Experience with Funding As Lead Applicant Versus Sub-Applicant



For local funding, 19 percent more respondents applied as lead applicants than as sub-applicants; however, the difference between respondents awarded as lead applicants and as sub-applicants was minimal, at only 3.3 percent. Comparatively, the results for state funding reveal a considerable increase in respondents awarded state funding as a sub-applicant (70 percent) than as a lead applicant (58 percent). This pattern suggests that many CBOs and Tribal entities strategically pursue state funding through partnerships to mitigate the higher administrative, financial, and compliance burdens associated with serving as the lead grantee. By participating as sub-applicants, CBOs and Tribal entities are able to leverage the administrative infrastructure, financial capacity, and grant management experience of larger or more resourced lead organizations and governmental entities. This arrangement can help reduce the workload associated with the grant application process and reporting. At the same time, this dynamic may also reflect broader structural inequities within funding systems, where smaller or lower-capacity organizations must rely on partnerships to access funding opportunities that are otherwise difficult to pursue independently.

Comparing the Level of Burden Across Funding Types

When comparing funding types, respondents consistently identified philanthropic funding as the least burdensome. According to survey results, 77.8 percent of respondents reported experiencing

administrative burdens with local funding, 75 percent with state funding, and 41.7 percent with philanthropic funding. When respondents ranked the level of burden across the four phases of the grant process, state funding received the highest burden ranking for all phases, with local funding closely following. To better understand the administrative burdens associated with funding type, respondents' written explanations were compiled and thematically coded. Below, *Table 3* provides a detailed breakdown of key administrative burdens survey respondents mentioned across local, state, and philanthropic funding. The numerical value represents the number of times each burden was mentioned by survey respondents.

Local Funding

While survey respondents reported slightly greater barriers to accessing local funding (77.8 percent), the average burden ranking for each phase of the local grant process ranked slightly lower than for state funding. As shown in *Figure 6*, the grant application, pre-award, and grant management phases of local funding each received an average burden ranking of 3.6 out of 5. When asked which local funding sources respondents have applied to and/or been awarded, respondents mentioned Los Angeles County's Measure W Safe, Clean Water Program, including its Public Education and Engagement Grant, Measure A Safe, Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches, and Measure M, LA Metro's grant programs, and other agency and municipal programs. As illustrated in *Table 3*, the most frequently cited challenges associated with local funding were "restrictive financial policies" (n=6), "unclear and restrictive eligible cost restrictions" (n=5), and "technically complex and cumbersome grant applications" (n=5). These findings align with respondents' rankings of local funding as the most difficult funding type for covering overhead and indirect costs, staff time, project design and construction expenses, operations and maintenance, and subconsultant costs (See *Figure 7*). Overall, these findings suggest that local funding presents significant administrative burdens related to restrictive financial policies and eligibility requirements.

State Funding

Although a slightly higher proportion of respondents reported barriers to local funding, they ranked state funding as the most burdensome across all four grant phases. When comparing the reported burden levels for state funding across the four grant phases, the grant management phase received the highest ranking (4.56 out of 5), with the pre-award phase (4 out of 5) and the grant application phases (3.89 out of 5) closely following (see *Figure 3*). When asked what state funding sources respondents have applied to and/or been awarded, respondents mentioned various state agencies and conservancies including the San Gabriel and Lower Los Angeles Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, the California Environmental Protection Agency, the California Air Resources Board, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the California Nature Resources Agency, the California Energy Commission, California State Parks and Recreation, the California Coastal Commission, the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, the Strategic Growth Council, and the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation. As shown in *Table 3*, survey respondents cited "highly detailed workplans and time tracking by task," "delays in the pre-award process," and "technically complex and cumbersome grant applications" as the most common burdens for state funding (n=6). Based on coded responses, respondents described state grant applications as "lengthy and convoluted" and described their limited staff capacity to

handle “complicated invoices and tracking requirements.” Despite these administrative burdens, respondents ranked state funding as the most difficult funding type in only one cost category (supplies) compared with local and philanthropic funding sources (see *Figure 7*).

Table 3: Key Administrative Burdens Shared by Survey Respondents Across Local, State, and Philanthropic Funding

Key Barriers Mentioned	Local (n)	State (n)	Philanthropic (n)
Unclear and Restrictive Eligible Cost Restrictions	5	3	0
Compliance Requirements	3	4	0
Restrictive Financial Policies i.e. indirect and overhead, fringe, and COLA restrictions	6	3	0
Reimbursement Process	2	3	0
Time Consuming Progress and Financial Reporting	3	2	2
Invoicing Requirements and Process	2	2	0
Technically Complex and Cumbersome Grant Applications	5	6	1
Inconsistent Application and Reporting Formats Across Agencies	1	1	2
Program Officer Lack of Communication and/or Staff Turnover	1	3	1
Short turnaround times for application submission	2	0	0
Jurisdictional and Partnership Coordination	3	2	0
Limited Staff Capacity	4	4	3
Detailed Workplans and Tracking Time by Task	0	6	0
Delays in Pre-Award Process	0	6	0
Unrealistic Expectations Set by Funder	1	1	1
Number of Statements Coded	26	31	11
Number of Barriers Mentioned by Funding Type	36	46	10

Philanthropic Funding

Philanthropic funding received the lowest burden ranking across all four grant phases, with the pre-award phase ranking lowest (2.4 out of 5). Among the ten statements coded for philanthropic funding, “limited staff capacity” emerged as a commonly cited barrier (n=3), particularly related to the grant application phase. One survey respondent noted challenges due to “not having a full-time person to conduct research, review, and scope out opportunities, recommend relationship building, and strategic development opportunities”(See *Table 3*). A second commonly cited challenge was “inconsistent application and reporting formats across funders” (n=2). Respondents also reported difficulty covering staff time, overhead and indirect, pre-development, and project design costs through philanthropic funding (see *Figure 7*). Despite these challenges, 88.9 percent of respondents reported pursuing philanthropic funding to fill funding gaps and commonly cited it as having minimal administrative burdens. One respondent noted:

Foundations and philanthropic grants have offered streamlined application and reporting processes that focus on outcomes and community impact rather than excessive documentation. These programs often provide flexible funding, reasonable reporting timelines, and trust-based grantmaking approaches that recognize the unique capacity constraints of community-based organizations. (Anonymous, Survey Respondent, October 8th, 2025).

While philanthropic funding presents significantly fewer administrative challenges than local and state funding, respondents’ experiences suggest there are still opportunities for philanthropic funding to reduce administrative burdens and better accommodate CBOs and Tribal entities with varying levels of organizational capacity.

Figure 6: Barriers Experienced by Grant Phase Across Funding Types

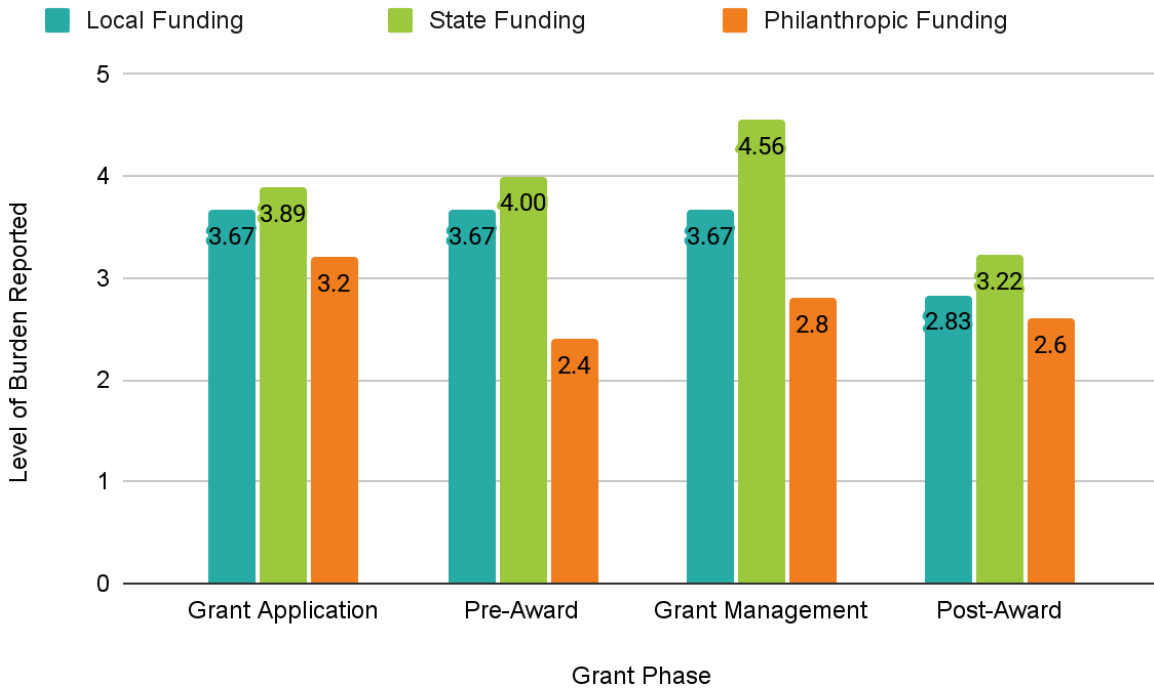
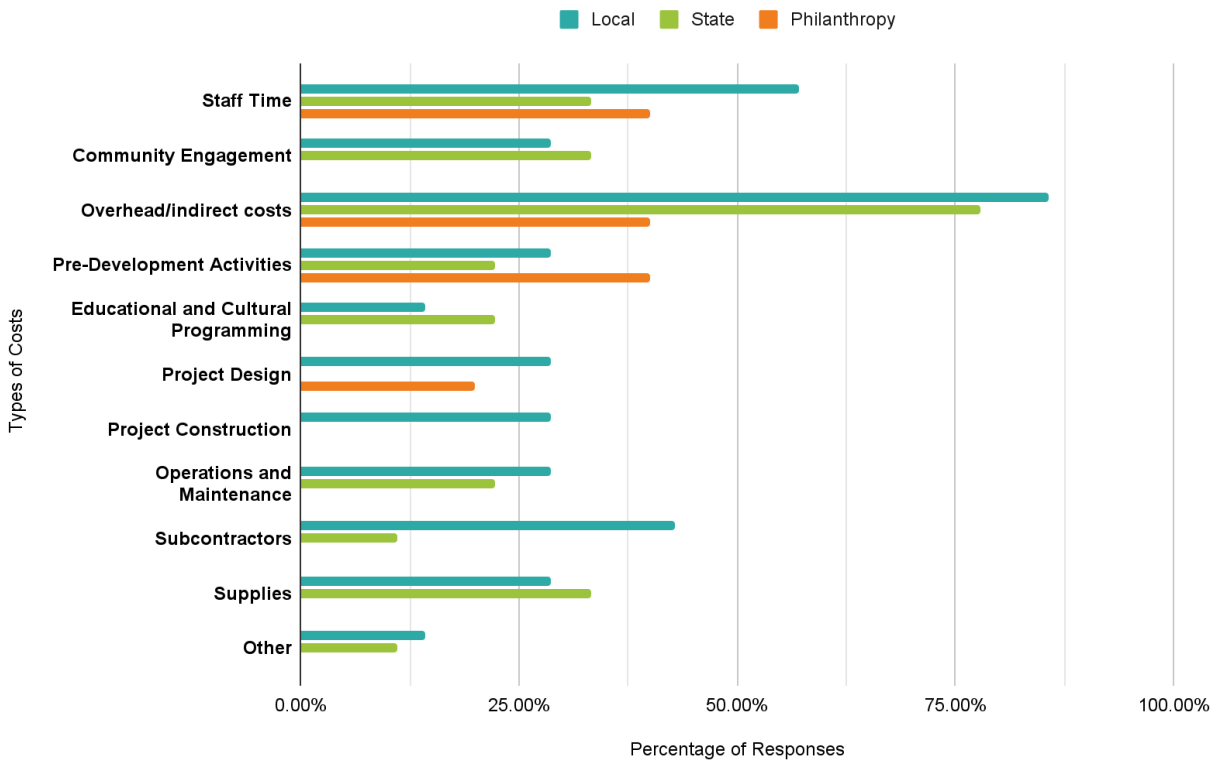


Figure 7: Costs Challenging to Cover Across Funding Types



4.B.2. Key Takeaways from Pre-Interview Surveys

The pre-interview survey findings highlight the role procedural administrative burdens and capacity challenges play in determining the accessibility of local, state, and philanthropic funding. Survey responses also revealed discrepancies in how participating CBOs and Tribal entities miscategorized certain funding sources, such as “Conservancy Funds” and “Safe Clean Water Program Funds,” respectively, as local and state funding. While these discrepancies were not found in all survey responses, misinterpretations of the three funding categories did occur and prompted follow-up questions during subsequent interviews with respondents. Although respondents represent entities of varying sizes and funding portfolios, limited staff capacity emerged as a universal experience among respondents and underscores the systemic nature of administrative burdens in our current funding landscape. Across funding types, philanthropic funding was consistently perceived as the least burdensome due to its flexibility and trust-based approach. In contrast, local and state funding posed significantly greater barriers, but in distinct ways. Local funding was most frequently associated with restrictive financial and eligibility requirements that limited organizational flexibility and the ability to cover core operating costs. While respondents often accessed state funding as sub-applicants, it proved the most burdensome across all grant phases, particularly in the pre-award and active grant management phases, due to complex applications, delayed timelines, and intensive compliance, invoicing, and reporting requirements. These findings underscore how funders' current policies and grantmaking structures can inadvertently impact CBOs and Tribal entities' ability to equitably access public funding.

4.C. CBO and Tribal Entity Interviews

4.C.1. Interview Purpose and Design

In addition to the pre-interview survey, 12 CBO and Tribal entities participated in semi-structured group Zoom interviews consisting of 7 to 10 questions. The purpose of these interviews was to gather the perspectives of participating CBO and Tribal entities on accessible and inaccessible grantmaking programs, models, and policies. Interview participants were also asked which public grant programs could learn from philanthropic funders and what changes could significantly impact their ability to access and manage local and state grant funding. The length of each semi-structured interview ranged from 35 to 75 minutes, depending on the participants' responses and the number of follow-up questions asked by CWH staff.

Prior to each interview, participants reviewed and signed informed consent forms indicating their preferences for audio recording, note-taking, and individual and organizational anonymity. All participating CBOs and Tribal entities consented to being audio-recorded. Interview recordings were then transcribed using [Otter.AI](#) and manually edited for accuracy. The interview transcriptions were then read and coded several times in Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, to identify common themes for thematic analysis. Using an iterative framework, deductive and inductive codes were used. As a result, 33 pre-established codes were created based on themes identified in the survey results and interview questions. An additional 190 codes emerged during the coding process to gather new themes. From there, codes were grouped into categories based on similarities and analyzed in greater detail.

4.C.2. Interview Results

A total of 12 semi-structured interviews were conducted with staff members from CBOs and Tribal members across Los Angeles County. Seven of the 12 interviews were group interviews. As a result, 21 individuals were interviewed. A list of CBO and Tribal entity interview participants is provided in *Table 4* below.

