

Summaries of Youth Investment Program Listening Sessions

July 21, 2004 – Sacramento

Guests included:

Laura Cohen, Rails to Trails;

Charlie Willard, Department of Parks and Recreation;

Heather Lauter-Clay, and Tyrone Buckley, Planning and Conservation League;

Honorable Victor Lopez, Mayor of Orange Cove and Councilman Roy Rodriguez;

Katherine Ferrin, Trust for Public Lands;

Martin Leblanc, Sierra Club;

Bud Turner, Feather River Land Trust;

Lorena Gorbett and Beth Rose Middleton, Maidu Cultural Center; and

Tabitha Gonzalez, Scott Woolsey, and Steve _____, California Conservation Corps;

Stewardship Council representatives included:

Luis Arteaga;

Duane Marti;

Randy Livingston;

Bob Schneider;

Steve Wald;

Bob Meacher;

Barbara Hale; and

Robert Kinosian.

Luis provided an introduction to the Council and the Youth Investment Committee, and provided copies of the draft goals and principles. He asked the participants to help the Committee 1) identify priorities; and 2) advise on an appropriate process. He then asked for input from the participants.

Laura Cohen - Suggested that the Committee focus its priorities on connections and creating networks where there otherwise might be gaps or threats. She offered the suggestion of helping connect individual trails within the Bay Area into a regional network of interconnected trails. She encouraged working with local partners and community-based groups. She advised that the goal should be to provide accessibility for underserved communities.

Laura recommended that the process should be simple, fair, flexible in the amounts (perhaps a 2-tier process with a simplified application and approval for smaller grant amounts). That the Committee be clear in its grant criteria perhaps identifying the weight of each criteria for review purposes similar to the Dept of Parks and Recreation's approach. It should specify what types of organizations and agencies are eligible. Decide how many grant cycles, but not feel obligated to have one a year. Try to maximize the leveraging capability by identifying other sources and making the criteria consistent with them. Weed out unlikely projects early in the process, and provide additional weight to projects with other funding that are ready to go. Finally, she suggested widely publicizing the call for projects and providing several months of lead time before the proposals are due.

Mayor Lopez - Noted that Orange Cove and many other cities in the Central Valley are in great need. They noted the complications that prevailing wage standards, prohibition on volunteers, and matching grant requirements place on small, poor communities. He noted that gang violence is a prevailing problem. Finding diversionary activities (boxing, auto or bicycle repair classes, baseball, etc.) is essential to raising kids with healthy bodies and minds who are good citizens. He suggested that even small grants can make a difference for these kinds of activities. Finally, he noted larger needs (playing field for HS, etc.).

Charlie Willard - Summarized the funds his agency administers for communities, recreations and parks. He suggested a focus on providing clear procedures and guidelines including who is eligible, what projects, etc. He suggested considering multi-year funding; focusing on the greatest need; cautioned including matching requirements; suggested weighting criteria and developing draft procedural guidelines; and offered to help with outreach and examples of definitions and process or documents.

Lorena Gorbett - Noted the work the Maidu is doing with 2100 acres of USFS land on which they're using traditional stewardship methods. She noted the importance of reconnecting youth with the land and described their summer camp that includes the community as well as Chico and Redding youth. She was open to expanding that program to other urban communities. She requested that funding go to others than just non-profit entities.

Conservation Corps representatives - Described their programs for trails and at-risk youth programs for 18-22 year olds. He noted they were open to expanding those programs to other age groups if appropriate. He noted their interest in working with the Committee.

Heather Louter-Clay and Tyrone Buckley - Described their Environmental Justice work and its focus on parks. They suggested coordination with Operation Yes, providing wilderness fishing experience to youth; Fresno Wildlife Rehabilitation, pairing injured wildlife with urban youth and schools; Boys and Girls Club of Echo Park, providing camping opportunities for underserved youth; and a Bay Area program of psychologists who are working to create a wilderness program. They encouraged funding programs, not just capital investments. They offered their assistance.

Dave Sutton and Kathleen Ferrin - Described their focus on providing accessible parks and recreation opportunities within a 15-minute walk. They noted the importance of partnerships, clear guidelines and definitions, opportunity to provide matching funds, and sometimes providing the first or seed money as opposed to being the last funding committed. They offered to help the Committee.

Bud Turner - Noted many land trusts like the Solano Land Trust with lands, but in need of program assistance to make use of those lands for education and recreation programs for nearby communities.

