

Collaborative Governance Research Findings Memo

Executive Summary

The Marin County Sea Level Rise (SLR) Collaborative Governance Study assessed opportunities for multi-jurisdictional collaboration on SLR adaptation across the county. Conducted between May 2024 and April 2025, the Study included:

- Detailed literature review
- Case study analysis of 12 comparable regional governance authorities, and
- Extensive stakeholder engagement with jurisdictions, agencies, and community organizations

Marin County faces an estimated \$17 billion in SLR adaptation needs. Meeting these needs will require coordination across jurisdictions, agencies, infrastructure systems, funding sources, and communities. The Study assessed what collaborative governance approaches could best support planning, funding, and implementation at the scale needed to address this challenge.

The Study finds that the county has the technical foundation and stakeholder relationships to expand SLR collaboration opportunities, but it currently lacks the enabling organizing structure. Agency capacity constraints, a limited and uncoordinated funding landscape, and the need to build trust across a diverse set of jurisdictions and communities mean that progress will require a deliberate, phased approach. However, the Study did not find support for establishing a new formal governance authority at this time. Instead, stakeholders supported strengthening collaboration through project-based coordination, shared services, and a County-led backbone function while existing relationships and organizational capacity continue to mature.

For the near-term, rather than pursuing a formal governance authority, the Study recommends that the County demonstrates the value of collaboration through targeted coordination, technical assistance, and shared implementation support around specific projects. Stakeholders identified opportunities for the County to provide leadership via capacity-building support for smaller jurisdictions and special districts, regulatory coordination and information sharing, and facilitation of collaboration among neighboring jurisdictions.

Transportation and utility systems may be the best places to start with this project-based approach. These emerged as the clearest areas of shared regional interest, reflecting the interconnected nature of infrastructure vulnerabilities across jurisdictional boundaries. By demonstrating the practical benefits of working together and partnering to advance a small number of projects of shared regional importance, the County can build the trust, relationships, and momentum needed to support deeper collaboration over time.

The establishment of the County Climate Office represents the most significant structural development since the Study launched. In conjunction with Marin Community Foundation's (MCF) collaboration and funding support, the Climate Office is well-positioned to serve as the backbone agency that has been missing from Marin's SLR landscape — managing up-to-date SLR information, tracking grants, providing technical assistance to smaller agencies, fostering collaboration on cross-jurisdictional projects and the SB 272 compliance process.

About this Memo

This memo summarizes the Study's research, stakeholder engagement, case study analysis, and key findings on multi-jurisdictional collaboration opportunities for SLR adaptation. Prepared for the Marin County Board of Supervisors and County staff, the memo summarizes the Study methodology, summarizes major findings, and presents recommendations to inform future discussions about countywide coordination, governance, funding, and implementation strategies. The findings are intended to serve as a resource for ongoing collaboration efforts and to help guide the County Climate Division and partner agencies as they continue advancing climate resilience initiatives across the county.

Key Findings

1. A deliberate, phased, project-based path toward countywide collaboration is the right approach.
2. West Marin's unique governance, regulatory, and community context requires a differentiated approach to collaboration.
3. Collectively, Marin has a strong technical and relational foundation for SLR adaptation but lacks a strong, sustained unifying champion — a role the County organization is uniquely positioned to fill.
4. Limited agency capacity and funding constraints create a strong case for shared services and coordinated support.

Recommendations

The recommendations focus on establishing the County Climate Office as a backbone organization, supporting cross-jurisdictional collaboration, partnering with MCF, and improving funding coordination. To advance these goals, the following actions represent important next steps for the County Climate Division in support of accelerated SLR adaptation progress:

- Position the County Climate Office as the countywide coordination backbone organization responsible for convening BayWAVE, expanded collaborative meetings, RSAP working groups, internal County department alignment, and project-specific coordination efforts.
- Strengthen partnership opportunities with private funders, chiefly Marin Community Foundation, to support the County's backbone efforts, plus pilot projects, pre-development activities, and community engagement.
- Building on prior collaborative efforts such as BayWAVE, work with cities, towns, agencies, and other partners to develop a shared collaboration framework and decision-making principles supported by clear metrics, equity considerations, and alignment of countywide priorities and projects.
- Lead collaborative efforts by identifying and assisting jurisdictions with grant funding opportunities, coordinating multi-jurisdictional applications, and advocating for sequencing projects to improve competitiveness and reduce duplication.
- Establish a flexible Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) structure to support shared planning, technical coordination, and implementation across jurisdictions, including through RSAP development.
- Provide technical assistance and implementation support related to navigating regulatory requirements like RSAP, grant administration, compliance tracking, permitting coordination, and project delivery, particularly for smaller jurisdictions with limited staffing capacity.

1. Introduction

Climate change presents a wide range of risks to Marin County, including extreme heat, wildfires and wildfire smoke, flooding, and sea level rise (SLR). Among these risks, SLR is one of the most significant long-term threats facing the county. With over 110 miles of shoreline, the county encompasses dozens of communities, critical transportation corridors, utilities, parks, and ecological systems that are vulnerable to rising sea levels, tidal inundation, groundwater rise, and shoreline erosion.

The scale of this challenge is substantial: the county is estimated to require more than \$17 billion in adaptation investments to address future SLR impacts.¹ Meeting this need will require coordination across jurisdictions, agencies, infrastructure systems, and communities. No individual jurisdiction or agency has the resources, authority, or capacity to address the challenge alone, highlighting the importance of collaboration for SLR adaptation at a countywide scale.

At the same time, the county's governance landscape is fragmented. The county includes 11 incorporated cities and towns, eight of which have shoreline frontage, alongside unincorporated communities (particularly in West Marin), dozens of special districts, multiple regional agencies, and state and federal regulatory authorities. Each plays a distinct but interconnected role in shoreline planning, permitting, and project delivery. This complexity creates challenges for coordinating adaptation efforts across jurisdictional boundaries and advancing countywide priorities. Smaller jurisdictions and agencies often lack the staff capacity needed to pursue grants, navigate regulatory requirements or manage complex multi-jurisdictional projects. And frontline communities, including the Canal neighborhood in San Rafael, unincorporated Marin City, and rural West Marin communities, are some of the most vulnerable to climate impacts.

While stakeholders broadly recognized the need for stronger collaboration, they also emphasized that Marin is not currently facing the type of immediate emergency or compressed timeline that has driven the rapid formation of governance entities in other contexts. This creates an opportunity to take a deliberate and phased approach to building collaboration, shared priorities, and organizational capacity. Stakeholders emphasized the importance of building trust, developing a shared vision and shared priorities, demonstrating the value of collaboration through shared projects and services, and developing alignment around priorities and funding needs.

To help address these challenges, the County of Marin ("County") initiated this Countywide SLR Collaborative Governance Study ("Study") to identify opportunities for multi-jurisdictional collaboration that could support and accelerate the planning and implementation of SLR adaptation strategies throughout the county. The County contracted with AECOM, in partnership with CivicKnit, O'Rourke & Associates, and Ricardo Huerta Niño, to conduct this Study. Research and engagement activities ran through May 2025.

The Study sought to answer several key questions:

1. What does the county (the County and local agencies) want to achieve together?
2. How could agencies on Marin's bayside shoreline work together? Where and how does unincorporated West Marin fit in?
3. What are the roles and responsibilities of partner agencies?
4. What are the resourcing needs and sources to be successful?

¹ Transportation Authority of Marin. *Marin County Sea Level Rise Adaptation Study*. San Rafael, CA: Transportation Authority of Marin, May 2025. <https://www.tam.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/TAM-SLR-Study-May2025-Final.pdf>

Background

SLR adaptation planning in Marin County has been underway for more than a decade through a combination of countywide collaborative initiatives, regional assessments, and locally led planning efforts. Together, these efforts have improved understanding of shoreline vulnerabilities, identified adaptation opportunities, strengthened relationships among agencies and stakeholders, and informed planning and investment decisions across the county. A summary of key historical SLR studies and planning efforts is provided in Appendix A.

