Strengthening Connections between Community and Conservation

REGIONAL PILOT ASSESSMENT
Overview

- Our Goal
- Methods
  - Local Data Evaluation
  - Best Practices Survey
  - Partner Assessments and Workshop
- Future Directions – Action Plan
Create a long-term constituency that is engaged and supportive of conserved lands and waters in Orange County.

by

Developing sustainable projects and programs aligned with local values and interests and that yield measurable improvements in awareness, engagement and participation.
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Local Context

Demographic Trends

- **95% of Californians now live in urban areas**
  Orange County is the third largest county in California with a highly urban population of over 3.1 million

- **By 2050, 4 of the state’s Regions will have a super-majority of non-white residents**
  Orange County estimated population will be 45% Latino and 26% Asian/Pacific Islander by 2060

- **Nearly 25% of Californians live in poverty**
  Santa Ana – Anaheim – Irvine ranked 4\(^{th}\) in the nation for fastest growing income gap. This gap is greatest along racial, ethnic and geographic lines
Local Context

Public Health Trends

- **California is growing older**
  Orange County will have a 142% increase in senior population and 7% decrease in non-seniors by 2060

- **California is getting more obese**
  Orange County, 20% of low income children are overweight

- **Many low income Californians live in “food deserts”**
  Orange County has seen a large increase in free and reduced price lunch needs over the past ten years; large increases in supplemental nutrition programs.
Local Context

Growing Inequities with Access

- Orange County has both greatest access and least access to parklands
  - More than 150,000 acres of public parks and wildlands in County
  - Irvine – 7 acres of parkland per 1000 residents
  - Santa Ana – less than 0.5 acres of parkland per 1000 residents
  - Correlated with wealth…but caused by urban planning

- Source: The City Project, an LA nonprofit
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Informing Our Approach

“There is a hunger within parts of the land trust community... to authentically engage with a broader range of community allies, and to make a contribution to a broader range of community issues”

- “Land Conservation and the Public Trust”

- Where to begin?

- Deepen our understanding of the concept with a literature review

- Best Practices: Obtain practical advice and actionable insights by interviewing leaders nationwide with direct experience

- Develop a strategy and objectives for the Initiative
Best Practices

- Start small, with a few pilots and partners rather than a master plan.
- Any effort must be responsive to community issues, not prescriptive.
- Remember the silent majority, reach out to the underserved.
- Ensure pilot projects have clear measures of success.
- Focus on long-term relationships, not long-term projects.
- Be open to serving essential “backbone” role.
- Make a commitment of time, money and effort.
- Find Funders willing to invest and help prove concepts.

Strategies to consider:

- Ambassador lands
- Addressing barriers to access
- Engaging youth
- Working side by side on actual stewardship projects
- Bringing people to the land and land to the people

- Allow others to own and tell the story.
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Advice Applied

- Refined Our Approach
  - Sharpened our initial focus to engaging Latino & Asian communities, especially youth, based on expressed interest;
  - Switched to an approach based on identifying interest overlaps, developing pilots, and building relationships with partners

- Reached out to Potential Partner Groups
  - From initial list of 19, identified 8 potential partners, including local funders & community groups
  - Conducted initial conversations with the 6 who wished to proceed now, to find overlapping interests and potential
  - Hosted an “Open House” to explore these interests in detail and discuss possible pilot projects
Partner Interviews

- Orange County Asian and Pacific Islander Community Alliance
- Kaiser Permanente
- Orange County Community Foundation
- Latino Health Access
- KidWorks
- Santiago Canyon College
Open House

- Workshop was in the style of an “Open House” - meeting held at a trailhead with a tour, allowing IRC to participate in peer-to-peer dialogue

- Discussion Topics were Based on Themes from Interviews:
  1. Relaxed, informal recreation to reduce stress and build family bonds
  2. Participation in hands on stewardship, restoration and educational efforts, with a focus on youth learning and “green job skills”
  3. Community farming and native gardening collaborations, improving human and environmental health
  4. Overcoming obstacles of transportation and translation
Open House

Results of Workshop Dialogue

- Bring People to Nature and Nature to People
- Create opportunities for youth to develop skills and long term professional career paths
- Activate Citizen Stewards of the Land through common opportunities and activities
- Collaborate on resolving both Real and Perceived Barriers in Access and Awareness
- Explore opportunities to bring IRC expertise to neighborhoods where people live
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Action Plan

- Collect data and analyze current population served vs. Orange County’s population*:
  - Under 18 years- 23%
  - Female /Male – 50/50
  - Ethnicity: White – 42%, Hispanic – 34.3 %, Asian – 19.6%, Black – 2%
  - Foreign born persons – 30.3%

- Conservancy numbers
  - 360 volunteers- 80+% white
  - Participants – no ethnicity/age data available
Action Plan

- Start small, with a few pilots and partners
- Identified key organizations representative of Orange County’s diversity: KidWorks- Santa Ana, Santiago Canyon College, Discovery Cube OC, GOALS- Anaheim
- Engaging youth – leaders of tomorrow (Irvine Youth Action)
- Looking for more long-term relationships to develop shared goals and projects
Action Plan

- Address barriers to access
  - Awareness - Improve “brand” and “land” recognition
  - Language and Transportation for individual projects

- Community outreach events with new partners to raise profile of IRNL
  - Recruit more diverse volunteers
  - New Program offerings
  - New languages: Spanish, Vietnamese, and Mandarin
Action Plan

- Explore how to serve as “backbone” organization
  - Capacity - Funders willing to invest in IRC core staffing?
  - Continue to expand relationships and program offerings

- Measure and Show Results!
  Data will confirm if pilot projects are successful