Table 4: CBO and Tribal Entity Interview Participants

No.	Entity Name	Interview Participant and Job Position
1	Anonymous CBO	Executive Director
2	Tribal Entity #1	Anonymous Participant #2
		Anonymous Participant #3
3	Tribal Entity #2	Anonymous Participant #4
		Anonymous Participant #5
4	Anonymous CBO	Executive Director
		Director
5	Anonymous CBO	Director
6	Nature for All	Belén Bernal, Executive Director
		Staff Member
7	River in Action	Erica Maceda, Executive Director
		Itzel Flores Castillo Wang, Program Manager of Environmental Education
8	Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement	Heng Lam Foong, Co-Executive Director
		Je-Show Yang, Program Manager
		Jean Park, Program Manager
9	Anonymous CBO	Executive Director
10	Anonymous CBO	Program Manager
11	Anonymous CBO	Executive Director
		Staff Member
12	Los Angeles Walks	Alex Ramirez, Executive Director

4.D. Funders Interviews

4.D.1. Interview Purpose and Design

This report also conducted interviews with staff from local, state, philanthropic, and philanthropic grant programs to gain insights into their entity’s grantmaking process, funding requirements, and related policies. To invite a broader audience of local, state, and philanthropic funders, an initial list of funding contacts was developed based on existing funder relationships and by researching grantmakers that specifically fund CBOs and Tribal entities in Los Angeles County. In total, CWH emailed over 50 individuals representing 40 grantmaking entities to participate in this research report. From there, we used a “snowball sampling” method to invite additional funders. This included asking funder networks to circulate the opportunity within their networks and contacts within California state agencies to circulate the invitation across their grant programs. Specific interview questions were created for each category of funders: local, state, and philanthropic funders. Follow-up questions about their specific grant programs were asked where appropriate.

Similar to CBO and Tribal interviews, participating funders were required to review and sign informed consent forms, indicate whether they consented to audio recording, and indicate their preference for anonymity. For interview participants who consented to audio recording, their recordings were transcribed using Otter AI, manually edited for accuracy, and coded several times in Dedoose. In addition to the existing codes established and identified while coding the CBO and Tribal partner interviews, 38 deductive codes were added to code the funder interview transcripts based on themes from the funder interview questions. One interview participant did not consent to being audio recorded. As a result, notes taken during the interview were used to code the interview.

4.D.2. Interview Results

A total of eight semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom with local, state, and philanthropic funders. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, depending on participants’ availability and the length of their responses, including follow-up questions from CWH Staff. Two of the eight interviews consisted of group interviews with multiple staff members participating. As a result, a total of ten individuals participated in interviews. As outlined in *Table 5*, interview participants represent a cross-section of Los Angeles County’s funding landscape, including three philanthropic funders, one funder network, one local public agency, and three California state agencies. All three philanthropic funders are foundations that actively grant funding to CBOs and Tribal entities in Los Angeles County. Interviewee Ron Milam, who directs Smart Growth California, an initiative of The Funders Network, and leads the Los Angeles Funders’ Collaborative, was categorized alongside philanthropic funders due to his unique insight into regional philanthropic funding trends. For the purposes of this report, Metropolitan Water District of Southern California was categorized as a state funder because its grant program operates at a regional scale beyond Los Angeles County.

Table 5: Funder Interview Participants

No.	Entity Name	Interview Participant
1	The Funders Network	Ron Milam, Director of Smart Growth California
2	Philanthropic Funder #1	Anonymous Staff Member
		Anonymous Staff Member
3	Local Public Agency #1	Anonymous Staff Member
4	Philanthropic Funder #2	Anonymous Staff Member
		Anonymous Staff Member
5	California State Agency #1	Anonymous Staff Member https://docs.google.com/document/d/1S-WiyC0abyfFesuenZIDk5NMkJ8uduEZW6k4mEapSyc/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.wpk65b1p3k0q
6	California Strategic Growth Council	Blanca Escobedo, Resilient Community Associate Planner
7	Philanthropic Funder #3	Anonymous Staff Member
8	Metropolitan Water District of Southern California	Joseph Chavez, Principal Public Affairs Representative

4.E. Research Limitations

This research report faced several limitations that affected its scope and findings. Namely, our research had a limited timeframe of three months to collect survey responses and conduct interviews. CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders also reported limited capacity, which further constrained the number of funders who could participate. At the state level, funders specifically shared capacity constraints due to existing grant application deadlines and the rollout of grant guidelines for upcoming California Proposition 4 opportunities. Additionally, increased federal scrutiny and investigations into nonprofit organizations, Tribes, and philanthropic funders contributed to hesitancy among potential participants to share experiences, even with assurances of anonymity. Lastly, the complexity and variability of grantmaking among local, state, and philanthropic funders made it challenging to survey them about their individual grantmaking policies and practices. As a result, we limited our data collection amongst funders to interviews.

DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS



Victory Elementary School

5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

Drawing on data gathered from interviews with CBOs, Tribal entities, and a diverse range of funders, this section highlights key patterns related to procedural equity and administrative burdens, and organizational capacity. It outlines key considerations CBOs and Tribal entities weigh when deciding whether to pursue funding opportunities, the strengths and procedural challenges associated with each funding type, and the challenges funders encounter when administering their grant programs. These insights illustrate how administrative burdens, structural barriers, and capacity challenges shape CBOs and Tribal entities' ability to pursue and manage funding for community-led green infrastructure projects.

5.A. Key Considerations When Pursuing Grant Funding

Survey and interview findings from CBOs and Tribal entities revealed several key factors that shape whether an organization or entity decides to pursue a grant opportunity. As discussed in the literature review, the grant application process represents a considerable investment in staff time and organizational resources. Interview participants also described the creative approaches they use to piece together and leverage multiple funding sources to advance a project or program. Given the limitations and constraints associated with many grant opportunities, CBOs and Tribal entities often rely on combining multiple funding streams to support their work.

While mission and program alignment remain a foundational consideration, interview participants consistently identified three additional factors that influence their decision-making: organizational capacity, potential impacts to cash flow, and strategic partnership opportunities to mitigate capacity and financial constraints. Together, these considerations reflect the strategic calculations that CBOs and Tribal entities must make when navigating an increasingly competitive funding landscape.

5.A.1. CBOs and Tribal Entities' Approaches to Funding

CBO and Tribal entity interviewees described the creative approaches their organizations use to assemble funding for projects and programs, frequently referring to strategies such as “stacking” or “braiding” grants. Given the challenges associated with the current funding landscape, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees emphasized the creativity required to combine multiple funding sources to push projects forward. One Tribal entity interviewee described their approach as “braiding” funding sources, particularly for planning grants. According to the interviewee, braiding represents a more intentional approach to align multiple funding streams to strengthen one another while filling gaps. As the interviewee explained:

We're not dependent on building off of one [funding source] for the other. But rather, how do we use one to make another one stronger, or to fill the gaps of what one may be missing?... I'm saying braided because most are planning grants. And so right now we can braid planning grants. I think once we get more into implementation grants, that's when we'll start stacking funding opportunities (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025).

While braiding and stacking funding sources were commonly shared strategies, some interviewees also pointed to the challenges that these strategies require, especially when the funding sources are more restrictive. For some organizations, they only stack funding on a case-by-case basis as stacking multiple funding sources to finance a project can pose significant administrative burdens and overextend staff. When it comes to the project development process, an anonymous CBO shared that they try to minimize stacking, relying on a single funding source to cover a particular phase of the process (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 22nd, 2025). Similarly, to mitigate administrative burdens, other organizations shared that they only tend to combine and stack flexible funding sources that are less rigid and deliverable-heavy.

5.A.2. Organizational Capacity Consideration

Across survey responses and interviews, organizational capacity, rather than lack of organizational experience or ability, emerged as a critical constraint that shapes whether and to what extent CBOs and Tribal entities can engage with local and state funding opportunities. Several interview participants emphasized that applying for and managing public grants required dedicated staff time, internal infrastructure, and compliance systems, which many small and mid-sized organizations are actively developing. According to survey results, 58.3 percent of respondents reported limited staff capacity for grant writing, development, and contract compliance, and 75 percent reported having no full-time staff dedicated to these areas. While organizational capacity is top of mind for many small organizations (1 to 3 full-time staff), survey respondents from medium-sized (11 to 30 full-time staff) and larger organizations (more than 31 staff) also reported capacity challenges and frequently cited staff capacity as a key factor in their decision to pursue a grant opportunity. Likewise, more than half of survey respondents (58.3 percent) declined a grant award due to administrative burdens and capacity challenges, and respondents represented organizations of varying sizes. When asked to elaborate on this response during their interview, CBO and Tribal entities commonly shared several reasons behind their decision. These included cash flow issues related to the reimbursement process, limited staff capacity, and the required level of compliance and reporting, which outweighed the size of the grant award. For some CBO and Tribal entity interviews, their organizations and Tribal governments will also not pursue grant awards below a certain internal threshold. Relatedly, CBOs and Tribal entities emphasized the importance of evaluating a grant program's design and whether the required deliverables align with or mismatch the grant award amount to determine whether a grant opportunity is a good fit for their organization.

Furthermore, survey and interview results reveal organizational capacity is a key factor in determining whether CBO and Tribal entities pursue state funding opportunities. During interviews with CBO and Tribal entities, CWH staff asked survey respondents who indicated they had never applied for state funding as a lead applicant to explain the factors behind this decision. Across organizations, interviewees consistently identified limited organizational and staff capacity as the main factor. As Alexandra Ramirez, Executive Director of Los Angeles Walks, reflected, while their organization has not applied to state grants before, this decision is not due to an inability to learn the process. Rather, it is due to capacity. Ramirez shared, "I recognize that I don't have experience [applying for state grants], but I don't think it's something that we couldn't learn from or we couldn't do" (Personal Communication, November 4th, 2025). Likewise, Executive Directors of other CBOs shared that their organization's decision is due to limited staff capacity to take on

additional reporting and compliance requirements because grant development and compliance is effectively “a full-time job” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 4th, 2026). As a result, interview participants distinguished between a lack of experience and a lack of capacity in influencing their decision to pursue state funding. In other words, organizations often deliberately choose to avoid overextending themselves, even when funding opportunities are substantial and aligned with their mission and project goals.

5.A.3. Cash Flow Impacts

Cash flow considerations also emerged as a critical factor determining whether CBOs and Tribal entities pursue a grant opportunity. Many local and state grants operate on reimbursement-based funding models, which require grantees to front project costs and then wait for reimbursement after submitting invoices. For organizations with limited cash reserves or limited access to lines of credit, this structure can present an immediate barrier to entry. Interviewees explained that reimbursement-based funding models require organizations to carry substantial costs, such as staff salaries and project expenses, for several months before receiving reimbursement. For implementation projects, these challenges become even more acute because grantees must front additional funds. As described by one CBO Executive Director, “Without having the finances — the money in the bank — you really can’t pursue the larger grants that operate on a reimbursement basis” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Even for CBO and Tribal entities that have navigated or are currently navigating reimbursement-based grants, several interviewees shared instances in which they forwent submitting a grant application or later declined an awarded grant to mitigate cash flow impacts due to anticipated reimbursement delays. Likewise, for CBOs and Tribal entities serving as sub-applicants, cash flow remains a key factor. The Executive Director of a small CBO shared:

“I partnered with another organization around the same size as [us] and we won a million dollar grant ... After going through some of the pre-approval process, we understood that with the reimbursement, the way that they had it set up may take up to six months and that we would need to basically float the grant and the payroll for the folks that needed to be hired for that amount of time. At that actual time, [we] probably could have [proceeded with the award], but our partner couldn't, right, because they actually had to hire more people than we did, and so that just kind of sent us in a direction of having to try to get lines of credit and different things like that. That just took an immense amount of time off of the clock on the grant, and so we ended up having to decline the grant based on that” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 4th, 2026).

Given how lengthy the reimbursement process can be, local and state grants that use reimbursement models are often infeasible for many CBOs and Tribal entities. Interviews with CBO and Tribal entities revealed a shared sentiment that decisions not to pursue public funding are less about mission misalignment and more about risk mitigation around their entity’s cash flow.

5.A.4. Partnering with Higher Capacity Entities

Several CBO interviewees cited strategic partnership opportunities as another factor in their decision to pursue local and state grants. For CBOs and Tribal entities that lack the capacity or financial infrastructure to take on a reimbursement-based grant, partnering with another entity that has the necessary financial and administrative infrastructure to serve as the lead applicant is a key strategy for accessing public funding while avoiding some financial risks. When applying for a state conservancy grant, one CBO interviewee shared that their organization made a last-minute decision to partner with a larger national nonprofit to serve as the primary applicant on a grant application to avoid cash flow issues they would otherwise face as the primary applicant. A CBO interviewee shared they decided to partner with this larger organization “because it had the resources and they can afford to wait months to get the funds from [a State Conservancy],” whereas their CBO couldn’t wait “so that collaboration with that organization, where we were the sub-applicant, was partly on purpose because we knew that [they] could pay us regularly” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2026). Likewise, another CBO shared that they made a similar decision when resubmitting a state grant application that had previously been unsuccessful. According to a CBO interviewee, their organization decided to lean on a larger partner to serve as the lead applicant and “fiscal sponsor” for their multi-million-dollar grant application. They shared, “I think a really big learning lesson is to lean on these other organizations that can be allies, especially for small nonprofits like ours, so that they can support us with the heavy admin and reporting, and that doesn't have to solely fall on us, and so that we can still do the good work, but not necessarily be held back because of the reporting” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). As illustrated by both examples, partnering with larger organizations to serve as fiscal sponsors or financial intermediaries for larger or more restrictive grants represents a key strategy for small and/or limited-capacity CBOs and Tribal entities to continue accessing reimbursement-based grants and to leverage their partners’ existing administrative and financial infrastructure.

5.B. Philanthropic Funding

Interview findings highlight the important role that philanthropic funding plays in supporting the work of CBOs and Tribal entities. Compared with local and state funding sources, philanthropic grants were consistently described as more flexible, responsive, and supportive of organizational capacity. Based on findings from interviews with CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders, this section examines the benefits of philanthropic funding, such as its flexibility, support for community engagement, and ability to respond quickly to emerging community needs. This section also explores how philanthropic funding contributes to organizational capacity building and enables CBOs and Tribal entities to diversify their funding portfolios. Additionally, this section highlights key lessons learned and challenges within the philanthropic sector.

