



The Nature Conservancy  
Maryland/DC 



## Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources

In Collaboration with *Maryland Coastal Community Members*

**Maryland has a vibrant coastline more than 7000 miles long.** Our coastline has a rich cultural history tied to the lives and livelihoods of Marylanders. The productive estuarine ecosystems of the Chesapeake Bay and adjoining tidal wetlands are also vital habitats for thousands of plant and animal species.

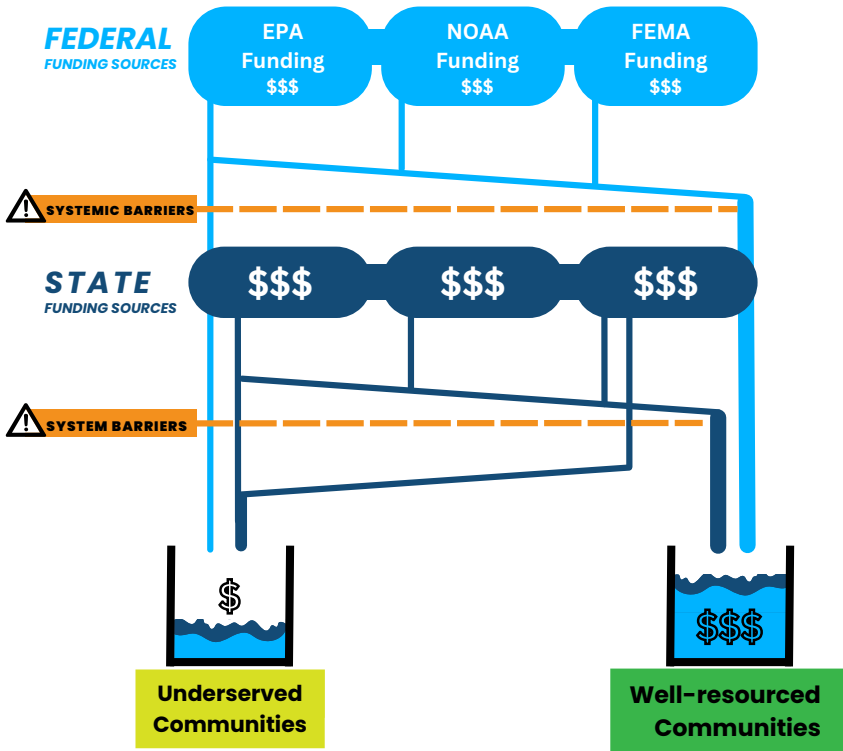
**Maryland's coastline is already experiencing impacts of climate change** in the form of increased flooding events, storm surge, erosion, loss of forest and wetlands, and drinking water and agricultural land being compromised by salt water. By 2050, Maryland will experience one to one-and-a-half feet of sea level rise measured from a 2000 baseline. This is twice the amount of sea level rise experienced in the previous century.

**The burdens of climate change and historical pollution are not equitably distributed** among all Marylanders. The communities most at risk from impacts of climate change face systemic barriers to accessing adaptation funding sources. While environmental justice is acknowledged as an important criteria for funding decisions, our laws do not yet center climate justice goals.

**SEAFARE** (*Supporting Equitable Access to Funding for Adaptation Resources*) envisions a future Maryland where historically underserved and overburdened coastal communities stand resilient in the face of adverse impacts of climate change and have access to the funding and technical resources they need for building and sustaining vibrant communities where people and nature thrive.



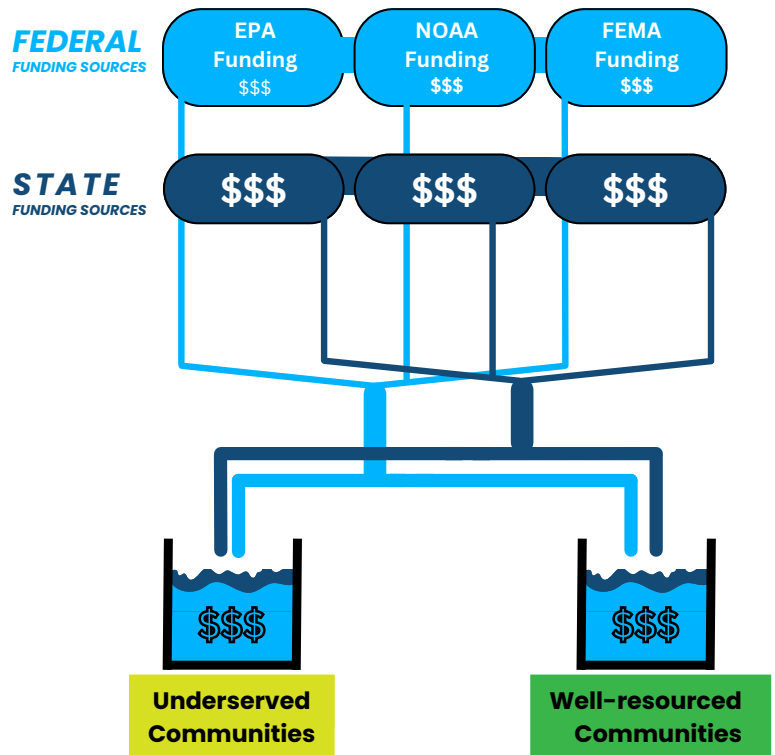
## CURRENT FUNDING SYSTEM



In our current funding system for climate adaptation, systemic barriers such as complicated legislative frameworks, complex and alienating solicitation language, restrictive funding criteria, capacity limitations within agencies and local governments, matching fund requirements, lack of authentic public engagement (among others) all keep underserved and overburdened communities from accessing the funds they need to successfully adapt to climate change. These barriers manifest at both the state and federal levels, resulting in new climate funding flowing towards already well-resourced communities.