We discussed how to tie this process to ongoing funding efforts (Proposition funds) that would be completed and funds allocated this year, and a number of other suggestions for ways to ensure a successful process.

July 28, 2004 – Oakland

The Committee held its second listening session in Oakland on July 28. Representatives of the Council included Luis Arteaga, Jim Smith, Duane Marti, Randy Livingston, Bob Schneider, and Barbara Hale. The participant list was sent to you previously, and is attached.

Luis and Jim provided introductions and a brief overview of the Council and the Youth Investment Committee. Luis introduced the draft goals and guiding principles and asked participants to comment on these items, identify needs within their communities and work, and offer recommendations for the grant-making process.

Toni Moran, SF Recreation & Park Department, Capital Division, asked whether renovation projects were eligible for funding, and whether environmental documents needed to be complete prior to a grant being awarded.

Juliet Ellis, Urban Habitat, urged the Committee to focus spending on the communities most affected by PG&E like Bayview. She suggested giving priority for community-based groups, providing assistance to smaller organizations by helping them partner with larger organizations, for example. She encouraged the Committee to adopt greater specificity in gathering information on community needs.

Meda Okelo, City of Palo Alto, suggested that the Committee would have to use differing methods to reach communities that are the hardest to reach like East Palo Alto. He suggested that any projects in underserved communities be coupled with an effort to build a sense of community ownership in that project.

Deborah Schoenbaum, Trust for Public Lands (didn't sign attendance list), agreed with Meda that community buy-in and support is essential for the long-term stewardship of projects. She suggested the Committee focus on supporting partnerships with community groups, and noted that TPL has been successful with this approach.

Michael Lee, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, suggested that a portion of grant funding be designated for providing small/inexperienced organizations technical assistance like hiring a grant writer or community organizer.

Liz Lerma, San Francisco Department of Public Works, Bureau of Urban Forestry, agreed that planning grants and technical assistance grant funding can be very helpful.

Michele Clark, The Youth Employment Partnership, Inc., noted that "underserved youth" is very open-ended. With limited money to grant and large numbers of children who likely qualify as underserved youth, the Committee needed a tighter definition in order to have a focused impact. She noted that if eligibility for school lunches was the qualification as underserved, most of the children in the Oakland Unified School District would qualify.

Byron John, YMCA of the East Bay, described the extent of the Y's work to help kids learn to swim, the cost of maintaining even the insurance for pools, and noted the importance of ensuring that parks are accessible.

A representative of the East Bay Asian Local Development Corp. noted the importance of building new and rebuilding existing urban parks. She also suggested noting how the park is working with the community to ensure upkeep and maintenance, determine how it is connected to regional parks, and that forging partnerships among organizations makes good investments. She concluded that the sustainability of the park space should be considered and built into planning for the creation or renovation of a park.

Laura Lam, Councilmember Cindy Chavez' Office, San Jose, agreed that stewardship and maintenance of parks and recreation facilities was important.

The group stopped for lunch then returned to discuss community needs and priorities.

Claudia Jasin, Jamestown Community Center, noted that accessibility to parks and recreational opportunities was more than just measuring the distance from people's homes to the park. She noted that the Mission District is divided into two gang territories. Someone living in a gang territory is routinely unable to use recreational facilities located in a rival gang's territory even though the facility may be only a few blocks away. She noted the importance, therefore, of creating recreational opportunities within communities, creating a sense of family within that community. She also noted the importance of jobs to build skills, get paid, learn about wilderness and nature, and learn to be passionate about something. She said that the cost of providing a wilderness experience to youth included not just the bus to transport them, but staff, equipment, interpretation, etc.

Byron Johnson, YMCA of the East Bay, noted concern over the sustainability of new programs, and encouraged that new activities be enmeshed with existing efforts. He said that transportation, maintenance, and programs are expensive. He said it costs the YMCA \$7000 per month to operate a pool, and that their goal is to teach all kids within their service area to swim. He also said that renovating existing facilities is important, and that the Y camp's facilities were in need.