5.B.1. The Power of Flexibility with Philanthropic Funding

Survey and interview results reveal that philanthropic funding affords CBOs and Tribal entities with the necessary flexibility to “pursue other funding sources” and adaptability to meet emerging community needs, both of which are critical when working directly with communities. When asked

how their organizations cover the staff time required to apply for grants, a majority of CBO and Tribal entity interviewees noted that philanthropic funding plays a critical role in covering these costs when grant writing and development are not activities under another existing grant. However, in the absence of flexible philanthropic funding, organizations must absorb the staff costs associated with grant development, adding to a laundry list of other indirect costs that are already difficult to cover under public grants. Challenges are often magnified in smaller organizations, as staff juggle multiple roles and responsibilities. Erica Maceda, Executive Director of River in Action (RIA), shared, “Because we are so small and our team is small, we try to only take on grants that feel manageable and don’t have too much rigorous reporting. So, it’s been really helpful to be funded through private philanthropy sources and local, just because the ongoing grant award management is easier to manage” (Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Ultimately, flexible grant funding enables organizations to invest in building their organizational capacity and position themselves to secure larger, more complex grants that support long-term growth.

Built-In Flexibility Supports Community Engagement

Additionally, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees noted that philanthropic funders who build flexibility into their grant programs enable CBOs and Tribal entities to apply their expertise effectively to authentically and meaningfully engage communities. Je-Show Yang, Program Manager at Asian Pacific Islander Forward Movement (APIFM), describes philanthropic funding “...gives quite a lot of flexibility to do engagement, as well as flexibility to shift priorities on what the community may need” (Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). In addition to providing the flexibility necessary to engage communities, CBOs and Tribal entities noted that philanthropic funding covers supply and participant support costs associated with engagement that are often ineligible under public funding. For example, a staff member at Nature for All noted that being able to cover expenses such as food, printing, and supplies can make or break the effectiveness and accessibility of a community engagement event, as well as its enjoyment for community members (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). Likewise, Itzel Flores Castillo Wang, Program Manager of Environmental Education at River In Action (RIA), shared that for their team, “interpretation, child care, and transportation” are also important expenses to cover when engaging communities. For RIA, Flores Castillo Wang shared that these expenses are “needed sometimes in order for us to have a successful attendance and be able to support families, especially because we serve families that need these types of services to fully participate in our events” (Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). When community engagement-related supplies can’t be covered by a state or local grant due to eligibility restrictions, one philanthropic funder shared that they see their funding as helping to fill an important gap. As shared by one philanthropic funder:

We can provide funding for small, but important elements that increase accessibility of community outreach, for example, including childcare, transit or parking, food and beverages, and other things that public funds cannot cover (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025).

As described by interviewees, philanthropic funders’ flexibility around eligible costs proves essential when it comes to either filling existing gaps to cover community engagement-related expenses or trusting grantees to spend funding how they best see fit.

Ability to Pivot and Meet the Moment

Similarly, CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders called out philanthropic funding's ability to pivot and "meet the moment" as well as its flexibility to allow grantees to adapt as additional community needs emerge. Heng Lam Foong, Co-Executive Director of APIFM, describes that general operating support grants "allow us to invest our staff time in a way that makes most sense to accomplish our mission in the community" (Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). As seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Los Angeles Fire Storms, and ongoing ICE raids against immigrant communities, CBOs and Tribal interviewees highlighted the importance of adaptable funding and of philanthropic funders approaching grantmaking with trust and flexibility. As an example, a Tribal entity interviewee shared:

Liberty Hill has been a great resource, and I say this because they've given us funding in multiple capacities, some grants larger than others, but I just appreciate the long-term and continued engagement. And one example that I kind of want to uplift is after the fires occurred, they reached out to us and said, 'We know that the Tribe, Tribal citizens, Tribal community in general in LA are affected. How can we support you in this effort? How can we support the Tribe's vision on fire maintenance or fire prevention? And how can we help different affiliates of the Tribe through that work?' And so something that I like about that is it's active, and it's proactive, but also reactive in the sense where it's like, how do we build you up knowing the changing landscapes as well (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025).

Several philanthropic funders also shared how this adaptability is an intentional part of their grantmaking approach. When inflation increased rapidly during the pandemic, one philanthropic funder shared an example of how they proactively decided to increase their grantees' grant amounts by 10 percent to account for rising costs adapted to meet an emerging need amongst their grantees (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). As described by one philanthropic funder:

We did that across the board for all of our partners with active grants, because we knew that their costs were skyrocketing and there was no way they were going to be able to complete the projects with the budgets that they had created pre-pandemic. This sort of proactive thinking on the part of a funder about what is needed in the ecosystem, or what the partners might be facing, is something that we really try to hold. We listen closely to our partners and then figure out how we can best respond (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025).

When individual funders decide to adjust their reporting requirements to address emerging community needs, such as climate disasters or public health emergencies, one funder noted: "when people hear about certain practices, it can help give [other funders] the idea to do that for their grant recipients" (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). Decisions like these reflect the power of trust-based grantmaking in action and how funders can "meet the moment" through both proactive and reactive approaches.

Rapid Response Funding & Support with Filling Federal Funding Gaps

More recently, philanthropic funders pivoting to address emerging community needs have also taken the form of rapid-response funding and support for grantees amid federal funding cuts. While discussing his perspective on current trends across philanthropy, Ron Milam, who directs Smart Growth California, initiative of The Funders Network, described philanthropy's current response to "the clawbacks of federal funding" as responding by trying to "fill the gaps where possible and... continue supporting groups with capacity building and technical assistance for them to continue the work" (Personal Communication, December 12th, 2025). Milam also shared that part of the response has entailed numerous funders allocating more of their overall percentage. Similarly, another philanthropic organization shared its approach to the federal funding cuts as two-fold:

We are seeking to understand the ways the funding landscape has shifted and what that might mean for the needs in the community, because our funding is not big enough to fill the gaps left by federal funding cuts, for example. However, there are things that we can do to provide some capacity or cash-flow support so that those partners can go out and seek other grant opportunities, maybe from state or county funds. We're able to fill small capacity gaps for partners to help them get through a difficult time and seek replacement funds (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025).

While philanthropic funding cannot fully fill the gaps left by the federal government, it has played a critical role in supporting CBOs and Tribal entities in navigating a changing funding landscape.

5.B.2. Capacity Building Support

Interview findings also underscore the central role that philanthropic funding plays in supporting capacity building for CBOs and Tribal entities, which is foundational to long-term organizational growth and sustainability. Funders and grantees alike emphasized that philanthropy can strategically strengthen CBOs and Tribal entities' organizational capacity by providing grantees with flexible, multi-year funding to build the internal systems and human infrastructure needed to thrive beyond individual grant processes. According to one philanthropic funder, "A key element of our approach is to provide the right kind of capacity to organizations, so that they can engage on their own terms, rather than being directed from the top down (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). A clear example of how philanthropic funders are able to directly support CBOs and Tribal entities with building their capacity is providing funding to cover full-time staff positions, such as fundraisers or grants and compliance managers, that allow organizations to build internal administrative capacity and pursue diversified funding streams that live beyond any single philanthropic investment. As one funder noted, even short-term investments in staff positions can have significant long-term impacts because they position organizations to grow and pursue additional funding to sustain future operations.

In addition to investing philanthropic funding into staff time and development, funders also pointed to providing CBOs and Tribal entities with the necessary technical assistance tools that support early planning processes and grant application development as another critical capacity building strategy. By equipping CBOs and Tribal entities with tools designed to help communities navigate early project planning, one funder sees their investment as ensuring that grantees have "the right

tools at their fingertips to do what's necessary to get public funding” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). Capacity building was further intended to extend beyond organizational systems to include community and Tribal leadership development, with philanthropic funding covering scholarships, stipends, honoraria, and travel for community members and Tribal citizens to participate in conferences and learning opportunities. Collectively, these strategies reflect an intentional effort to provide CBOs and Tribal entities with the resources to build their staff capacity and necessary internal infrastructure, as they best see fit, rather than relying on prescriptive, top-down funding models.

Ability to Diversify Funding

Simultaneously, organizational capacity and CBO and Tribal entities’ ability to diversify their funding represent a complex Catch-22. Limited-capacity CBOs and Tribal entities must navigate the complex challenge of securing funding to support their capacity building and organizational growth without overextending staff or depleting limited cash reserves. Without sufficient infrastructure or capacity building, efforts to secure new or larger grants can inadvertently weaken, rather than strengthen, their organizational capacity. As a result, several interview participants shared that organizational capacity building is a critical prerequisite to diversifying their funding portfolio and, therefore, increasing their financial sustainability. When asked how the size of their annual budget and main sources of grant funding influence their ability to pursue different funding sources, several participants noted that this process was very gradual for their organization. According to a CBO Executive Director:

It took us a long time to reach a place where we could apply for larger grants and truly think about diversifying our funding. We learned during the recession that we survived because we had a strong base of government grants, while organizations that relied mostly on foundation funding struggled or even closed. That experience taught me the importance of having both. Right now, with the current administration, our foundation partners are really helping us stay afloat—alongside some government grants—but it’s the diversity of funding that sustains us. Moving forward, we also need to strengthen individual and corporate contributions to build a well-balanced portfolio that gives us confidence and stability. (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025).

Likewise, an anonymous interviewee from a Tribal entity shared that growth in their organizational budget over recent years enabled them to establish internal systems and staffing structure to pursue and manage state and federal funding (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Overall, interviews reveal organizational capacity building is fundamental to ensuring CBOs and Tribal entities the ability to diversify their funding portfolio, which is essential to surviving times of funding uncertainty, such as the present.

5.B.3. Challenges Shared by CBOs and Tribal Entities

Sudden Decisions to Restructure Funding Priorities

While both groups of interviewees applauded philanthropic funders for their ability to pivot to meet the moment, CBOs and Tribal entity interviewees also shared that philanthropic organizations' recent decisions to pivot their broader funding priorities come at a cost to grantees. When philanthropic funders pivot and restructure their funding priorities, this instability ultimately hurts their grantees and the relationships they have built together. A CBO Executive Director shared their recent experiences with philanthropic organizations across the region.

All these foundations all of a sudden want to do strategic plans and reorganizations and that's making it much less accessible to tap into any of these funds, right. There's a lot of foundations that are changing and pivoting, for example, one organization stopped funding us because they were funding too much in LA and they received direction to fund more in the South.... When funders pivot that creates a lack of accessibility to them, their strategic plans change. Now, we're having to try to fit into their new portfolio, whatever that structure is (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025).

While it is possible that some of these sudden shifts may have been a result of the federal policy landscape due to the timing, funders shifting their priorities and not providing existing and longstanding grantees with guidance on how to fit into their funding portfolio ultimately reinforces historical harms imposed by the world of philanthropy. Ultimately, these sudden shifts place the burden on CBOs and Tribal entities to continuously adapt their programs, narratives, and funding strategies to align with evolving philanthropic priorities, often with little notice or support.

Grant Officer Turnover

Additionally, CBOs and Tribal entities shared that grant officer turnover creates additional administrative challenges for them to navigate. In relation to sudden changes to the strategic direction of philanthropic funders' grantmaking, CBOs and Tribal entities shared that they found grant officer turnover to occur simultaneously and contributed to the chaos and uncertainty they experienced. Interviewees who receive repeat funding from philanthropic funders shared that they often put in energy toward building trust and a relationship with their grant officers. As a result, grant officers play a critical role in their ability to secure repeat funding and serve as a valuable resource throughout the grant period. One CBO Executive Director shared, "I lean a lot on the program officers, because they're the ones that are really making the case for us to their boards and foundations, and this is what sets them apart from other funders" (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). Sudden grant officer turnover creates additional administrative challenges for grantees and reflects a longstanding relationship and ally that is suddenly lost, requiring grantees to reinvest time and energy into building trust with a new grant officer from the very beginning. While grant officer turnover is not isolated to just philanthropic funding, philanthropic funders' ability to quickly pivot and restructure is less commonly experienced at the local and state funding levels.

Lack of Engagement with Tribal Entities to Avoid Regional Tribal Politics

Tribal entity interviewees shared challenges in engaging with and building relationships with larger philanthropic organizations in Southern California due to perceived reluctance to engage in, or to “stay out of,” regional Tribal politics. While Tribal entity interviewees shared that they have had positive experiences with certain philanthropic funders, the lack of engagement and absence of a large swath of the philanthropic funder space represents a critical roadblock, given that this funding is typically more accessible than public grants. Interviewees shared that this hesitation often manifests as prolonged delays, vague commitments, or repeated claims that foundations are still “developing internal processes” for working with Tribes and Tribal communities. As shared by a staff member at an anonymous Tribal entity, “I’ve heard [this] since week one, when I started three years ago, and I don’t think it takes three years to establish policies like that. And so it makes me question, what are the conversations behind the scenes that are causing concern or weariness?” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 25th, 2025). Another interviewee characterized this weariness as “philanthropy not comfortable funding Tribes” and pointed to two interconnected factors.

One is the lack of understanding, or lack of trust in the Tribe having or Tribes having the infrastructure necessary to report... The other is that they don’t feel comfortable, or they don’t want to engage in the Tribal politics with good reason, right? So, they don’t know who to give it to. And if they give it to one entity, will they piss off other entities?... So they don’t want to get stuck in the middle of all of that, and we’ve experienced that in real time with an entity saying, ‘Hey, you know, we don’t, we’d like to give money, but with all the stuff that we’re hearing about, what’s happening, we’d rather not.’ And so it’s the reality (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025).

Collectively, these experiences raise broader questions about why larger Southern California foundations remain hesitant to meaningfully show up for and partner with Tribal governments and Tribal organizations, and how some philanthropic funders’ unwillingness to engage with and learn how to partner with Tribes reinforces longstanding inequities in philanthropic investments.

5.B.4. Challenges Shared by Philanthropic Funders

To understand what is currently getting in the way of philanthropic funders’ ability to adopt flexibility and design flexible grant programs, we asked philanthropic funders what currently gets in their way of creating more accessible grant funding. Based on interview responses, the main challenges philanthropic funders face with designing accessible grant programs are finding a balance between flexibility and compliance, which has become increasingly more complicated under the current federal administration.

Balancing Flexibility and Compliance

From the funder’s perspective, the level of flexibility philanthropic funders can provide to grantees is often shaped by compliance requirements established by their funding sources and the restrictions they face from the IRS. For philanthropic funders that serve as pass-through or “intermediary

funders,” interviewees shared that they are well-positioned to safeguard their grantees from certain requirements but are also beholden to their funders' requirements in other places. One philanthropic funder interviewee shared that their role as an intermediary funder, positioned between corporations and grantees, uniquely positions them to safeguard their grantees from unnecessary requirements and “adopt the kind of grantmaking we want” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, January 9th, 2026). For philanthropic foundations that serve this “intermediary” role rely on funding from other funders, they are still tasked with balancing their own compliance needs with the development of flexible, accessible funding. Additionally, philanthropic funders that are 501(c)3 nonprofits must comply with IRS rules around operating as a charitable organization. Based on what interviewees shared, this means conducting the necessary due diligence to ensure they only fund organizations that are certified 501(c) nonprofits and that none of their grant funding goes toward lobbying, as that is prohibited. While some interviewees went as far as to say they:

“would love to maybe not even require reporting at all, but... in the current federal landscape, it's more important than ever that we have clear documentation of what was being done” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025).

Philanthropic funders must carefully balance ensuring accessibility and their organization's own due diligence needs. Another philanthropic funder described this process:

“as always such a dance between trying to make the application process as accessible as possible without sacrificing due diligence” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2025).