Several collaborative efforts have helped establish the regional foundation for SLR adaptation planning in the county. In 2013, local governments, special districts, regional agencies, community organizations, and technical partners formed the Collaborative Sea Level Rise Marin Adaptation Response Team (C-SMART) to coordinate adaptation planning among Marin's coastal communities, which later published the *Marin Ocean Coast Sea Level Rise Adaptation Report* (2016). Two years later, the Bay Waterfront Adaptation Vulnerability Evaluation (BayWAVE) brought together bayside jurisdictions and partner agencies to assess vulnerabilities and adaptation opportunities along Marin's bayside shoreline, culminating in the *BayWAVE Adaptation Report* (2018). BayWAVE highlighted the interconnected nature of shoreline risks and the need for stronger coordination among local governments and partner agencies to advance adaptation planning and implementation. More recently, the 2024 Marin County Civil Grand Jury report reinforced these findings, identifying fragmented governance, limited coordination, and insufficient funding as key barriers to advancing SLR adaptation and calling for stronger collaboration among jurisdictions and agencies. The BayWAVE initiative has continued to convene jurisdictions and agencies following completion of the assessment, providing an ongoing forum for regional coordination and information sharing.

In 2025, the Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) completed a countywide assessment of SLR impacts on transportation infrastructure and adaptation needs. Consistent with earlier efforts, the study reinforced the scale of future risks facing the county and highlighted the importance of coordinated planning and investment across agencies and jurisdictions to address vulnerabilities affecting interconnected transportation networks.

In parallel with these regional efforts, individual jurisdictions and agencies have continued advancing locally led adaptation planning. Recent examples include San Rafael's Community-Informed SLR Technical Feasibility Study (2026), Sausalito's Gate 5 Drainage Management Study (2026), and Sausalito's community-informed Shoreline Adaptation Plan (2026), led by the City with support from WRT, Arup, and ESA, along with numerous local vulnerability assessments, adaptation plans, and resilience initiatives undertaken throughout the county.

Collectively, these efforts demonstrate that Marin has developed a strong technical understanding of SLR risks and established multiple forums for collaboration. However, the county still lacks a countywide process for developing shared priorities, coordinating infrastructure investment strategies, and advancing long-term funding and implementation approaches across jurisdictions and agencies.

Recent policy developments further underscore the need for this Study. First, California's SB272 legislation (2023) requires all jurisdictions to prepare Regional Shoreline Adaptation Plans (RSAPs) by 2034, creating a need for greater coordination across jurisdictions. RSAPs are intended to identify shoreline vulnerabilities, adaptation strategies, priority projects, and implementation pathways at a scale that reflects how flooding and SLR impacts cross-jurisdictional boundaries. The legislation and subsequent guidance from the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) encourages jurisdictions to collaborate on regional and multi-jurisdictional planning efforts where feasible, recognizing that adaptation challenges often extend beyond individual agency boundaries. As

jurisdictions across Marin advance their RSAP efforts, there will be a growing need for stronger coordination, information sharing, and alignment around funding and implementation priorities.

Updates Since Study Launch

Since this study began in 2024, agencies and communities across Marin have continued to make progress in understanding the potential impacts of SLR and preparing for adaptation. In regard to collaborative governance and countywide support, most notably, the County established a new Climate Division within the newly-reorganized Office of the County Executive, adding a Chief Climate Officer, two Sea Level Rise Planners, and an Administrative Analyst. This significantly expands the County's capacity to coordinate regional climate resilience efforts and provides a potential organizational home for coordinating countywide SLR adaptation efforts.

In 2025, the Marin Community Foundation (MCF), in partnership with Coastal Quest, launched a countywide assessment to evaluate the need for a broader climate collaborative. While this study focuses specifically on governance approaches for sea level rise adaptation, the MCF effort examined opportunities for collaboration across a wide range of climate-related challenges and mitigation efforts, including SLR, wildfire, extreme heat, and greenhouse gas reduction. The effort reflects growing interest in coordinated approaches to addressing climate resilience and sustainability challenges at a countywide scale.