An improved funding system would find ways to eliminate the systemic barriers that currently exist and take into consideration the unique needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities. With the Justice 40 Initiative at the federal level, we have an opportunity to tackle funding barriers across all levels of the government. An improved funding system would have equity principles at its core, to ensure that legislative language, proposal review criteria, technical knowledge, and capacity improvements are centering the needs of communities facing the first and worst impacts of climate change.

## IMPROVED FUNDING SYSTEM





# BARRIERS TO ADAPTATION

Within the climate adaptation funding system, a wide variety of barriers prevent funds from reaching historically underserved and overburdened communities. Some barriers are deep and systemic while others are superficial and technical; some may have emerged recently while others have developed over hundreds of years. Below are some of the main barriers coastal communities face and how they manifest themselves.

***Lack of trusting relationships among historically underserved and overburdened communities and funders.***

Trusting relationships make systems function more efficiently and effectively. The absence of trust slows a system down—potentially even bringing it to a halt. A higher level of trust within the climate adaptation funding system will benefit all involved.

***Funding programs are not designed with the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities front and center.***

Climate adaptation programs can fail historically underserved and overburdened communities strategically (what is getting funded?) and tactically (how is funding being deployed procedurally?). Both failures occur when the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities are not placed at the forefront.

***Funding policies, procedures, and processes do not serve historically underserved and overburdened communities well enough.***

Even if climate adaptation funds are available, current funding policies, procedures, and processes keep those funds from being deployed to historically underserved and overburdened communities. The current system rewards established priorities while limiting the space available for planning stages.

***All parties involved in climate adaptation funding lack sufficient capacity and need technical assistance.***

There is a need for additional capacity across all levels of the funding system. Federal and State Agencies must get funds out the door, and the process is often so fast it doesn't leave enough time for meaningful cross-agency collaborations to tackle multi-faceted climate change issues.





# Equity Principles | *A Framework for Change*

1

**Understand the historical and present, social and political conditions and decision-making processes that have contributed to community injustices and the current state of inequity.** Work devoid of this context tends towards victim-blaming rather than facilitating transformation.

2

**Build community trust and relationships in historically underserved and overburdened communities.** Trust is built through transparency, listening, dialogue, reliability and engagement that assumes all parties are entitled to equal access and opportunity.

3

**Leverage community knowledge and experience in solution finding.** Those living with the failures of systems have indispensable expertise about how to best address and fix those failures. Seeing and respecting local leaders is key to transformational work.

4

**Driving more effective climate adaptation strategies and actions requires that we strive for coalition work and consensus in strategy creation to foster reciprocity and co-creation across communities.** Establish cross-cutting knowledge sharing practices.

5

**Contextualize decisions and strategies through the lens of local histories and cultures.** The assumptions being brought into the project should be embedded in a worldview that reflects the impacts of historical and structural factors that created current conditions being experienced by those we serve

6

**Emphasize the transformation of communities, and avoid transactional projects.** At the conclusion of transformational work, communities are far better off than at the beginning of the process. Consider how *benefits* and *success* is defined at the onset of a project.

7

**Understand the power dynamics within partner communities.** Achieving equity and justice requires an understanding of the power dynamics that emerge from working with communities that may be disconnected from fully utilizing their own power.



# Recommendations for Policymakers

## *Applying the Equity Principles*

1

**Start with Building Relationships of Trust - Establish a trusting foundation and continuously build on it.**

Take on the issue of trust and risk directly at the outset. Ensure that relationships are built on trust, reciprocity, and transparency. Convene all stakeholders and address any lack of trust that may exist. Hold the expertise and lived experiences of historically underserved and overburdened communities on par with other types of expertise and experience.

2

**Embrace a Shared Environmental Justice Vision for Maryland: Join an existing environmental justice vision or, if more appropriate, co-create a new one.**

A compelling vision acts as a “North Star” towards which, guided by our equity principles, we can aspire and navigate. The vision can describe our desired end-state and help to align all of our activities to a final point. A compelling vision can be invaluable in times of confusion and conflict.

3

**Align Effective Funding Strategies & Plans to the Vision: Ensure that funding goes first to historically underserved and overburdened communities that are bearing the brunt of climate change.**

Design and adopt more inclusive frameworks for identifying the most impacted and climate-vulnerable communities. Create screening and tracking tools that are responsive to and reflective of the climate adaptation goals identified by historically underserved and overburdened community leaders and use these tools in the communities.

4

**Execute in Ways that Serve: Adopt policies, procedures, and processes designed first to serve the interests of historically underserved and overburdened communities.**

Design the RFP process from beginning to end with criteria that prioritize the needs of historically underserved and overburdened communities. Together with community representatives, conduct a review of the current funding life cycle using the Equity Principles as a lens and adopt improvements.

5

**Grow, Learn & Adapt: Take an approach of continuous learning, improvement, and systems change.**

Increase the capacities of both funders and historically underserved and overburdened communities to successfully undertake Justice40 projects. Review whether funders have sufficient skills and resources for community engagement as well as grant management capacity. Deploy available resources to close gaps in capacity.