

Disadvantaged Communities Assessment

Background

Funds received from the cap-and-trade program are deposited into the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund and appropriated by the California State Legislature. These funds must be used for programs that further reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2012, Senate Bill 535 directed at least a quarter of the proceeds to projects that provide a benefit to disadvantaged communities and at least 10% to projects located within those communities. The legislation gives the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) the responsibility of identifying these communities. Assembly Bill 1550 modified the investment minimums for disadvantaged communities, requiring at least 25% of funding be allocated to projects within or that benefit disadvantaged communities, and at least an additional 10% for low-income households or communities.

The California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) developed the California Communities Environmental Health Screening Tool, CalEnviroScreen, as a screening methodology used to identify communities most affected by pollution and where people are vulnerable to the effects of pollution. The state uses pollution exposures, environmental effects, sensitive populations, and socioeconomic factors as variables to score every census tract in the state. The scores are mapped to identify the top 25% highest scoring census tracts. Based on the methodology used to establish CalEnviroScreen 3.0 and the newly updated CalEnviroScreen 4.0, the state does not designate any census tracts in the SLO region as a disadvantaged community.

Need for a Regional Definition

Through a regional definition of disadvantaged communities, our region can compete for grant funding, distribute funds more equitably, and meet the state's environmental justice requirements.

Grant Funding

A number of statewide competitive grant programs include funding requirements for disadvantaged communities—to ensure that these benefits are directed appropriately. Some funding sources, such as the Caltrans' Active Transportation Program (ATP), allow for a regional definition in the RTP. SLOCOG created this regional definition to be able to compete for funding opportunities like the ATP.

Funding Prioritization

Every two years, there is an opportunity to implement transportation projects and programs identified in the RTP's multi-modal Action Element. Since the number of projects and programs outweighs available funding, SLOCOG uses a set of criteria to create a prioritized list. Part of the ranking criteria includes findings from the Disadvantaged Communities Assessment. The assessment identifies disproportionately burdened areas that are economically distressed and/or underrepresented in our region—assigning additional points to projects and programs in these areas help them rank higher on the priority list thus funding them sooner.

Environmental Justice Policy

Because SLOCOG receives federal funding, an EJ analysis is required for the RTP. SLOCOG's EJ policy includes two elements: technical analysis and public engagement. The technical analysis component of the EJ policy is the following Disadvantaged Communities Assessment. More detail about the public information and engagement component can be found in the Environmental Justice Policy and the 2021 Public Participation Plan.

Regional Definition of Disadvantaged Communities

To provide some specificity, SLOCOG uses the following definition of disadvantaged communities:

In the San Luis Obispo Region, disadvantaged communities are defined as disproportionately burdened areas that are economically distressed and/or underrepresented.

Methodology Objectives

Prior to developing the Disadvantaged Communities Assessment, four objectives for the methodology were identified and introduced to the [SLO County Healthy Communities Work Group](#). These objectives, listed below, served as a guide throughout the methodology development process.

Objective 1: ***Use available and accessible data*** from standard, easily-obtainable, and frequently-updated sources such as the U.S. Census, the American Community Survey (ACS), etc. All but one of the selected indicators was obtained from the American Community Survey (ACS) Five-Year Estimates.

Objective 2: ***Be flexible for MPO/local plans and programs*** where resulting outputs can be modified to accommodate different planning efforts, if needed.

Objective 3: ***Be simple to use***, providing a methodology and analysis file that is user-friendly and easy to understand.

Objective 4: ***Be objective*** so results are transparent and cannot be manipulated by the perspective or opinion of the person developing the model or the user.

Both the definition and methodology objectives helped us identify the variables SLOCOG uses to geographically define our region's disadvantaged communities.

Variables Considered

SLOCOG and the Healthy Communities Work Group identified 13 variables that address a wide range of socioeconomic and population-based factors to help us geographically define these areas. Additional variables were considered, but not included in the assessment. Our region's 13 variables include:

- Racial Minority
- Ethnic Minority
- Disability Status
- Language Proficiency
- Household Income
- Free or Reduced-Price Meals (School Yr 18-19)
- Educational Attainment
- Renter Affordability
- Housing Ownership Affordability
- Older Adults: Age 75 Years and Older
- Youth: Age 15 Years and Under
- Households with No Vehicle Available
- Households with No Computing Device Available

What is the Healthy Communities Work Group?

Since 2011, this stakeholder group, representing multiple agencies and organizations, has been working to improve the health and wellness of current and future SLO County residents through collaboration, education, and policy guidance as it relates to the built environment.

This working group is a collaboration between public health officials, community-based organizations, local planning officials, academia and community members. SLOCOG worked with this group to develop the regional definition of disadvantaged communities for guidance and feedback.