More recently, the County and City of San Rafael were selected to participate in the Climate Resilience District Incubator Program, to explore California's Climate Resilience District legislation (SB 852) and evaluate opportunities for shared governance and financing to address climate impacts like flooding and SLR.²

In addition, severe flooding associated with King Tides and winter storms in early 2026 -- and the increasing frequency of King Tide flooding events during the summer months -- have continued to increase public awareness of SLR risks and underscored the urgency of advancing adaptation planning and implementation efforts throughout the county.

2. Collaborative Governance Models

Collaborative governance models exist along a spectrum of authority and responsibility, ranging from informal coordination bodies to formal public authorities that raise revenue, hire staff, own assets, and implement projects (Figure 1). As governance models become more formal, they generally gain greater authority, staffing capacity, funding tools, and implementation responsibilities. However, these benefits come with increased formation requirements, governance complexity, administrative responsibilities, and long-term organizational commitments.

Addressing the county's estimated \$17 billion in SLR adaptation needs will require coordination across jurisdictions, agencies, infrastructure systems, and communities to fund and finance projects, navigate complex permitting and regulatory environments, and deliver adaptation at a scale no single jurisdiction can achieve alone. To better understand how these functions could be supported, this Study evaluated a range of collaborative governance models used throughout California, examining the authorities, capabilities, formation requirements, and tradeoffs associated with each.

² City of San Rafael, "City Selected for Climate Resilience District Incubator," June 2026, <https://www.cityofsanrafael.org/city-selected-for-climate-resilience-district-incubator/>

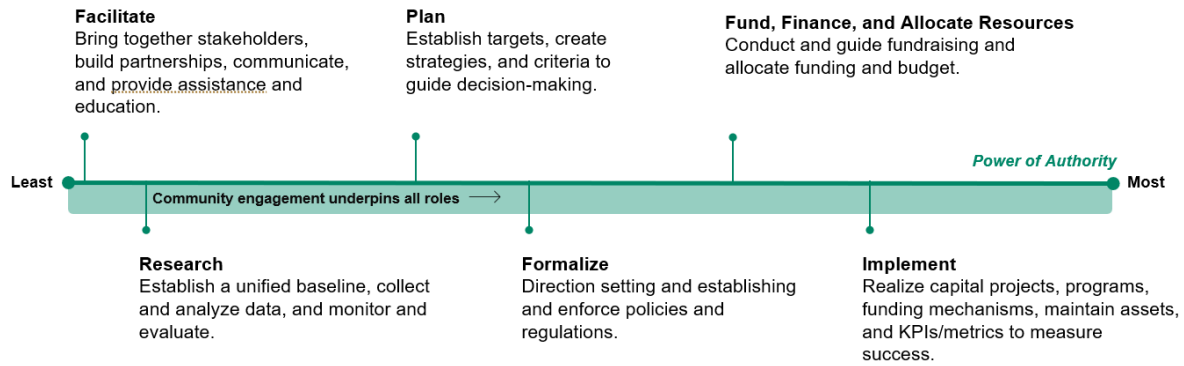


Figure 1. Governance Functions and Authority Spectrum

Governance Models Evaluated

The four governance models reviewed vary in their authority, governance structure, financing tools, and implementation capacity. Each represents a different answer to the question: *what do we want to be able to do together, and what does it take to do it?* Table 1 provides a comparative overview of the primary functions and authorities associated with each governance model.

1. Collaboratives and Committees

Collaboratives and committees represent the least formal governance models reviewed as part of this Study. They are often established when organizations seek to improve coordination, build relationships, develop shared priorities, or advance planning efforts without creating a new legal entity.

- Voluntary coordination bodies that bring together local governments, agencies, community organizations, and other stakeholders around a shared issue or objective.
- Primarily focused on information sharing, stakeholder engagement, technical coordination, strategic planning, and relationship building.
- Can support collaborative grant pursuits and development of shared priorities, but generally rely on participating organizations to administer funding and implement projects.
- Do not possess independent legal authority to raise revenue, own assets, hire staff, or directly implement projects and programs.
- Often serve as a mechanism for sustained regional coordination and may evolve over time as regional needs, priorities, and organizational capacity change.