Meda Okelo, City of East Palo Alto, said that a priority for his community is reducing the High School drop out rate. He said the high rate exists because there is no community high school, among other thing. He suggested trying to establish programs that allow youth to get high school diplomas like one with the California Conservation Corps to provide jobs, a living wage, opportunity to complete high school, and provided transportation. He noted the importance of providing transportation (in his community 101 divides the community with most need on one side, and parks on the other) to Girls and Boys Club, City recreation programs, parks, and so on. He said that his community is not very wealthy. One example he offered was of a summer camp where the City provides one-half the tuition. The camp is only half full because even at one-half tuition, some parents still can't afford \$65 a week for tuition. He said that some kids live their entire lives within 2.5 square miles, without an opportunity to leave. He encouraged programs to connect children to their environment. He encouraged the Committee to keep the application process simple and brief. He encouraged the Committee to employ youth to undertake park refurbishment and restoration activities. He also noted the importance of sustainability of parks and recreational facilities and encouraged maintenance funding possible though the California Conservation Corps establishing a local division and creating a network of young people trained to undertake this work.

Paul Correa, Gilroy City Council, encouraged the Committee to keep the application process easy, provide clear definition of who is eligible for funding and what communities are to be served by the

projects. He encouraged funding to augment acquisition of properties, rehabilitate lands, connect communities to the environment, provide environmental education programs, and help make the link between environmental health and behaviors like development. He encouraged grant funding for developing and building the capacity of local organizations.

Joan Chaplick, Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy, questioned how sustainable outdoor recreation programs were with limited resources. She suggested the cost per student was \$250 plus \$75 for transportation. She suggested creating an endowment by leveraging other funding could make a longer lasting impact than making all direct grants and spending all the funds within the next 10 years.

Beth Kassler, Get Out & Learn, San Francisco, suggested the focus should be on sustaining existing programs instead of creating new ones. She noted that summer interns generally cost approximately \$2500 each.

Joan Chaplick described the Golden Gate Parks program with 7 interns on Alcatraz for the summer (1 week wilderness experience plus this longer deeper experience) including environmental education throughout. She noted that one-time wilderness outings was less expensive per student than the sustained training with more kids served by the former for the same amount of money, but noted the enduring effects of a longer-term, deeper experience. She suggested perhaps reserving funding for both kinds of opportunities.

Liz Lerma, San Francisco Department of Public Works, emphasized the need of underserved youth to have jobs. She said that youth employment and environmental education ought to be tied together, a "Youth Employment Partnership." She also suggested asking applicants what the local investment is in order to assess the long-term sustainability of a program, organization or project. Beautifying neighborhoods is also important to affecting the conditions in which children are growing. She suggested using State or federal standards for identifying income levels for communities to identify "underserved communities." Finally, she suggested asking applicants what their recent experiences are in order to learn of their successes and failures.

Luis thanked the participants and encouraged those who wished to to remain and continue the discussions informally.

We sent copies of the participant contact information along with thank you notes to each participant.

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August 4, 2004 – Fresno

The Committee held its third listening session August 4 in Fresno. Representatives of the Council included Luis Arteaga, Chris Nota, and Mike Schonherr. The participant list was sent to you previously, and is attached.

Luis provided introductions and a brief overview of the council and the Youth Investment Committee. He introduced the draft goals and guiding principles, and asked participants to comment on them, as well as to identify needs within their communities and work.

Lucianna Ventresca, EOC Sanctuary, encouraged the Committee to include youth in developing the priorities of the program. She also suggested that a phased development would allow youth groups and commissions to help shape the program and identify priorities. She suggested some important priorities to consider are employment, training, career development, and noted the importance of connecting this effort to existing programs.

Ray Leon, Latino Issues Forum, described an effort in Madera providing research, planning and advocacy through a central valley coalition of organizations. He suggested a focus on community-based organizations.

Ben Benavidez, Coalition of Rural Pueblos Economic Development noted the number of community based organizations already in existence, and encouraged the Committee not to start new organizations. He also noted there was little State or federal funding available for the maintenance of facilities. He noted that communities like Kettleman City were on their own to fund maintenance.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, encouraged the Committee to make a "lasting investment" meaning a few large grants. He said the Institute and similar programs are constantly battling under funding of programs and projects.

Erik Vink, Trust for Public Land, emphasized the opportunities to use these funds to leverage other public funds for communities in the Central Valley that seldom get their share.

Jim Oftedal, USDA Forest Service, Central California Consortium, said that access to public lands is limited because of the cost to get there, language barriers, unfamiliar to family, etc. He encouraged going into schools and countering the drop out rate by teaching conservation skills and providing environmental education in the classroom, then get them into the wilderness. He identified local organizations as good partners. He suggested the importance of presenting role models, employment, comfortable opportunities to broaden their experiences and horizons. He encouraged sharing resources and creating partnerships. He also suggested providing money for jobs to create leaders and provide opportunity for rural youth.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, encouraged a focus on higher education.