Beyond federal oversight, philanthropic and corporate funders also face heightened security around greenwashing and impact claims related to environmental and climate-related funding. To withstand these pressures, funders reported similar efforts to tighten up reporting requirements and the need for robust data to defend the credibility of their investments and maintain open funding mechanisms (Anonymous, Personal Communication, January 9th, 2026). Both philanthropic funders' ongoing challenges reveal the complex balancing act between accountability, risk management, and equitable grantmaking.

Federal Policy Impacts Reshaping Funding Ecosystem

Recent federal policy changes have had cascading effects on CBOs, Tribal entities, local, state, and philanthropic funders. Most notably, interviews with CBOs, Tribal entities, and philanthropic funders highlighted how unprecedented clawbacks of federal funding and federal investigations into philanthropic funders' funding practices have required both CBO and Tribal grantees and philanthropic funders to adjust their approach to funding. Across interviews with CBOs and Tribal entities, interviewees shared their experiences of suddenly losing federal funding in 2025 after investing significant time and resources in applying for and managing the pre-award process for federal grants. Overnight, CBOs and Tribal entities were forced to rapidly adjust their funding strategies to fill immediate gaps and sustain core operations and staffing. Several interviewees described leaning on philanthropic dollars until they had the bandwidth to identify and apply for local and state funding opportunities to fill larger planning and infrastructure funding gaps.

CBOs and Tribal entities' increased reliance on philanthropic funding coincides with notable shifts within philanthropic funding itself. Specifically, funder interviewees shared insights into philanthropic funding trends amid the current climate of federal scrutiny. In response to heightened federal scrutiny and political risk, philanthropic funders announced their decision to proactively adopt risk management strategies to protect their organizations from federal investigation. Based on what interviewees shared, proactive risk mitigation strategies have included softening proposal language related to race, immigration, and advocacy, tightening compliance requirements, safeguarding staff privacy by removing information from their websites, and shifting away from unrestricted funding toward more clearly defined project-based grants (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025; Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th). Funders described that these changes, unfortunately, represent a significant departure from the previous flexibility and trust-based practices, even as they attempt to keep reporting and compliance requirements as minimal as possible when and where feasible. Funders' decisions to adopt these risk mitigation strategies also reflect funders' efforts to protect their grantees, especially low-capacity CBOs and Tribal entities, from getting caught up in a federal investigation.

Compounding these challenges, interview findings reveal that several philanthropic organizations are also undergoing internal restructuring, strategic pivots, and mass staff layoffs, disrupting long-standing relationships with grantees and reducing accessibility for grantees who must now reestablish trust amid shifting funding portfolios (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). Together, these dynamics have pushed CBOs and Tribal entities toward local and state funding sources as more competitive funding streams, albeit more administratively burdensome, given the current federal climate. While this report does not specifically focus on federal funding, interview findings reveal how federal policy volatility can reverberate across the entire funding ecosystem and reshape organizations' approaches to funding.

5.B.5. Key Takeaways on Philanthropic Funding

Philanthropic funding represents an invaluable player in Los Angeles County's funding ecosystem. Although philanthropic funders do not typically fund the design or implementation of green infrastructure projects, philanthropic funding provides vital project planning, community engagement, and capacity building support for CBOs and Tribal entities. Due to its flexibility, philanthropic funding also plays a critical role in strengthening CBOs and certain Tribal entities' ability to pursue more restrictive grant funding and cover their indirect costs. When philanthropic funders approach grantmaking with flexibility, trust, and adaptability, CBOs and Tribal entities are able to more authentically engage their communities and meet their communities where they are as new needs and priorities emerge. From the pandemic to LA's firestorms to federal funding clawbacks, the ability of philanthropic funders to pivot and quickly disperse funding has proved essential for our region to weather seasons of crisis. However, issues such as sudden strategic pivots and grant officer turnover, minimal engagement with Tribal entities, and increasing compliance pressures reveal underlying inequities in philanthropic funding, as well as its vulnerability to federal policy volatility and political scrutiny. Similarly, Tribal entity interviewees' challenges with accessing larger philanthropic funding reveal a critical need for philanthropic funders to commit to trust and relationship building with Tribal governments and Tribal entities across the region. Addressing these underlying inequities will be essential to ensuring that

philanthropic funding remains an effective and equitable component of Los Angeles County's broader funding landscape.

5.C. Shared Challenges Across Local and State Funding

5.C.1. Restrictive Financial Policies

Restrictive financial policies emerged as the most destabilizing aspect of managing local and state funding. From reimbursement-based funding models and invoice retention policies to restrictive indirect cost, fringe benefit, and cost-of-living-adjustment (COLA) limits, many local and state funding structures impose significant financial and administrative burdens on applicants and grantees. For CBOs and Tribal entities, especially low-capacity organizations and non-federally recognized Tribes, these burdens can be detrimental to their organization's financial health and capacity. These policies represent considerable burdens during grant implementation as well as a barrier to entry, leading some organizations to forgo applying for certain funding opportunities out of financial caution. Drawing on key themes from interview findings, the following section examines how reimbursement-based funding models and restrictive financial policies affect CBOs and Tribal entities' ability to access and manage public funding.

Cash Flow Issues and Reimbursement-Based Funding Models

CBOs and Tribal entity interviewees described the reimbursement model as structurally misaligned with their financial realities, especially for smaller nonprofit organizations and non-federally recognized Tribal governments with limited cash reserves. As presented in this report's literature review, reimbursement-based funding models require grantees to front project costs, sometimes for months and even over a year, before receiving payment, which places immense strain on already limited cash flow. In interviewing an anonymous philanthropic funder with 501(c)3 nonprofit status, the interviewed staff member shared that reimbursement-based funding models represent significant financial burdens on their organization, despite having sizable reserves as compared to a small CBO. When their organization served as an intermediary, managing a state-funded program that operated on a reimbursement basis, the CFO had to explore opening a line of credit to cover upfront expenses (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2025).

For smaller organizations, reimbursement delays pose even more serious financial and organizational capacity consequences. Erica Maceda, Executive Director of River in Action, described waiting over 18 months to receive payment on a state grant while operating on a budget of less than \$60,000. Similarly, an anonymous CBO Executive Director emphasized the heightened risk posed by reimbursement models in green infrastructure project development and implementation. "For capital development projects, where you're like, 'Well, I can't front \$5 million or \$10 million' I think that's the scary part... the cash flow issue whenever we're forced to front so much money" (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 22nd, 2025). Combined with rigorous reporting requirements, interviewees described reimbursement delays as "exhausting" and deeply stressful. An anonymous staff member of a Tribal entity shared that this issue has become a growing concern for their Tribal entity as they have expanded their organizational capacity and climate resiliency efforts. "Now it's not a \$20,000 grant that we carry, [but] it's a multi-million, and

that means we can't submit for reimbursement until we pay that" (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025). In addition to carrying large invoice amounts, some grants require lead applicants to show proof of payment to their subcontractors before they can be reimbursed, creating an "administrative burden Catch-22." For CBOs and Tribal entities working on green infrastructure projects, this reality transforms what may have once been a \$5,000 invoice into tens of thousands of dollars in financial risk to carry until invoices are processed.

In addition to fronting costs, the reimbursement process itself is labor-intensive, requiring the collection of detailed receipts, budget revisions, and task-based budget tracking and invoicing. As described by Je-Show Yang, Program Manager at APIFM, each invoice requires "quite a lot of staff hours" (Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Compounding these challenges, interviewees noted that some local and state grants impose additional cash-flow constraints through invoice-retention policies or require mandatory waiting periods before invoices can be submitted (Belén Bernal, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). For example, Heng Lam Foong shared that one grant award received has a five percent retention rate policy, "so they cannot pay you in full. They hold five percent until the end of the two-year contract... that can be challenging for smaller nonprofits to manage" (Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Collectively, these experiences illustrate how reimbursement-based funding models and related policies disproportionately burden CBOs and Tribal entities. Without the necessary cash reserves or lines of credit, reimbursement-based funding models are simply not an option and will continue to pose a structural barrier to the equitable participation of CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribal entities in local and state funding.

Restrictive Indirect, COLA, and Fringe Benefits Policies

Additionally, interviewees identified restrictive policies related to indirect cost rate, cost-of-living-adjustments (COLA), fringe benefits, and eligible costs as another major financial and administrative barrier when managing local and state grant awards. According to CBO and Tribal entity interviewees, these policies fail to reflect the true cost of operating a nonprofit organization or Tribal government and disproportionately burden applicants with limited administrative capacity and cash flow. When local and state grants impose low caps on indirect and fringe benefit rates, an anonymous Executive Director described "we're left with subsidizing the difference, which isn't included," whereas consultants are able to more or less include their "actual indirect and fringe benefit rates" (Personal Communication, October 22nd, 2025). Interviewees also called attention to compliance requirements tied to fringe benefit rates, which represent an additional, costly, and time-consuming burden that some local and state agencies impose on grantees. After being awarded a recent local grant award, one CBO shared that a funder required them to complete a time-consuming fringe benefit audit that cost over \$3,000 to complete, which then had to be repeated months later at the start of the new fiscal year. For CBOs and Tribal entities, these policies divert limited staff time and financial resources away from implementing a grant program's goals and objectives and impose additional strains on their cash flow.

5.C.2. Grant Program Design

Another recurring challenge raised by CBOs and Tribal entity interviewees is when local and state grant programs are not designed to properly value community engagement or community-led

planning, creating a “fundamental mismatch” between funding amounts and required deliverables (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 28th, 2025). According to a staff member at a CBO, “I think the other thing that can make grants super inaccessible is just a lack of understanding of how much money equates to how much work” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 28th, 2025). In this CBO’s experience, a \$50,000 state grant required far more staff time and effort than the funding could realistically cover on top of its “incredibly high reporting burden” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 28th, 2025). When CBOs and Tribal entities are required by grantors to meet ambitious community and Tribal engagement deliverables, yet are underfunded to do so, they are effectively asked to absorb the costs. This mismatch also reflects a broader undervaluing of community engagement within many public grant programs. Interviewees noted that even when community engagement is identified as a required or eligible activity, key expenses are often excluded from eligibility, such as food, childcare, transportation, participation stipends, and interpretation costs. Several CBO and Tribal entity interviewees explained that these costs are essential for making engagement activities accessible and respectful of Tribal and community members’ time. In particular, interviewees emphasized the importance of providing food at community engagement events. Offering meals helps remove barriers to participation, especially for working families, and creates a welcoming environment that brings people together, fosters relationship-building, and acknowledges the value of community members’ time and contributions. As a staff member at Nature for All shared, the ability to cover expenses such as food, printing, and supplies can determine how accessible a community engagement event is: “I think even just in terms of activities like being able to feed the community and have print materials and things like that.... it's really hard to make an activity accessible if you can't feed people, right?” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). This disconnect reflects a broader misunderstanding within public funding systems about the amount of staff time, thoughtful planning, and related expenses that are required to build trust and carry out meaningful community engagement.

5.C.3. Onerous Reporting

CBOs and Tribal entities consistently described onerous reporting requirements as one of the most significant and frequently faced challenges associated with managing local and state grant funding. While interviewees recognized that local and state agencies must ensure accountability for public funds, many emphasized that the frequency of reporting and level of documentation required felt excessive relative to the size of the grant award and their organization’s capacity. Erica Maceda reflected on her organization’s experience reporting to a state agency, sharing that the monthly reporting requirements were “incredibly rigorous,” requiring extensive documentation of activities and expenditures (Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Similarly, the Executive Director of another CBO underscored how the administrative weight of paperwork and compliance diverts staff time away from engaging and meeting the needs of community members: “the burden of paperwork and tracking of these things really gets us away from our work” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). For many CBOs and Tribal entities, especially those already limited in staff capacity, high-cadence and onerous reporting requirements pose a critical capacity strain that pulls limited staff away from community engagement and community planning. Likewise, when reporting requirements are not scaled to accurately reflect a grant's size, interviewees reveal they end up spending more time on reporting than accomplishing their deliverables. Ultimately, the

cumulative impact of fulfilling reporting requirements can undermine a grant’s original purpose and dissuade grantees from pursuing this funding in the future.

5.C.4. Sentiments of Distrust Felt by CBO and Tribal Partners

Compounded by the restrictive and burdensome realities of many local and state grant programs, CBOs and Tribal entity interviewees shared the emotional and relational toll of a funder's distrust. Rather than feeling like collaborative partners stewarding public dollars together to achieve shared goals, several interviewees described grant check-ins and reporting processes as interrogative in tone. As described by one CBO interviewee, this frequent questioning and interrogation by grant officers makes the work feel more “daunting” than it needs to be (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Other interviewees similarly described this environment “feels like you're constantly afraid of being fired [from a job]” (Itzel Flores Castillo Wang, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). This fear can discourage grantees from asking clarifying questions or seeking guidance from funders, ultimately undermining transparency and learning. While interviewees unanimously agreed that accountability for public taxpayer dollars is paramount, the approaches described can come across as undermining CBOs and Tribal entities' expertise and the value they contribute to these projects and their communities of focus. Ultimately, the implication that CBOs and Tribal entities must constantly prove their expertise and competence erodes trust and reinforces harmful power imbalances. For Belén Bernal, Executive Director of Nature for All, these shared sentiments reflect the need for a “narrative shift on what nonprofits are and what we bring to the table... We are worthy” (Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). Collectively, these reflections reveal how compliance-heavy and distrustful funding environments both strain organizational capacity and erode trust and relationship building between grantees and grantors. Shifting toward trust-based grantmaking grounded in mutual accountability and recognizing community expertise is essential to advancing procedural equity within public funding systems.

5.D. Local Funding

Consistent with themes identified in the survey results, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees highlighted recurring challenges in accessing and managing local grant funding through local county bond measures and small city- or municipality-led grant programs. At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that local funding, particularly voter-approved bond measures, is a stable, longer-term funding source for community-led green infrastructure projects in Los Angeles County. This section examines both the strengths and limitations of local funding mechanisms, with a focus on Countywide bond measures and smaller city- and municipality-led grant programs, and procedural challenges that CBOs and Tribal entities face when accessing and managing these funds.

5.D.1. Assets of Countywide Bond Measures

CBOs, Tribal entity, and local funder interviewees identified countywide bond Measures W (Safe Clean Water Program), A (Safe Clean Neighborhood Parks and Beaches), and M (Traffic Improvement Plan) as important sources of funding for green infrastructure, active transportation,

and related community benefits. During a period of relative funding uncertainty at the federal level and incoming state funding being oversubscribed, interviewees highlighted local funding Measures as a critical funding stream as they do not sunset. In addition to the built-in longevity of these funding sources for Los Angeles County, existing grant programs funded by local bond measures are better equipped to reflect the unique needs and diversity of our region. When asked to design their ideal grant process for their organization, Heng Lam Foong, Co-Director of APIFM, highlighted Measure A's Language Access Requirements for Community Outreach and Engagement as an effective example of how grant guidelines can be designed to address the diverse needs of Los Angeles County's communities (Date). In comparison with statewide grant programs, countywide grant programs are able to develop regionally appropriate guidelines and requirements.