2. Joint Powers Authorities (JPAs)

JPAs are a common form of regional governance in California and are frequently used when agencies seek to coordinate funding, planning, and implementation across jurisdictional boundaries while maintaining local control.

- Formal public entities established through agreements among two or more public agencies under California's Joint Exercise of Powers Act.
- May create a separate legal entity with authority to hire staff, administer grants, enter contracts, own property, and implement programs.
- The JPA agreement defines the entity's board composition, voting structures, and decision-making processes, providing flexibility to meet local needs.
- Authority is limited to powers that member agencies possess and choose to jointly exercise through the JPA agreement. JPAs generally do not have independent taxing authority and

typically require separate voter approval to establish taxes, assessments, or other revenue mechanisms.

- Often used to support long-term regional coordination, resource sharing, administrative efficiency, and implementation of multi-jurisdictional projects.

3. Climate Resilience Districts (CRDs)

Climate Resilience Districts are a relatively new governance model created specifically to address climate adaptation and resilience challenges that extend across jurisdictional boundaries, with an emphasis on funding and implementation.

- Established under California law (SB 852) to support climate resilience planning, financing, and implementation.
- Formation requires participating agencies to establish a Public Financing Authority and adopt a financing plan that identifies resilience projects and funding mechanisms.
- Designed to fund projects addressing sea level rise, flooding, wildfire, drought, extreme heat, and other climate-related risks.
- May utilize a range of financing tools, including tax increment financing, benefit assessments, special taxes, fees, grants, service charges, and bonds.
- Governed through a public financing authority composed of local agency representatives and public members.
- Offers one of the strongest funding and financing toolkits available for regional climate adaptation efforts, though there are currently few examples statewide since the model is quite new.

4. Special Districts

Special Districts represent the most formal and institutionally robust governance models reviewed as part of this Study. They are typically established when a long-term public need requires dedicated governance, staffing, funding, and implementation authority.

- Independent governmental entities created under state law to provide specific public services or address a defined public need.
- Can generate revenue through taxes, assessments, fees, and bonds, subject to statutory requirements and voter approval thresholds.
- May own assets, hire staff, enter contracts, administer grants, and directly implement projects and programs.
- Governed by elected or appointed boards with authorities defined through state legislation and principal acts.
- Typically require approval through Local Agency Formation Commissions (LAFCOs) and, in many cases, voter approval.
- Provide dedicated long-term governance, funding, staffing, and implementation capacity, but also typically require a higher level of organizational commitment, administrative overhead, and ongoing funding.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Governance Models

Governance Model	Typical Leadership Structure	Planning & Strategy	Community Engagement	Grant Pursuit & Administration	Revenue Generation/ Bonding	Project Implementation
Collaborative / Committee	Agency staff, elected officials, stakeholders, community representatives	✓	✓	Limited / Varies	—	—

JPA	Board composed of representatives from member agencies	✓	✓	✓	Limited / Varies	✓
CRD	Public financing authority board composed of agency representatives and public members	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Special District	Elected or appointed governing board	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

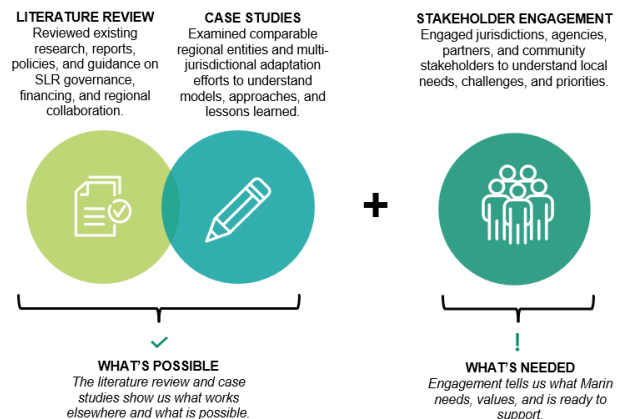
This section represents a range of approaches to supporting regional collaboration, each with different authorities, capabilities, and tradeoffs. The Study evaluated these models to better understand which functions would be most valuable in Marin's context and which approaches aligned with stakeholder priorities and readiness. While addressing Marin's full SLR adaptation needs will eventually require moving toward the more formal end of this spectrum, such as a JPA, special district, or CRD, case study research highlighted that these governance authorities are most successful in funding and implementing projects when they are supported by a strong foundation of shared vision, stakeholder support, transparency, and clearly defined roles and responsibilities. Building this foundation is achievable, but it takes time, trust, and a deliberate effort build the conditions that make formalization work – and be successful in achieving its intended goals.