John Echols, Fresno Local conservation Corps/EOC, suggested that urban youth are often limited by fear of the unknown and a lack of resources. He suggested the the most personal growth occurs when they work on lasting projects that change their community. These projects build confidence, teach skills, and provide an opportunity to improve their own communities.

Ben Benavidez, Coalition of Rural Pueblos Economic Development, noted that there are limited opportunities for jobs include the end of a publicly funded Summer Youth Employment program. He said providing summer jobs and funding for park maintenance was important to recreate.

Barb Miranda, USDA Forest Service, Sierra Nevada Wilderness Education Project, described the huge opportunity for growth and lasting change that wilderness education provides.

Lucianna Ventresca, EOC Sanctuary, suggested that academic credits if not jobs would also be helpful.

Barb Miranda, Forest Service, noted the Yosemite Institute program providing high school students with wilderness experience, teaching them proper sampling techniques, then paring them with UC Merced scientists to analyze the samples and earning academic credit.

The group stopped for lunch then reassembled to discuss the greatest areas of need and definitions of underserved communities.

Lucianna Ventresca, EOC Sanctuary, noted that communities need parks and recreational opportunities. She also noted that lacking family support, many youth need both infrastructure and programs to provide services. She noted that many youth are in need regardless of their parents' socio economic status (gay and lesbian teenagers, for example).

John Echols, Conservation Corps, suggested that recent decisions requiring payment of prevailing wage and preventing the use of volunteer labor coupled with community building standards combined to make projects very expensive. He suggested using existing organizations and forming partnerships where possible.

Jim Oftedal, Central California Consortium, also encouraged the Committee to build on successful programs.

Baldwin Moy, California Rural Legal Assistance, encouraged tying education/employment opportunities and park facilities.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, described a matrix of connections between employment and education. He suggested using qualification for school lunches as determinative of need.

Barb Miranda, Forest Service, said that multi-year funding would be helpful to many programs.

John Echols, Conservation Corps, said that workers compensation and insurance costs are huge. He suggested encouraging partnerships to allow smaller organizations to be covered by larger organizations' policies.

Lucianna Ventresca, EOC Sanctuary, noted that many foundations want to fund direct costs, but not indirect or overhead costs. She thought multi-year funding would be great.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, suggested 10 year funding.

Baldwin Moy and Ben Benavidez both suggested that 10 year funding was too much, and that the funds should be spread around.

Jim Oftedal, Central California Consortium, noted that year-to-year funding is a strain, grass-roots emphasis is important, teaching citizenship is important, providing access to scholarships is important, and that employment is essential. He said the Forest Service is seeking to recruit future land managers who reflect their communities.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, said that leaders must develop professional skills to support their programs. Three year funding with an opportunity for training to ensure ongoing program support was a good approach. He noted that above the sixth grade, California standards don't require field science/environmental education. He said that grades 7-12 need to make field science available by educating teachers, having the teachers identify students in need, providing those students with outdoor educational opportunities and experiences, and providing ongoing education and materials to the teachers.

Luis asked whether the participants had recommendations regarding the process for granting the funds.

The participants agreed that the Committee should have clear criteria and guidelines, offer simply application and review processes for small grants, favor grass-roots community-based organizations and those groups forming partnerships, provide grants for planning and assist NGOs compete for funds.

Lucianna Ventresca, EOC Sanctuary, suggested not allowing schools to be eligible, but limiting grants to NGOs who were better able to manage the funds.

Jim Oftedal, Central California Consortium, noted that stewardship of parks needs to rest with communities. That communities could use parks as educational opportunities. He also suggested taking care of housing needs for poor youth to allow them to work with the Yosemite Institute, for example. He noted the need to teach job skills.

Ben Benavidez, Coalition of Rural Pueblos Economic Development, said that housing, jobs, transportation, and salaries are important as are funds for park. He suggested allocating money for each to ensure both would be funded.

Moose Mutlow, Yosemite Institute, noted the cost of a bus to a National Park was \$400-\$600, too much for many school districts. He also noted the importance of providing funding for transportation.

Baldwin Moy, CRLA, noted that with limited funding perhaps planning grants would be a better investment and noted the need to spread funding across many communities.

Luis thanked the group for their comments and participation. He said the Committee would continue to refine its approach and report back to the Council this fall. He said the Committee's goal was to begin grant making in 2005.

We sent copies of the participant contact information along with thank you notes to each participant.

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