SCWP WF Education Grant As a Model for Accessible Public Funding

An important finding from our research is that the Safe Clean Water Program's (SCWP) Public Education and Community Engagement Grant Program ("WF SCWP Education Grant"), administered in partnership with The Water Foundation, represents a promising model for cross-sector partnerships to advance public funding accessibility. To gain insights into how the SCWP WF Education Grant was designed and implemented, we interviewed funders knowledgeable about the grant program's design and rollout. Since this was the SCWP's first time launching the grant program and it was considered a pilot program, LACFCD used a sole source agreement to contract with The Water Foundation as they are a trusted partner in the region uniquely positioned to administer such a program. This partnership allowed LACFCD to lean on The Water Foundation's expertise in grantmaking. As a contractor to LACFCD and the grant administrator, The Water Foundation had to assume legal responsibility and ensure that its grantees steward public funding responsibly and that their projects do not trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Given The Water Foundation's experience balancing the accessibility of grant applications and reporting requirements with maintaining necessary compliance when administering their other grant programs, they were able to effectively develop grant application and reporting requirements that remained accessible while ensuring they gathered the necessary reporting questions to quantify impacts.

In comparing CBO and Tribal interviewees' remarks on applying for the SCWP's Regional Program with their experiences applying for and receiving funding from the SCWP WF Education Grant, it is evident that The Water Foundation effectively safeguarded its grantees from complicated grant application processes and onerous reporting commonly experienced with public funding.² In fact, several CBO and Tribal entity interviewees initially referred to the grant as "private" or "philanthropic" funding because the application, pre-award, and reporting processes have been significantly less burdensome than those of other local and state grant programs. In comparison with other public funding opportunities, interviewees commented on how the WF SCWP Education Grant did not require extensive upfront documentation (i.e., full permits, memoranda of understanding, land use agreements, proof of property control, etc.) that often creates additional barriers for applicants and stalls community-led projects before they even begin (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 22nd, 2025). While some CBOs acknowledged the proposal still required coordination

² It is important to acknowledge that due to Measure W's bond language non-federally recognized Tribal governments were not eligible to apply as a lead applicant.

and staff time, Erica Maceda with River In Action described the grant application as a strong “blueprint” for how public funding can be structured to maintain accountability while minimizing unnecessary administrative burdens (Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). As a result, our findings reveal that The Water Foundation’s administrative and intermediary role was critical to creating an equitable and less burdensome grant process for CBOs and Tribal nonprofits. Overall, the partnership between The Water Foundation and the Los Angeles County Flood Control District (LACFCD) to pilot the SCWP WF Education Grant represents an effective model for philanthropic organizations to serve as an intermediary grant administrator and ensure public grant programs are designed and administered with procedural equity and accessibility in mind.

5.D.2. Challenges of Tax-Funded Measures

At the same time, interviewees acknowledged that the scale and structure of these tax-funded bond measures bring their own set of challenges for funders. Specifically, funders described a steep learning curve in developing a large-scale grant program to disburse these bond dollars, noting that agencies have had to “build the plane while flying it and continue to release supplemental guidance as needed” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). Given the magnitude of these measures and the fact that they are taxpayer dollars, one interviewee described that implementing a countywide bond measure-funded grant program requires a “really heavy administrative load to manage all the different components of the program and to continue to engage with all the different parties” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025). Likewise, one challenge and lesson learned shared by an interviewee is to ensure that Consumer Price Index (CPI) or inflation adjustments are included as part of the tax mechanism from the start, because otherwise public agencies have to go back to the voters to pass a CPI adjustment, which in itself is a longer and more complicated process (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 17th, 2025).

In addition to administrative challenges faced by public agencies when implementing these grant programs, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees highlighted persistent barriers that limit their ability to compete for these grants. Specifically, CBOs with organizational experience applying for these measures reported that the grant application process can represent an immediate barrier to entry for lower-capacity applicants due to the application’s length and a match funding requirement found in one Measure. As discussed in this report’s literature review, match-funding requirements pose an immediate barrier to entry for lower-capacity applicants. When most large infrastructure grants require matching funds, one CBO interviewee described a “chicken-and-egg” dynamic in which organizations must already have funding in order to secure additional funding. One CBO interviewee shared the reality their organization has faced, “Who’s going to be the first one to have funded you?... When we’re applying to these really big grants, you sometimes need to have that one grant that’s accessible and is willing to fund you so you can use it as a matching grant fund for the larger grants” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Without matching funds, interviewees described how these requirements can disqualify otherwise competitive, community-driven green infrastructure projects and reinforce inequities in who can tap into larger-scale infrastructure dollars.

5.D.3. Other Challenges Shared by CBOs and Tribal Entities

Beyond countywide bond measures, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees also described structural and procedural inequities when applying for or managing other local and countywide grant programs. Specifically, interviewees called out CBOs and Tribal entities' ineligibility to apply for requests for proposals (RFPs) and staff turnover within smaller cities and municipalities as key challenges that further constrain their ability to access and effectively manage local funding. At the local funding level, interviewees identified their ineligibility for many local RFPs as a recurring structural and procedural barrier that limits their direct access to local funding opportunities aligned with green infrastructure and community climate resiliency work. From their vantage point, interviewees described local contracting and RFP processes as being designed in favor of large private consulting firms and enabling them to subcontract out the community engagement portion of the scope of work at a much lower cost. As a result, CBOs and Tribal entities receive a small fraction of the project budget to carry out community engagement work that is central to the project's success. In LA Walks' experience, Alex Ramirez, Executive Director, shared:

We got a tiny little piece of that [community engagement] budget compared to what [the consultant is] receiving, and that work and the success of their project actually depends on people adopting the thing that they're doing, and people giving feedback, and people supporting the activity or the project that they're doing. I really want to flip the way that is being done, and I want to make sure that at least when it comes to community engagement and ownership of public projects that is invested directly in community (Personal Communication, November 4th, 2025).

To Ramirez's point, it is critical that local funding mechanisms allow for direct investment in bottom-up planning led by CBOs and Tribal entities and can facilitate authentic and meaningful community engagement for and ownership of a project.

CBO and Tribal entity interviewees also identified frequent staff turnover in small grant programs administered by local cities and municipalities as a common challenge at the local level. Similar to challenges experienced with philanthropic funding, turnover among city and municipal staff serving as grant officers disrupts grantees' ability to complete their grant in a timely manner and results in stalled communication, delayed decision-making, and loss of institutional knowledge. When grant managers leave mid-grant period, new staff must cycle in and relearn the project context within an already short grant timeline. For smaller local grants in particular, where staffing is already limited and grant periods are short, frequent staff turnover can significantly disrupt grantees' workflows and even strain a grantee's organizational capacity (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025). As a result, interviewees frequently pointed to grant officer turnover contributing to slowing progress and undermining their momentum. In some cases, interviewees even shared that their grant officer's departure caused an active grant to be put on pause until the city filled the vacant position (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Given the instability of city and municipal grant program staff, it is difficult for CBOs and Tribal entities to effectively leverage these smaller grant opportunities when the entities distributing the funds are unable to carry out their responsibilities as grant administrators.

5.D.4. Key Takeaways on Local Funding

Together, these findings highlight both the promise of countywide bond measures and local grant programs in advancing community-led green infrastructure, as well as the need to address procedural inequities that limit CBOs' and Tribal entities' effective access to these infrastructure dollars. Measures W, A, and M provide critical, long-term funding that is increasingly important amid federal uncertainty and state funding programs that have become increasingly oversubscribed; however, the design and administration of their grant programs often impose procedural barriers that make these funding sources unattainable for CBOs and Tribal entities. Importantly, the Los Angeles County Flood Control District's partnership with The Water Foundation to roll out the SCWP WF Education Grant represents an effective model that other public agencies and foundations can replicate to equitably distribute public funding to CBOs and Tribal nonprofits. Addressing eligibility restrictions, match funding requirements, and staffing instability will be essential to ensuring that local funding can better serve CBOs, Tribal entities, and their partners in designing and implementing community-led green infrastructure and climate resilience efforts across the region.

5.E. State Funding

Through interviews with staff from California State agencies, as well as CBOs and Tribal entities, about their experiences navigating state funding processes, it is evident that state agencies are making a concerted effort to address longstanding procedural inequities baked into their grantmaking process. Particularly, the California Strategic Growth Council's emphasis on funding capacity building as part of planning and infrastructure grants, as well as ongoing momentum shifting away from reimbursement-based funding models and toward advance payment show promise. At the same time, CBO and Tribal interviewees' experiences and current challenges with applying for and managing state grants reveal that additional reforms are needed. This section examines best practices identified by interviewees in less burdensome state grant programs, as well as existing policies and procedures that contribute to the administrative burdens and capacity challenges shared by CBO and Tribal entity interviewees. From there, the section discusses challenges specific to Tribal entities, as well as the constraints state agencies face when administering grant programs.

5.E.1. Effective Grantmaking Practices

Interviews with state agency staff, CBOs, and Tribal entities affirm that efforts are underway within California state grant programs to address longstanding procedural burdens and barriers. While extensive challenges remain, interviewees identified several promising practices that have helped make grant programs more accessible, flexible, and responsive to CBOs and Tribal entities. These approaches also demonstrate that state agencies can equitably administer public funds while reducing administrative barriers and building trust and relationships with grantees.

Capacity Building Activities

One grantmaking practice frequently highlighted by interviewees was the Strategic Growth Council's (SGC) integration of capacity building activities into its grant programs. Blanca Escobedo,

a Resilient Community Associate at the SGC, emphasized that the SGC intentionally embeds capacity building throughout the life of the grant and “embed training on reporting and invoicing to give grantees the tools to complete deliverables” (Personal Communication, January 6th, 2025). Escobedo noted the SGC “can change some invoicing requirements and are always working to try and simplify administrative requirements for our programs as much as we can” (Personal Communication, January 6th, 2025). Additionally, CBO and Tribal interviewees noted the SGC’s integration of cohort-based learning, peer-to-peer engagement, technical assistance, and the tools and resources provided as extremely valuable. A Tribal interviewee also described the SGC as “very accessible” and “very malleable to the needs of the Tribe,” noting that the program allowed Tribal governments to serve as the lead applicant and demonstrated an effective balance between fiscal accountability and trust-based grantmaking (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025). While interviewees consistently identified capacity building activities as beneficial across various state grant programs, they expressed more mixed sentiments about technical assistance alone. Interviewees emphasized that capacity building is more effective when it is embedded directly within grant programs and paired with relationship-based support. Recognizing that organizational capacity is needed to successfully pursue and manage larger infrastructure grants, this approach helps ensure that grantees build the administrative and organizational capacity to manage more restrictive public funding sources and advance community- and Tribal-led projects.

Use of a Conceptual or Pre-Proposal: Saves Time and Resources

Additionally, interviewees identified using conceptual or pre-proposal phases as an effective strategy to reduce the administrative burden associated with complex state grant applications. Several CBO and Tribal entity interviewees noted that two-step application processes, in which applicants first submit a brief concept proposal before completing a full application, can save both applicants and grant program staff significant time and resources. While one interviewee acknowledged that it “does create an extra step in the process,” the pre-proposal phase allows us to “put together a smaller pre-application package and then at least get pre-approved or preliminary feedback” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). By adding this initial phase, funder interviewees shared it provides applicants with early clarity on whether they meet all eligibility requirements and aligns with the grant program’s priorities (Blanca Escobedo, Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026). Across interviews, CBOs and Tribal entities emphasized that pre-proposal phases help prevent organizations from spending extensive staff time preparing lengthy and complicated applications that ultimately may not be competitive or aligned with program goals.

Relational Grantmaking and Adaptability

Another effective approach identified by interviewees involved with grant programs is adopting relational grantmaking practices that focus on building partnerships rather than solely evaluating proposals and completed deliverables. One example highlighted was the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California’s (MWD) Community Partnering Program. Rather than relying on a traditional grant process that simply accepts or rejects applications, the Community Partnering

Program works collaboratively with applicants to strengthen their proposals. Joseph Chavez, a Principal Public Affairs Representative who manages the program, shared:

“Our objective is to get them to the finish line... If they have a project or an event that’s water-themed and they need to work on their application, a collaborative effort will be made to ensure all qualifying criteria are met” (Personal Communication, January 13th, 2026).

This collaborative approach helps improve the quality of proposals and reduces barriers for grant applicants. By approaching grantmaking with the shared goal of helping applicants succeed and receive funding, the application process also initiates and fosters relationships and trust-building between applicants and MWD. Interviewees also highlighted the need for funders to be adaptable when unexpected challenges arise in projects. In particular, an interviewee working at a Tribal entity noted positive experiences working with the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy (SMMC). When their project encountered unforeseen political barriers, SMMC provided a no-cost extension and offered support in navigating specific challenges (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). These examples illustrate how flexibility, responsiveness, and relationship-building can help ensure that community- and Tribal-led projects remain viable even when external conditions change.

5.E.2. State Funding Challenges

CBO and Tribal entity interviewees described state funding as particularly challenging due to its administratively burdensome processes, state bureaucracy, and focus on geographic equality rather than geographic equity regarding distributing state funding. Due to state grant programs' reliance on state budget allocations, grantees described the destabilizing impacts of state budget cuts and uncertainties, causing programs to shift priorities, pause mid-grant application cycle, or enter moratoriums with little warning. As one interviewee explained, grantees are “constantly at the shift of the state budget” and directly experience the consequences of any state budget volatility (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). When grant program allocations are impacted by the state budget, grant program pauses create significant delays, disrupting project planning, and forcing organizations to absorb the staff costs of navigating this uncertainty.

Community Data and Distribution of State Funding

When discussing state grant funding with CBO and Tribal entities, CBO and Tribal entity interviewees raised concerns about how state agencies’ emphasis on geographic equality, rather than geographic equity, shapes the distribution of funding across California in ways that overlook the scale and intensity of need in Los Angeles County. As the most populated county in the state, interviewees noted Los Angeles County often competes for funding under frameworks that seek to distribute state funds evenly across counties rather than proportionally based on need. One Executive Director working in an unincorporated Los Angeles County community described this challenge as a particular structural disadvantage for their community, which faces layers of historical and ongoing disinvestment. The anonymous interviewee also shared:

“if [state funders] can make [their grant programs and scoring criteria] equity-based and look at geographic areas that people are programming in and say ‘hey, this community, based on this data, looks like they need this opportunity more than others, I think would make things more accessible for communities or for [communities in unincorporated LA County]” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 4th, 2026).