3. Overview of Methodology

County-Led Assessment of Potential for Collaborative SLR Governance

This Study employed a multi-pronged methodology designed to capture both the technical landscape of governance options and the community-level context needed to evaluate them. Research methods included:

- Literature review** included an assessment of existing research, reports, policies, and guidance on SLR governance, financing, and regional collaboration. It also synthesized SLR adaptation activities, plans, and studies across completed across the county and identified key themes and findings, including where there are shared priorities – and differences – in regard to priorities and next steps.
- Case study research** examined 12 comparable regional entities and multi-jurisdictional adaptation efforts across the country to understand governance models, formation processes, financing approaches, and lessons learned. This included a detailed review of publicly



available materials and interviews with representatives from five selected organizations to gain additional insight into implementation experiences and best practices.

- **Stakeholder engagement** activities were designed to be comprehensive and exploratory, using one-on-one interviews, focus groups, surveys, and participation in 10 BayWAVE meetings. These conversations surfaced stakeholder perspectives, priorities, readiness for sustained collaboration, and highlighted challenges to advancing regional collaboration.
- **A Steering Committee**³ composed of representatives from each coastal incorporated Marin city and town, two representatives from West Marin, and representatives from the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria provided strategic guidance and reviewed findings. Some Steering Committee discussions occurred in collaboration with existing BayWAVE meetings to help align Study findings with ongoing regional conversations about SLR adaptation and collaboration.

Additional details about research methodology are provided in the Appendix.

4. Summary of Findings

The following findings are drawn from the County-led assessment and reflect convergent themes across the literature review, case study research, and stakeholder engagement. Taken together, these findings point to a consistent conclusion: the county has the foundation and interest to move forward on regional SLR collaboration.

Across Marin, agencies and stakeholders recognize that the scale of investment required to adapt to SLR far exceeds the capacity of any individual jurisdiction or agency. Addressing this challenge will require a coordinated, multi-pronged approach to funding, financing, and implementation that draws on local, countywide, state, federal, and philanthropic sources.

Stakeholders identified several areas where regional collaboration would be immediately valuable and broadly recognized that addressing SLR will require working across jurisdictional boundaries. Transportation and utility systems were consistently identified as among the highest-priority assets to protect, with stakeholder survey findings revealing that 57% of respondents identified protecting transportation networks as a top priority and 43% identified protecting utility systems as a top priority. Stakeholders broadly agreed that these interconnected systems are well-suited to regional approaches to planning, funding, and implementation. However, many stakeholders expressed hesitation about establishing a more formal governance authority before developing greater alignment around a shared vision, collective priorities, roles and responsibilities, and long-term funding strategies.

Case studies highlight that regional organizations have taken different approaches to regional collaboration, reflecting differences in local context, stakeholder readiness, and desired functions. These examples demonstrate that establishing a formal governance authority alone does not guarantee stakeholder alignment or sustained funding and reinforce the importance of building trust, developing a shared vision, and demonstrating value through early collaboration.

