

# East Palo Alto Engagement Project



## East Palo Alto, California

*Project Team:* Coastal Quest, City of East Palo Alto,  
and Climate Resilient Communities




*Funding Amount:* \$115,000



## Project Summary

This project engaged with and uplifted a community facing challenges related to a changing climate, including sunny day flooding from rising seas and poor air quality from more intense wildfires. The project team conducted a series of community-led in-person focus groups and workshops hosted in English, Spanish, Samoan, and Tongan, and distributed a survey across the community. The concerns and priorities collaboratively identified through these workshops create the foundation for the City of East Palo Alto's new Environmental Justice Element and updated Safety Element of the city's General Plan—a guiding policy vision for the next 8+ years of climate resilience, environmental protection, and community engagement.

## Project Goals

-  Increase awareness within underserved communities of climate challenges, local environmental concerns, and potential solutions.
-  Co-create solutions with residents through accessible engagement on issues such as housing stability, pollution, health, and safe community spaces.
-  Empower residents to stay engaged and shape city actions through interactive activities and increased civic participation.

*The Pacific Islander community in East Palo Alto is often left out of these conversations but is directly impacted by these policies and programs. We are excited to learn about civic engagement through this process and see its importance in getting our voice heard!*

- Community member,  
Pacific Islander workshop

## Project Timeline

Months 1-12

Host workshops and conduct surveys to gather community input

Months 13-14

Integrate into General Plan elements

Months 13-14

Formal approval of General Plan elements

## Additional Collaborators

Nuestra Casa • 'Anamatangi Polynesian Voices • East Palo Alto Climate Change Community Team

## Community Challenges



### Drought and Water Scarcity

Water shortages are exacerbated by droughts



### Wildfire Impacts & Air Quality

More days with dangerous air quality



### Aging Housing Stock

More than 80% of homes are over 50 years old and many lack air conditioning



### Low Tree Canopy Cover

Parts of the city have less than 6% canopy cover

## Project Approach

To engage historically underrepresented groups and ensure their concerns were included in the City's General Plan, the project team utilized the following approaches:

- ★ Hosted accessible engagement opportunities with childcare, meals, translation, and stipends to ensure Spanish-speaking, English-speaking, and Pacific Islander residents could fully participate.
- ★ Conducted door-to-door surveys in disadvantaged neighborhoods to capture residents' concerns.
- ★ Partnered with the City's Climate Change Community Team to co-develop outreach strategies and promote peer-to-peer information sharing.
- ★ Integrated community leaders and partners across faith, cultural, and youth groups as trusted cornerstones of East Palo Alto's identity, leveraging their networks to reach residents often overlooked, including elders, recent immigrants, and multilingual families.



## Impact

The community engagement work increased awareness within underserved neighborhoods of climate challenges, local environmental justice concerns, and potential solutions. Residents were able to co-create solutions through accessible conversations on pressing issues such as housing stability, pollution, health, and safe community spaces. Using interactive activities like gallery walks, mapping exercises, and open discussions, the process empowered participants to voice local priorities, stay engaged, and shape future city actions through stronger civic participation.

## Next Steps

- ✓ Implement the priorities identified in the General Plan.
- ✓ Continue transparent communication with residents about what progress is being made on the goals that they helped create.
- ✓ Provide regular updates on the status and future plans to identify adjustments or improvements to the planning process