This challenge is further compounded by limitations in how state mapping and data tools collect and aggregate demographic data. Heng Lam Foong and Jean Park with APIFM noted that Asian and Pacific Islander communities are frequently treated and “seen as monolithic,” which “actually masks a lot of disparities” (Heng Lam Foong, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). When applying for state funding, this aggregation of data creates a significant challenge because it becomes difficult to accurately “tell the story of [API] communities” and “justify why the funding is important and needed” (Jean Park, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). While challenges with accurate community-level demographic data are not an issue isolated to Los Angeles County, demographic data inaccuracies due to how the state aggregates demographic groups exacerbate Los Angeles County’s challenge to receive equitable funding allocations from the state. Together, these dynamics highlight how both funding distributions and data limitations inadvertently create additional barriers for CBO and Tribal entities trying to make the case for the level of need in Los Angeles County’s high-need communities.

State Budgeting and Invoicing Processes

CBO and Tribal entity interviewees also identified budgeting and invoicing by task as another significant administrative hurdle that often functions as a capacity barrier. For CBOs and Tribal entities new to applying for and managing state grants, interviewees described developing highly detailed budgets by task as “unwieldy” and difficult to manage (Heng Lam Foong, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Interviewees emphasized that this challenge is compounded by a lack of built-in capacity building support around budgeting and invoicing requirements across state grant programs. Erica Maceda, Executive Director of River In Action, underscored the need for state agencies to provide clearer protocols and standardized templates to support grantees navigating these processes. According to Maceda, the issue with current state grant budgeting and invoicing processes “is not that it’s super difficult, it’s that it’s particular” and that “there’s just a level of expectation across the board for everyone, and not all [organizations] are at the same place. So that’s a very real challenge, and it comes with real consequences, like not getting reimbursed fast enough” (Erica Maceda, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). This challenge is further exacerbated by inconsistent budgeting and invoicing formats across different state grant programs, affecting even highly experienced grantees. Ultimately, the amount of staff time required to track expenditures at the subcategory level and seek formal approval for minor budget adjustments increases administrative burdens and heightens the risk of non-compliance. Several interviewees also expressed that state agencies could meaningfully reduce these barriers and support CBOs and Tribal entities, especially those new to state funding, by providing grant-specific budgeting tools and templates.

5.E.3. Challenges Faced by Tribal Entities

Tribal entities face additional structural, legal, and administrative barriers that make it difficult to access and manage state funding. While interviewees referenced grant programs that have made meaningful progress in reducing barriers for Tribal applicants, many challenges remain for non-federally recognized Tribes. In particular, non-federally recognized Tribes continue to face eligibility restrictions, requirements to sign limited waivers of sovereign immunity, and cultural misalignments embedded in the design of many state grant programs.

Eligibility Requirements and Limited Waivers of Sovereign Immunity

Non-federally recognized Tribal entities interviewed described significant structural, legal, and administrative barriers rooted in tax classifications and eligibility rules applied by the California Franchise Tax Board and state agencies. While some state grant programs now allow non-federally recognized Tribes to apply as lead applicants, one interviewee noted that non-federally recognized Tribes are often required to register as a nonprofit, a for-profit corporation, or an LLC to qualify. Interviewees explained that these requirements effectively force Tribal governments to adopt external organizational structures that do not reflect their Tribal governance systems to become eligible for state funding. Relatedly, another major challenge identified by interviewees involves requirements that Tribal governments sign limited waivers of sovereign immunity as a condition of receiving state funds. These provisions are intended to ensure that the state can recover unspent or misused funds, but pose a monumental burden for both federally and non-federally recognized Tribes. As one interviewee explained:

When you get a state grant, you have to sign something that you give up your sovereignty in order for them to be able to be assured that they can take that money back. And that's a hard pill to swallow for the Tribe, right? You have to say, 'I'm a government, I'm sovereign,' but in order to take this money, I have to say that I give up that right? And it's been happening for decades, and we're trying to fight that (Anonymous, Personal Communication, November 19th, 2025).

Interviewees noted that this requirement can be particularly complicated for non-federally recognized Tribes, who are not formally recognized by the State of California but are still asked to waive aspects of their inherent sovereignty to access state funding opportunities.

Colonial Focus on Conservation Funding and Land Acquisition Challenges

Tribal entity interviewees also described the unique challenges Tribes in Southern California face when trying to reacquire their ancestral homelands due to both the colonial framing of conservation funding and fair market value policies embedded in state land acquisition grant programs. While several state grant programs increasingly prioritize land conservation in support of [California's 30x30 Initiative](#), a goal to conserve 30 percent of lands and coastal waters by 2030, interviewees noted that these programs often frame conservation through colonial and Western lens' that sees land and human use as separate (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). As one interviewee explained, funding programs can "silos Tribes to conservation and exclusively

conservation from a Western lens” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). Interviewees emphasized that when conservation funding programs rely primarily on colonial and Western concepts of land conservation, they often fail to recognize how land stewardship, cultural practices, and ecological restoration are implicitly interconnected for many Tribal communities. When grant programs adopt and reinforce this narrow understanding of land conservation, Tribal entities are then expected to steward land according to colonial and Western conservation standards that restrict economic uses or cultural practices that help the land over time. Tribal entities in Southern California face additional challenges when attempting to reacquire their ancestral homelands due to fair market value policies. According to a Tribal entity interviewee:

... Tribes in Southern California, in particular, are at a disadvantage because these grants only allow Tribes or Tribal organizations or conservancies in general to purchase land at fair market value, they will not be a part of any payment negotiation, whenever that exceeds fair market value (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025).

Since the fair market value for land in Southern California is significantly higher than in other areas across the State, such as Northern California or the Central Valley, land acquisition proposals include far less acreage for the same grant amount (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 29th, 2025). As a result, these proposals can be seen as less competitive when evaluated against statewide conservation goals such as the 30x30 Initiative. In practice, this means that Tribal entities in Southern California must compete within funding frameworks that prioritize acreage metrics without fully accounting for region-specific land costs or the importance of restoring Tribal access to specific ancestral lands. Collectively, interviewees stressed that these burdens and barriers make it significantly difficult for Tribes to reclaim their ancestral homelands and exercise their Tribal sovereignty through existing state funding programs.

5.E.4. Challenges Shared by Funders

In addition to barriers described by Tribal entities, state funders identified several challenges that affect their ability to effectively design and administer grant programs. Interviews with three state funders revealed that agencies must balance accountability requirements, administrative constraints, and varying levels of applicant and grantee capacity as they work to make funding more accessible. More specifically, state funder interviewees identified state agencies’ focus on quantitative metrics to evaluate a grant program’s return on investment, grantee capacity challenges, and legal and institutional constraints that limit grant officers and program staff’s ability to reduce or remove burdens. These structural realities can make it difficult for agencies to implement more flexible or relationship-based grantmaking.

Limited by State Legislation to Change Certain Grantmaking Policies

The most prominent challenge funders highlighted was that many grantmaking policies are shaped by statutory or legal requirements that cannot easily be changed at the grant program level. Even when grant officers and program staff identify and are in support of opportunities to improve flexibility and reduce barriers for CBOs and Tribal entities, implementing these changes often requires legislative or executive action. In some cases, modifications to grant program requirements

would require new legislation, updates to existing statutes, or executive orders. When one interviewee's state agency worked to remove certain structural and administrative barriers for Tribal applicants, they shared that their agency devoted resources to listening to and implementing community input to improve the grant process (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2025). Relatively straightforward changes to a grant program can be difficult to secure, particularly because not all state agencies fall directly under executive authority, and each agency has to navigate its own internal processes for implementing policy changes. As a result, grant officers and program staff may recognize the need for more adaptive grantmaking practices yet remain constrained by the legal frameworks governing state funding.

Grantee Capacity Challenges

Due to organizational capacity gaps, one state funder interviewee shared that challenges still arose even after their grant program made deliberate efforts to reduce administrative burdens related to reporting. When designing a Tribal grant program, the interviewee shared that staff at their state agency worked diligently to streamline administrative processes that simplify grantees' scopes of work and reporting requirements. Despite these efforts, the interviewee noted that significant capacity gaps limited the effectiveness of these administrative changes. While some grantees expressed appreciation for the streamlined processes, the interviewee noted that other grantees still struggled "to meet all of their contractual obligations" (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2025). This interviewee's experience highlights how innovations intended to reduce administrative burdens cannot solve all administrative challenges, that fundamental capacity building needs to happen at the Tribal entity level, and additional forms of capacity building support are called for (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2025). While streamlined reporting may benefit some grantees, these changes alone may not effectively support others facing deeper organizational capacity constraints. Ultimately, this interviewee's experience exemplifies how administrative burdens cannot be solved using the "one-size-fits-all" approach and underscores the importance of pairing efforts to reduce administrative burdens with investments in capacity building.

Emphasis on Return On Investment

State funders also identified challenges related to how state funding systems prioritize return on investment (ROI) metrics when evaluating a grant program's impact, as it overlooks their "social infrastructure impacts" (Blanca Escobedo, Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026). Since state grant programs use public tax dollars, State agencies are often required to report performance metrics or outcomes, such as ROI, to governing bodies and the general public. In particular, Blanca Escobedo, Resilient Communities Associate at the Strategic Growth Council (SGC), explained that this challenge is especially relevant for grant programs focused on capacity building (Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026). Escobedo noted that:

... in the case of the SGC's capacity building grants, there is often significant attention placed on measurable outcomes such as "how much additional funding grantees secure," she emphasized that the long-term goals of capacity building initiatives "extend beyond leveraged funding" (Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026).

As Escobedo explained, “sometimes there's a lot of focus on money or funding raised out of this outcome, which is really important, but longer term capacity building is also focused on social infrastructure, on building relationships, on building trust” (Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026). These forms of impact, such as strengthening partnerships, building trust, and developing internal infrastructure, are critical to enabling CBOs and Tribal entities to successfully leverage funding and implement projects in the future. However, funders noted that these social infrastructure outcomes are difficult to translate into the quantifiable metrics typically required by traditional state reporting frameworks. As a result, programs designed to build long-term capacity may struggle to fully communicate their impact using conventional ROI performance indicators, which can also influence how program success is understood by decision-makers and policymakers.

5.E.5. Key Takeaways on State Funding

These findings suggest that while some California state agencies are making meaningful progress in reducing administrative barriers and improving the accessibility of their grant programs, this progress is slow and uneven. Moreover, structural challenges within state funding systems continue to limit how far these reforms can go. Interviewees highlighted promising practices, such as embedding capacity building activities, incorporating a pre-proposal phase, and adopting more relational grantmaking approaches, that reveal how state agencies can reduce administrative burdens for CBOs and Tribal entities while maintaining fiscal accountability of public dollars. Simultaneously, persistent challenges related to administrative complexity, state budget volatility, equity in geographic funding distribution, and rigid legal frameworks continue to shape the experiences of CBO and Tribal entity applicants and grantees. Non-federally recognized Tribes face additional legal structural barriers that further complicate their ability to access state funding opportunities and reclaim their ancestral homelands. Importantly, CBO, Tribal entity, and state funder interviewees reveal that many of these challenges are interconnected and that reducing administrative burdens alone may not be sufficient without parallel investments in capacity building and greater flexibility in program design. Furthermore, state agencies' ability to implement grantmaking reforms is often constrained by statutory requirements and broader institutional processes. Consequently, interviewees emphasized the need for broader policy reforms across all state agencies and funding frameworks that prioritize equity and long-term capacity building.

RECOMMENDATIONS



East Los Angeles Median Project

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are grounded in the lived experiences, challenges, and insights shared by the CBOs, Tribal entities, philanthropic and public funders who engaged in this research. These perspectives provide valuable, on-the-ground context for understanding how current funding structures, policies, and practices shape access to and management of funding across different sectors. In addition to synthesizing interview findings and recurring themes, the following recommendations are informed by CWH's experience leading ReDesignLA, including its direct partnership with CBOs and Tribal entities navigating complex funding opportunities.

Importantly, these recommendations are not intended to be prescriptive or exhaustive. Rather, they serve as starting points to support ongoing dialogue and collaboration amongst CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders to co-develop solutions together. Advancing more equitable and effective funding systems will require partnership, trust-building, and co-development of solutions that reflect the diverse needs, capacities, and priorities of communities across Los Angeles County. Together, these insights highlight both persistent administrative burdens and structural barriers as well as emerging opportunities to reimagine funding practices in ways that are more equitable, accessible, and community-centered. The following sections organize recommendations by funder type, recognizing that philanthropic, local, and state funders each face unique constraints and play distinct yet interconnected roles in shaping Los Angeles County's funding ecosystem.

6.A. Recommendations For All Funders

Conduct an Equity Audit to Inform A Grantmaking Action Plan

By conducting an equity audit of their grantmaking process and specific grant programs, funders can identify where administrative practices across the grant application, budgeting, contracting, and reporting processes may unintentionally create barriers for CBOs and Tribal entities, especially those that are lower-capacity or non-federally recognized. Given that funders may not be aware of all the factors contributing to existing administrative burdens, we recommend that funders meaningfully engage with and gather feedback from current grantees about their grantmaking processes. An equity audit or needs assessment of their grantmaking processes provides funders with an opportunity to better understand how procedural, structural, and legal requirements affect different types of applicants and grantees. An equity audit can examine:

- Opportunities to simplify and streamline grant guidelines (such as removing jargon and reducing length of guideline documents), the grant application process, and reporting requirements.
- Administrative and compliance requirements that create cash-flow problems.
- Areas where flexibility is possible within existing statutory and fiscal requirements.
- Inconsistencies across grant programs that increase complexity and create confusion for grantees.
- Areas where additional capacity building and technical assistance resources could benefit applicants and grantees.

- What legal, regulatory, or policy changes are needed to address existing procedural burdens and barriers?

Based on findings from the equity audit, we recommend that funders develop a clear action plan outlining concrete steps to operationalize more equitable grantmaking practices. This may include simplifying reporting, piloting advance payment options where feasible, incorporating capacity building, or improving transparency regarding non-negotiable requirements. The action plan can also include timelines, internal accountability measures, and mechanisms for ongoing feedback from grantees.

Adopt a Capacity Building Framework Into Your Grant Programs

Rather than approaching capacity building as a separate or supplemental activity, grant programs that adopt a capacity building framework recognize the need for capacity building opportunities for CBOs and Tribal entities throughout the grant process. When funders integrate capacity building into their grant programs and approach to grantmaking, they acknowledge that strengthening organizational infrastructure is often a prerequisite for managing more complex and restrictive public funding. By adopting a comprehensive capacity building framework, funders can help ensure that CBOs and Tribal entities are not only able to access funding opportunities but are equipped with the administrative infrastructure and institutional capacity necessary to manage and sustain Tribal-led green infrastructure projects over time. For these reasons, we recommend that funders adopt a formal capacity building framework that embeds capacity building as a core objective of their grantmaking.

Embed Capacity Building in Grant Program Design:

Funders can strengthen grant outcomes by embedding capacity building activities directly into grant program design. When grant programs incorporate technical training, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and detailed templates to support budgeting, invoicing, and reporting processes, CBOs and Tribal entities are better positioned to manage increasingly complex grants required to implement green infrastructure projects. Rather than offering only technical assistance solely during the grant application process, embedding capacity building activities throughout the grant process can help organizations build the internal infrastructure needed to comply with reporting, budgeting, and compliance requirements associated with public funding. Further, we recommend that funders not silo capacity-building and infrastructure grants, but rather incorporate capacity-building activities into infrastructure grants to ensure that CBOs and Tribal entities accessing those funds receive the necessary technical assistance and resources to successfully manage their grants without negatively affecting their organizational capacity.