Taken together, the findings indicate that Marin has many of the foundational ingredients needed to strengthen regional collaboration, including existing partnerships, active stakeholder networks, and broad agreement on several areas of shared interest. At the same time, existing agency structures and norms, capacity constraints at the agency level, and the need to build trust across a diverse set of jurisdictions and communities reinforce the need for an intentional, phased approach focused on developing shared

³ The Steering Committee included elected officials from Belvedere, Tiburon, Mill Valley, San Rafael, Corte Madera, Novato, Sausalito, Larkspur, the Bolinas Community Public Utility District, and the Marin Resource Conservation District, along with two County Supervisors

priorities, strengthening collaboration, and building organizational capacity to better position the County to advance SLR adaptation over time.

1. A deliberate, phased project-based path toward countywide collaboration is the right approach.

Research and stakeholder engagement indicate that the Study did not find support for establishing a new formal governance authority for Marin at this time. Instead, stakeholders consistently supported a phased approach focused on successful collaboration on multi-jurisdictional projects and initiatives that builds trust, demonstrates the value of collaboration, and establishes shared priorities and goals.

- **Many regional efforts begin as coordination and convening bodies**, focused on building alignment and trust. Several case studies researched for this Study were initiated around shared projects that brought multiple agencies together around common challenges. For example, the Sea Level Rise Adaptation Plan for Humboldt Bay Transportation Infrastructure and the Central Coast Highway 1 Climate Resiliency effort convened agencies around shared transportation resilience needs, creating opportunities to build relationships, establish common priorities, and demonstrate the value of working together.
- **Stakeholders raised specific hesitations about moving too quickly towards a formal governance authority:**
 - There is uncertainty about establishing new governance authorities before roles and responsibilities among existing agencies are clearly defined. This uncertainty is most distinct when discussing the potential of shared funding sources, as questions are immediately raised about how the funding will be allocated and who will be part of the leadership structure.
 - While awareness of SB 272 has increased and jurisdictions are actively advancing planning efforts, agencies remain at different stages of preparedness due to differences in anticipated impacts, agency capacity and resources, priorities, public awareness, and available information. These variations highlight the importance of continued coordination—particularly between neighboring cities, towns, and communities—information sharing, and technical support as subregional planning efforts move forward in anticipation of the 2034 deadline.
- **Moving toward a collective set of priorities and goals is a critical precursor to successful regional collaboration, funding, and implementation efforts.** By supporting grant applications and administration, serving as a clearinghouse for regulatory information and agency guidance, and facilitating knowledge-sharing, the County Climate Office, acting as a countywide backbone organization, can help build trust, demonstrate the value of collaboration, and sustain participation over time.
- **Stakeholders favored a hybrid approach in which countywide collaboration focuses on activities of collective shared interest while local collaboration – between neighboring jurisdictions – focus on adaptation planning.** At the countywide scale, stakeholders widely agree that a countywide collaboration structure would be well-suited to lead projects of countywide significance, coordinate a countywide grant strategy, source and provide technical assistance to local, smaller agencies, lead regulatory engagement and advocacy, and serve as a clearinghouse for relevant information.

2. West Marin's unique governance, regulatory, and community context requires a differentiated approach to collaboration.

West Marin's coastal communities face a distinct set of SLR challenges from their bayside counterparts — different regulatory oversight (California Coastal Commission vs. BCDC), different economic bases, and a strong tradition of community-led planning. These differences mean that a one-size-fits-all

countywide approach may not serve West Marin well. At the same time, West Marin stakeholders expressed clear interest in collaboration, particularly around grant strategy, regulatory navigation, and technical capacity, provided that local autonomy is preserved and efforts remain grounded in local priorities.