Facilitate Peer-to-Peer Learning and Knowledge Sharing Opportunities:

As part of this capacity building framework, we encourage funders to incorporate peer-to-peer learning and knowledge-sharing opportunities into their grant program design. Several interviewees noted that philanthropic funders' investment in coalition-building and knowledge-sharing spaces

where organizations can exchange strategies, troubleshoot challenges, and build relationships with peers would greatly benefit public grant programs. Creating intentional spaces for peer learning can help organizations share lessons learned, build new and strengthen existing partnerships, and build long-term networks that exist beyond the life of a single grant.

Offer Tools and Resources that Build Administrative and Financial Capacity:

Another effective strategy that funders can build into their capacity building framework is providing clear tools and guidance to help applicants and grantees navigate complex grant requirements while strengthening their financial and administrative capacity. Unclear instructions, inconsistent reporting expectations, complex compliance requirements, and highly specific budget categories often create unnecessary confusion and administrative burdens for CBOs and Tribal entities. Providing user-friendly templates and training for budgeting, invoicing, and reporting can streamline compliance and equip grantees, particularly those newer to more restrictive funding, with the skills and systems needed to manage grants effectively. Interview findings reinforce that building financial and administrative capacity is foundational to enabling CBOs and Tribal entities to effectively lead and champion green infrastructure projects. Clear, jargon-free guidelines and well-designed templates also ensure that grantees understand a funder's expectations from the start and reduce unnecessary back-and-forth during the reporting and invoicing review process. While several grant programs provide tools during the application process, interviewees emphasized the need for funders to provide clear and detailed templates and guidance throughout the contracting and active management phases of a grant award. At the same time, interviewees highlighted the importance of flexibility, noting that grantees should have the option to use existing internal systems or adopt funder-provided tools. By offering clear, consistent guidelines and adaptable resources across all phases of the grant process, funders can reduce administrative burdens, improve grant management processes, and support CBOs and Tribal entities in building their long-term organizational, financial, and administrative capacity.

Shift from One-Off Technical Assistance to Long-Term Capacity Building:

We also recommend that funders move away from one-time or “one-off” technical assistance (TA) models toward longer-term TA models that prioritize continuity, relationship building, and technical skill development. Interviewees highlighted the importance of “mutual intentionality” between TA providers and grantees to ensure that support is grounded in a deep understanding of an organization’s mission or Tribal entities’ history, areas of work, communities of focus, and long-term goals. Rather than focusing solely on immediate grant application needs, longer-term TA models create space for organizations to engage in strategic planning, long-term visioning, and organizational development. By approaching TA through a capacity building framework, funders can provide multi-session engagements, ongoing “coaching,” and periodic “structured check-backs,” which interviewees described as significantly more effective than single workshops or short-term consultations (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 24th, 2025). This approach allows CBOs and Tribal entities to build skills incrementally, adapt to evolving funding landscapes, and make more strategic decisions about which funding opportunities to pursue. By investing in sustained capacity building and longer-term technical skills development, funders can

help ensure that CBOs and Tribal entities are competitive for current funding opportunities and are also equipped to lead and sustain projects over time.

Tribally-Led TA Efforts:

Capacity building strategies should also be tailored to reflect the distinct governance structures, cultural contexts, and operational needs of each Tribal entity. Interviewees emphasized the importance of working with culturally humble TA providers who are knowledgeable about Tribal governance systems, Tribal sovereignty, and the historical and legal context that shapes Tribal access to funding. Since Tribal entities vary widely in their administrative capacity, level of internal infrastructure, and organizational structure, we recommend that TA models be flexible and responsive to each Tribe's specific needs. Rather than applying a "one-size-fits-all" model, funders should prioritize Tribally-led TA efforts that can adapt to the different Tribal governance systems, capacity levels, and community priorities.

Explore Cross-Sector Partnerships to Equitably Administer Public Funds

Given the positive experiences shared by CBOs and Tribal entities funded by Los Angeles County's Safe Clean Water Program's Public Education and Engagement Grant, administered by The Water Foundation, this pilot grant program represents a promising model for reducing administrative burdens while maintaining accountability for public funds. By partnering with philanthropic organizations to serve as grant administrators or intermediaries, public agencies can draw on philanthropic funders' experience administering flexible, trust-based grantmaking to streamline grant application and reporting processes. Building relationships across sectors and exploring partnership structures similar to those of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and The Water Foundation can open doors to new partnership models to help create public grant programs that are both publicly accountable and less burdensome for CBOs and Tribal entities. Funders may consider exploring cross-sector partnerships between public agencies and philanthropic organizations to design and administer more accessible public grant programs.

Offer Multi-Modal and Relational Reporting As Alternatives to Traditional Narrative Reports

Allowing grantees to share project updates through multiple modalities and non-traditional formats, such as short videos, storytelling, cohort discussions, phone check-ins, or in-person site visits, can reduce administrative burdens while still providing grant officers with meaningful insights into project progress and community impacts. Similar to the concept of multi-modal engagement, "multi-modal reporting" recognizes that different audiences communicate more effectively in different ways. Interviewees noted that these approaches enable them to convey outcomes more clearly and authentically than lengthy written reports and serve multiple purposes, making them a "multi-benefit investment of time" for grantees (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). For example, short video updates can function as communication tools for community engagement, social media, and future grant proposals. Interviewees also emphasized the value of

allowing grantees to repurpose existing language and materials, rather than requiring entirely new reports for each funding source. Additionally, offering CBOs and Tribal entities a site visit as an alternative to a narrative report provides funders with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a project's context and impact, while strengthening relationships with grantees. CBOs and Tribal entity interviewees also shared that in-person site visits are beneficial for them as grantees because they allow them to really highlight their work, as relationship- and trust-building with community members is difficult to quantify. By incorporating these flexible reporting options, funders can maintain accountability through financial reporting requirements while offering reporting mediums that better reflect the realities of community-based work and maximize the value of grantees' time and effort.

Release Grant Opportunities At Least 60 Days and Ideally Up to 90 Days In Advance

Based on CBO and Tribal entity interviews, short application windows create significant barriers for organizations with limited staff capacity, particularly when applications require several lengthy narrative question responses, partnership development, and detailed budgets and workplans. To ensure that lower-capacity applicants can participate in grant opportunities, interviewees recommended that funders extend application timelines to at least 60 days, ideally up to 90 days. Providing longer timelines for completing the grant application and reducing the length of narrative question responses allows applicants to develop stronger proposals, coordinate with partners, and secure the necessary approvals to pursue funding. Funders should also consider diversifying how they announce grant opportunities to ensure potential applicants have adequate time and awareness to prepare competitive applications.

Reimagine the Role of Grant Officers to Advance Trust-Based and Relational Grantmaking

Interview findings reveal that a grant officer's communication skills, community knowledge, and understanding of a project can greatly influence a grantee's experience and success navigating funding processes. Simultaneously, these findings underscore a broader reality: effective and equitable grantmaking requires a meaningful investment of time, staff, and resources. Administering grant programs in ways that are accessible, responsible, and relationship-centered cannot be achieved without dedicated capacity on the side of the funder. While we recognize that allocating additional resources for administering grant programs can be challenging, interview findings indicate that grant officers who invest time in understanding CBOs' and Tribal entities' work, such as through site visits and regular check-ins, help foster stronger partnerships and contribute positively to grantees' success. By hiring Black Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) grant officers who possess relevant lived experience and local knowledge, funders can strengthen their cultural humility and the speed at which they build trust with CBO and Tribal entity grantees. To support and safeguard existing relationships developed between grantees and grant officers, it is important that funders develop internal systems and implement continuity plans to ensure trust is not lost during grant officer turnover. Continuity planning will also prevent the responsibility of onboarding new grant officers about existing projects from falling entirely on grantees. By

reimagining the role of grant officers to center relationship-building, trust, and community understanding as core components of grant administration, funders can build stronger, more sustained partnerships and ultimately deepen the impact of their investments in the communities they serve.

Prioritize Multi-Year Grant Awards

When funding CBOs and Tribal entities, interviewees noted that multi-year grant awards are more conducive to building trust with their communities and securing project buy-in, and achieving long-term capacity building goals (Anonymous, Personal Communication, October 21st, 2025). Multi-year grant awards also support grantees in ensuring program continuity and staffing sustainability, allowing organizations to devote more time and energy to engaging their communities than trying to keep their work funded. In contrast, one-year grant timelines make it more difficult for organizations to pivot engagement activities to meet emerging community needs. Interviewees shared that the challenges of short grant timelines were exacerbated while responding to their communities' needs during the LA Firestorms and periods of community crises. Accordingly, we recommend that all funders move away from short grant periods and prioritize multi-year grant awards. As described by one philanthropic funder, longer-term investments allow communities to be “more resilient to the changing political currents... and have the infrastructure in place to weather some of the storms better” (Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2026). In the context of green infrastructure planning and development, multi-year funding also better aligns with longer timelines required for community-led planning, partnership development, and project implementation. By adopting multi-year funding models, funders can better align grant timelines with the realities of community-based work and provide projects the stability needed to succeed.

6.B. Tribal Specific Recommendations For All Funders

Increase Tribal Set Asides and Ensure Geographic Equity

Existing Tribal set-asides in public grant programs are insufficient and not geographically equitable to address the historical harms and ongoing disenfranchisement of Tribal communities. For State Agencies, Tribal entity interviewees emphasized that existing allocations are structured to prioritize outcomes, such as acres of land acquired, over equitable access for Tribal communities in urban areas of the state. As a result, Tribal set-asides may concentrate in regions where land acquisition is less costly, leaving Tribal communities in higher-cost areas, such as Los Angeles County, with limited access to these opportunities. Funders should prioritize geographically distributed increases in Tribal set-asides within grant programs. By expanding Tribal set-asides within grant programs and intentionally structuring them to prioritize geographic equity, funders can help ensure that Tribal entities across the State can access the funding needed to achieve land back, advance Tribal land stewardship, and each Tribe's climate resilience goals.

Provide Sabbatical Funding to Tribal Leaders

Tribal leaders face immense emotional and cultural responsibilities as they work to address the past, present, and ongoing harms their communities face due to the legacies of colonization, displacement, genocide, and environmental injustice in their communities. To support Tribal leaders and Tribal elders in managing their responsibilities and to prevent burnout, we recommend that funders explore opportunities to provide sabbatical funding for Tribal elders and leadership. Tribal elders and leaders are responsible for organizational leadership and oftentimes also serve as cultural knowledge bearers. Similar to sabbatical funding models increasingly offered to nonprofit executive directors, sabbatical funding for Tribal leaders could provide dedicated time and financial resources for rest, reflection, healing, and cultural renewal. These paid periods of rest and reflection can help Tribal leaders to prevent burnout, support intergenerational knowledge sharing, and their individual physical and mental health.

Offer Funding for Tribes to Convene with One Another and Without Set Expectations

The lack of adequate support and resources for Tribal communities to engage in meaningful discussions and gatherings poses a significant challenge, particularly for non-federally recognized Tribes in California. To address this issue, it is imperative for local, state, and philanthropic funders to provide Tribal governments and Tribal entities funding to convene independently and without any expectations set by our outcomes required by funders. Interviewees highlighted the need for Tribal-led spaces where Tribal governments and Tribal organizations can gather to share knowledge, discuss common challenges, and strengthen relationships across communities. In the current policy and funding landscape, particularly for non-federally recognized Tribes in California, these conversations are increasingly important for navigating evolving legal, political, and funding dynamics. Unrestricted funding for Tribal convening would allow Tribal entities to determine the structure, priorities, and goals of these gatherings, thereby supporting their self-determination and fostering stronger networks of collaboration among Tribal communities.

Require Cultural Humility and Tribal Sovereignty Training for Staff

Tribes, regardless of federal recognition status, are sovereign nations with the right to self-determination and self-governance. Tribal governments and Tribally-led nonprofits represent a unique and distinct type of applicant and grantee whose governance structures, sovereignty, culture, data sensitivity, and history must be respected and understood by grant officers and program staff. Likewise, funders must recognize that each Tribal entity is unique and cannot be treated as a monolith. Rather, each Tribal entity must be approached and partnered with individually. Cultural humility training can help grant staff better understand Tribal sovereignty, governance structures, Tribal data sensitivity best practices, and culturally appropriate strategies for working with Tribal communities. Without a clear understanding of these distinctions, staff who design grant requirements and oversee active grant awards may unintentionally create barriers for Tribal applicants and grantees. Depending on the geographic scope of a funding entity and the

work of grant officers, these trainings can also serve as a space to learn about the history and culture of Tribal communities within their region of focus. Existing cultural humility training, such as those created by [the California Governor's Office of Tribal Affairs](#), can serve as a starting place for local public agencies and philanthropic funders seeking to develop similar training and resources for their grant officers and staff. By building their staff's cultural humility to engage in grantmaking with Tribal entities, funders can better set up Tribal entities for success in navigating the grant application and active management process by having grant officers knowledgeable of and responsive to Tribal contexts. As a result, we recommend that funders require their grant officers and program staff to participate in ongoing Tribal sovereignty and cultural humility training.

6.C. Recommendations For Local and State Funders

Address Reimbursement Model and Cash Flow Barriers

Consistent with the existing literature, CBOs and Tribal entities shared persistent cash-flow barriers and administrative burdens due to existing reimbursement-based funding models used by local and state agencies. While there has been progress at the state level to address these barriers, interviewees emphasized that current advance payment policies do not require agencies to offer advance payment options to grantees, and the administrative process to receive approval can be equally as burdensome. At the county and state levels, jurisdictions could explore models implemented by other public funders, such as Maryland's Nonprofit Interest-Free Micro Bridge Loan (NIMBL) Program, which provides bridge loans to support CBOs, nonprofits, and Tribal entities bridge cash flow gaps and cover expenses until invoices are reimbursed. We encourage public agencies to explore and learn from existing advance payment pilot programs such as the Strategic Growth Council's Tribal Capacity Building Grant Program, which provides Tribal grantees with 100 percent advance payment. According to an SGC staff member, this model has helped Tribal grantees retain staff and manage cash flow while implementing projects (Blanca Escobedo, Personal Communication, January 6th, 2026). At the Los Angeles County level, we urge local public agencies to partner with philanthropic funders and explore opportunities for public-philanthropic partnerships that could support solutions such as an interest-free bridge loan program. Convening CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders at the county and state levels, will serve as an effective starting point to identify solutions and ensure that funder's solutions are directly informed by grantees' experiences.

Facilitate Partnerships Between CBOs, Tribal Entities, and Public Agencies

There is a high demand for limited public funding sources, such as California's Proposition 4 Climate Bond, many programs have become oversubscribed, which will make it increasingly difficult for lower-capacity CBOs and Tribal applicants to compete independently. Funder interviewees stressed the importance of strategic partnerships. Encouraging collaborative proposals and regional partnerships can help distribute funding opportunities more equitably while leveraging each partner's unique expertise. Strategic and collaborative partnerships can also support knowledge sharing and resource pooling, especially for green infrastructure project

implementation. For smaller CBOs and Tribal entities, these strategic partnerships can also help to bridge funding accessibility gaps by allowing higher capacity entities to serve as the lead applicant and address cash flow issues.

Adopt a Common Grant Application Platform

The current funding landscape requires applicants to navigate multiple application portals with different formats, questions, and reporting expectations depending on the agency administering the program. The need to navigate several grant application portals places a significant, and unnecessary, administrative burden on CBOs and Tribal entities, particularly those with limited staff capacity. Interview findings reveal that these administrative burdens can discourage smaller organizations from pursuing public funding opportunities. To streamline grant application processes across agencies, several interviewees pointed to the model of the college “Common Application,” where applicants complete a shared set of core questions that can be carried over across multiple submissions while allowing individual funders to ask additional program-specific questions. Funder interviewees also reveal that grant officers see the benefit of “having a consistent process and requirements as it will save staff resources and time for both sides”(Anonymous, Personal Communication, December 19th, 2026). Similar efforts have been explored and adopted by philanthropic funders. For example, several philanthropic funders have moved to user-friendly grant management platforms, such as Just Fund or Submittable. By adopting a common grant application portal at the county and state levels, CBO and Tribal applicants can save staff time and recycle grant application materials across several proposals.

For California State Agencies: Another opportunity to explore is to build on an existing platform such as the California Library System’s Grant Library, which already consolidates grant opportunities across state agencies in a user-friendly format. Expanding this platform to include a common grant application portal would allow applicants to explore funding opportunities and submit applications through a single system.

For Public Agencies in Los Angeles County: We recommend that local funders coordinate efforts to streamline the application process for Requests for Proposal (RFPs) and similar solicitations issued by cities, municipalities, and county departments. By developing a shared platform for RFPs, local funders can reduce fragmentation across city and county departments and streamline the process for CBOs and Tribal entities to partner on projects and provide their expertise.

Implement a Pre-Proposal Application Phase

Local and state funders should also consider implementing a two-step grant application process that includes a pre-proposal phase before requiring applications to submit a full application. CBOs, Tribal entities, and funder interviewees agreed that a pre-proposal or conceptual proposal phase is an effective practice to save applicants and grant program staff time and resources. Rather than investing significant staff time in preparing a full and often complex grant application, implementing a pre-proposal phase enables applicants to first submit a shorter conceptual proposal and receive

preliminary feedback from funders. This approach can help applicants ensure their proposal meets eligibility requirements and aligns with a grant program’s goals and priorities. By reducing the number of applicants who submit full proposals, this approach reduces the number of full grant applications that grant administrators review to only reflect those that are eligible and competitive. CBO and Tribal entity interviewees also noted that the Strategic Growth Council and several state conservancies, such as the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Rivers and Mountains Conservancy, and Baldwin Hills Conservancy, have successfully implemented pre-proposal phases, demonstrating that this model is feasible within state grantmaking. In addition to streamlining applications, a pre-application phase can create opportunities for early engagement between applicants and funders through workshops, office hours, and one-on-one consultations, helping organizations refine project ideas and submit more competitive full proposals.

Expand Eligible Costs to Include Community and Tribal Engagement Related Expenses

While local and state grants include engagement and community-led planning as eligible activities, the grant’s eligible costs and workplan structures often make it difficult for CBOs and Tribal entities to cover the necessary expenses to authentically engage their communities of focus. By expanding eligible costs to include items such as interpretation, childcare, transportation stipends, participation stipends, food, and non-alcoholic beverages, local and state grant programs can help remove common barriers to planning and facilitating authentic, accessible, and culturally relevant community engagement activities. When designing green infrastructure planning and implementation grants, we recommend that local and state funders expand eligible costs and build in flexibility where possible to reflect the nature of community engagement.

We also recommend that local and state funders refrain from prescriptive engagement requirements because effective community engagement looks different for each community. Likewise, it is important that engagement requirements are designed with flexibility for Tribal entities, recognizing that they may primarily engage Tribal citizens rather than the broader public and may follow different cultural protocols or decision-making processes. This flexibility also ensures that local and state grant programs align grant program requirements with Tribal sovereignty and respect Tribal governments' right to self-determination. By designing grant guidelines to expand eligible costs and create flexibility for community engagement-related activities, local and state funders can help ensure that CBOs and Tribal entities are set up for success to plan and implement engagement activities that are culturally relevant.

6.D. Recommendations For Philanthropic Funders

Approach Grantmaking With Urgency and A Recognition of the Intersectionality of Ongoing Social, Environmental, and Political Injustices

Many philanthropic funders address social, environmental, and political injustices in isolation, despite the deeply interconnected nature of these issues. CBOs, Tribal entities, and philanthropic

funder interviewees stressed that the climate crisis, environmental injustices, public health disparities, and threats to democratic institutions are overlapping and compounding, yet funding to address these issues frequently remains siloed. In reality, these issues are not separate, nor do they stem from separate root causes. This disconnect in how challenges are understood amongst funders limits the effectiveness of philanthropic investments and prevents funders from addressing systemic inequities at their source.

In response, philanthropic funders should adopt an intersectional approach to funding that recognizes and responds to the interconnected nature of these crises. This includes exploring sunseting models to strategically accelerate deploying resources at a time when communities are facing urgent and overlapping challenges. Additionally, we urge philanthropic funders to intentionally prioritize investments in Black and Indigenous-led organizations and ensure resources reach frontline communities through trusted CBOs and Tribal entities, as they are acutely aware of the interconnected reality of harms in their communities. By aligning funding strategies with an intersectional understanding of systemic inequities, philanthropic funders can better address root causes, strengthen community resilience, and demonstrate a greater commitment to equity and justice.

Align Investments With Organizational Commitment to Equity and Justice

Interview findings reveal a significant misalignment between philanthropic institutions' stated commitments to equity and justice and how the majority of their financial assets are invested. While foundations are required to distribute a minimum of five percent of their endowment annually through grants, the vast majority of their assets are financial investments (Darren Walker, 2017). Oftentimes, these financial investments unintentionally support industries or companies that harm the very communities philanthropy seeks to serve. As one funder interviewee noted, "If your grant dollars are funding good things, but of all, your investments are in things that hurt communities. What good is that?" (Ron Milam, Personal Communication, December 12th, 2025). While institutional inertia, risk aversion, and organizational culture can make shifts in investment strategy challenging, aligning investment portfolios with mission and equity goals are a meaningful opportunity for philanthropic institutions to reinforce the impact of their grantmaking. By committing to mission-related investments, divestment from harmful industries, and values-aligned investment strategies, philanthropic funders will ensure the full scope of their financial resources, not just their grant dollars, support the communities and outcomes they seek to advance.

Increase Focus on Tribal Grantmaking

Interview findings reveal that many philanthropic institutions in Los Angeles County have largely refrained from participating in Tribal grantmaking due to perceived reluctance to engage in, or desire to "stay out of," regional Tribal politics. This lack of engagement creates a significant gap in funding access for Tribal entities, particularly given that Los Angeles County has no federally-recognized Tribes. However, philanthropic funding streams are important to ensuring Tribal entities are able to build their capacity and advance their Tribe's priorities. To address this gap, we recommend philanthropic funders in Los Angeles County increase their focus on Tribal grantmaking

and prioritize funding approaches that provide flexible, trust-based support. Rather than approaching Tribal funding from a position of power and authority, philanthropic funders in Los Angeles County should engage with Tribal entities from a place of learning and humility, centering Tribal sovereignty by allowing Tribes to define how funds are used and what success looks like. The Decolonizing Wealth Project offers philanthropic funders with a valuable model to learn from. It provides flexible funding to Tribal organizations while integrating technical assistance, cohort-based learning, and relationship-building opportunities among Tribal grantees.

Sustain Funding Commitments in Frontline Communities

When philanthropic institutions enter communities with time-limited initiatives and later shift priorities or withdraw funding, CBOs, and Tribal entities that have built trust and momentum advancing their projects are often left without the resources needed to continue their work. This pattern can reinforce longstanding harms, particularly in underserved communities in Los Angeles County, where frontline and Tribal communities have faced legacies of harm, redlining, and genocide. When funders operate on short-term funding cycles and suddenly pull out of communities and move onto a different priority, community and Tribal-led efforts, such as Tribal land return, community trust and power building, and community project development, are disproportionately impacted by this whiplash. Requiring CBOs and Tribal entities to frequently adjust their work to fit a philanthropic funder's new priorities also reinforces the philanthropic sector's past and ongoing harms. To avoid reinforcing historical harms and undermining progress, we recommend that philanthropic funders sustain their commitments when working with frontline communities. By approaching philanthropic funding through long-term commitments and trust-based grantmaking, philanthropic funders can better support CBOs and Tribal entities in Los Angeles County to advance their work, retain staff, and build on the longstanding trust and relationships they have with their communities of focus.

CONCLUSION



Northridge Middle School

7. CONCLUSION

CBOs and Tribal entities are essential partners in advancing climate resilience, watershed health, nature-based solutions, and community-led green infrastructure across Los Angeles County. CBOs and Tribal entities' longstanding community trust, cultural knowledge, and expertise in authentically engaging their communities position them to meaningfully lead the design and implementation of projects that address their communities' needs and priorities. As communities across Los Angeles County face ongoing environmental injustices and intensifying climate impacts, community-led approaches to identifying, designing, and implementing multi-benefit green infrastructure projects are essential to building a climate-ready and equitable Los Angeles County.

Interviews with CBOs, Tribal entities, and funders reinforce that significant procedural and structural challenges persist within current funding systems. Complex grant applications and reimbursement-based funding models, rigid reporting requirements, and restrictive cost eligibility requirements continue to limit CBOs and Tribal entities' abilities to access and manage local and state funding opportunities. For Tribal entities in Los Angeles County, these challenges are further compounded by structural barriers tied to federal recognition status. While philanthropic funding often provides greater flexibility and allows its grantees to address emerging community needs, it cannot replace the scale of public investment required to advance green infrastructure across the region. Rather, these challenges require a shift in how funders design and administer grant programs. Embedding capacity building into grantmaking, simplifying administrative requirements, supporting Tribally-informed approaches, and strengthening collaboration between public and philanthropic funders can help create more accessible and equitable funding systems. Strategic partnerships between philanthropic and public funders also represent a unique opportunity to create less administratively burdensome grantmaking models.

Advancing procedural equity in funding is essential to ensuring that community-led solutions can scale and succeed. Without intentional changes to the design and administration of local, state, and philanthropic grant programs, funding systems will continue to reinforce longstanding disparities in which communities are able to access and manage resources. By redesigning funding systems to better support CBOs and Tribal entities, funders can better support CBOs and Tribal entities leading green infrastructure and ensure that investments in climate-adaptive solutions deliver multiple benefits to Los Angeles County's highest-need communities.

This report provides a starting point for continued dialogue and future research on building equitable and accessible public and philanthropic funding systems across Los Angeles County. Moving forward, there is a critical need to convene funders, CBOs, and Tribal entities to build trust and relationships and co-develop solutions that address the procedural burdens and structural barriers that exist in our current funding landscape. These efforts should prioritize procedural equity, cultural humility, and long-term capacity building. By centering and elevating the lived experiences and expertise of CBOs and Tribal entities, funders and policy makers can help shape funding systems that more equitably distribute resources and strengthen the long-term leadership and organizational capacity needed to advance community-led climate readiness across Los Angeles County.

APPENDIX



Magic Johnson Park

APPENDIX

Survey Questions:

See [here](#) for CBO and Tribal entity survey questions.

CBO Interview Questions:

1. You indicated the size of your annual budget and your main sources of grant funding. How do these factors influence your ability to pursue different funding sources?
2. How does your organization cover the staff time required to apply for grant applications?
3. Given that you apply for several sources of grant funding, how do you combine/stack funding sources to advance your projects?
4. Are there specific programs you've found more or less accessible? What practices set them apart that other funders could learn from?
5. *For those that indicated they have never applied for a state and/or local grant as the lead applicant, what are the main barriers that prevent your organization from applying as a lead applicant?*
6. What kinds of technical support (i.e., technical assistance, one-on-one consultation, etc.) would help your organization be more successful when applying for and managing grant funding?
7. *For those that indicated their organization has had to decline a grant award before, Could you please elaborate on why your organization made that decision?*
 - a. What administrative or capacity-related issues played into your decision?
 - b. What kinds of support or policy changes from the funder would have allowed you to accept the grant award?
8. What are the top 3 changes that would significantly improve your ability to access and manage local and state grant funding?
9. If you could design the ideal grant process for your Tribal entity, what would the grant program look like and why?

Tribal Entities Interview Questions:

1. You indicated the size of your annual budget and your main sources of grant funding. How do these factors influence your ability to pursue different funding sources?
2. How does your organization cover the staff time required to apply for grant applications?
3. Given that you apply for several sources of grant funding, how do you combine/stack funding sources to advance your projects?
4. Are there specific programs you've found more or less accessible? What practices set them apart that other funders could learn from?
5. What kinds of technical support (i.e., technical assistance, one-on-one consultation, etc.) would help your Tribal government/entity be more successful when applying for and managing grant funding?
6. What are the top 3 changes that would significantly improve your ability to access and manage local and state grant funding?
7. When designing public grant programs, how can local and state funding programs best support Tribes and Tribal entities?
8. If you could design the ideal grant process for your Tribal entity, what would the grant program look like and why?

Philanthropic Funder Interview Questions:

1. How does your organization approach grantmaking with community-based organizations and Tribal entities?
2. How have you adjusted your approach to grantmaking due to changes in the federal funding landscape and policy?
3. How do you determine your compliance and reporting requirements? What goes into that process for your organization?
4. Are there challenges or barriers that have prevented your organization from adopting certain grantmaking practices?
5. If so, what were the grantmaking practices you tried to adopt, and what barriers prevented you from doing so?

6. How does your agency think about its role in public funding? Can philanthropy play a role in advancing equity in public grant programs for CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes?
7. We've been thinking a lot about what it means for philanthropy to meet the moment. What changes do you think still need to be made within philanthropy to make grantmaking more accessible for CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes?

Local/State Funder Interview Questions:

1. Can you provide an overview of your entity's grant process?
2. How does your agency approach grantmaking with CBOs and Tribal entities?
3. Given your involvement in the X Grant Program, what considerations do you have in mind when administering grants to Tribal entities, specifically non-federally recognized Tribes?
4. What lessons learned do you have from implementing and administering grant programs focused on Tribes? What is working? What have you had to adjust or hope to adjust?
5. We've been thinking a lot about what it means for local and state funding to fill federal funding gaps. What changes do you think still need to be made within state funding processes to make grants more accessible for CBOs and non-federally recognized Tribes?

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