- **West Marin supports countywide collaboration for shared regional needs, but favors local implementation.** West Marin stakeholders expressed strong interest in participating in countywide efforts related to funding and financing strategies, grant assistance, technical support, and projects of regional significance, but generally prefer adaptation planning, project development, and community engagement to occur at a local or subregional scale that reflects West Marin’s unique conditions and priorities.
- **The primary actors involved in SLR adaptation in West Marin differ from those in bayside communities.** Because West Marin is entirely unincorporated, there are no incorporated cities or towns serving as the primary convening entities for adaptation planning. Instead, adaptation efforts involve a broader set of participants, including the County, state and federal agencies, special districts, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and community leaders. Stakeholders emphasized that any countywide collaboration should reflect this broader set of participants and not rely solely on municipal representation.
- **West Marin faces a distinct regulatory environment** shaped by coastal planning requirements and coordination with agencies such as the California Coastal Commission, requiring different regulatory engagement, permitting strategies, and adaptation planning approaches than those used in bayside Marin.
- **The County plays an outsized role in West Marin adaptation efforts.** In unincorporated West Marin, stakeholders identified an even greater need for County support and coordination. The County plays a more direct role in West Marin than it does in many bayside communities due to its responsibilities for transportation infrastructure, land use planning, and the provision of many public services. Stakeholders emphasized that the County is therefore uniquely positioned to support adaptation planning, implementation, and coordination, while recognizing that successful adaptation efforts will also require collaboration with special districts, community-based organizations, resource agencies, and local communities.

3. Collectively, Marin has a strong technical and relational foundation for SLR adaptation but lacks a strong, sustained unifying champion – a role the County organization is uniquely positioned to fill.

Despite significant progress in understanding SLR risks and identifying adaptation opportunities, stakeholders consistently identified a gap between planning and implementation, with no single entity in Marin currently positioned to coordinate action, align priorities, and advance adaptation efforts at a countywide scale.

- **Case studies demonstrated that successful regional collaborations are supported by strong champions who bring stakeholders together, build momentum, and create alignment around a shared need or opportunity.** In San Mateo County, Supervisor Dave Pine played a key leadership role in advancing the conversations that ultimately led to the formation of OneShoreline. Similarly, Supervisor Katie Rice, former County Executive Matt Hymel, and fire service leadership were instrumental in building support for and advancing the formation of the Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA). These examples highlight the important role that trusted leaders can play in bringing partners together, building alignment, and advancing collaborative efforts from concept to implementation.

- **Case studies also demonstrated the importance of sustained organizational support to maintain collaboration over time.** Examples such as the Oakland Alameda Adaptation Committee (OAAC) and Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA) illustrate how dedicated staff and backbone organizations can support meeting coordination, stakeholder engagement, strategic planning, research, grant development, and other administrative functions that help maintain momentum, reduce the burden on participating agencies, and translate collaboration into action.
- **Stakeholders widely agreed that the County organization is the entity best positioned to serve this coordinating role.** With unincorporated areas in both West Marin and Bayside Marin, combined with its countywide perspective and convening authority, the County is uniquely positioned to support countywide initiatives while facilitating local and subregional collaboration. Stakeholders identified opportunities for the County to help convene stakeholders, support strategic planning, coordinate funding opportunities, and facilitate the development of shared priorities. At the same time, stakeholders emphasized that the success of any countywide coordinating effort will depend on continued trust-building, responsiveness to local needs, and strong partnerships with existing organizations and community leaders. Several stakeholders identified MCF as an important partner that could complement the County's role through its community relationships and ability to support collaborative initiatives.

4. Limited agency capacity and funding constraints create a strong case for shared services and coordinated support.

Most municipalities and agencies in the county are small, with limited staff and technical resources, limiting their ability to pursue funding, manage complex projects, build cross-jurisdictional partnerships, and maintain SLR as a consistent priority alongside competing demands. Only three of Marin's 11 incorporated municipalities in Marin have more than 100 FTE on staff, and cities and towns have typically only one to two staff assigned specifically to climate projects. These constraints point to opportunities for shared services, coordinated grant support, technical assistance, and countywide capacity-building—functions that are difficult for individual jurisdictions to provide independently but could be effectively supported through a countywide backbone organization.

- **Shared technical assistance related to permitting, regulatory compliance, and grant administration could reduce burdens on individual jurisdictions** and provide access to expertise that many agencies cannot maintain independently.
- **Coordinated countywide grant strategy and administration could reduce duplication, improve competitiveness,** and help jurisdictions pursue funding opportunities collectively rather than independently. In a landscape of limited funding, state and federal grants are frequently oversubscribed and very competitive. The chances of success coupled with the time and effort required of grant applications often exceed the capacity of smaller agencies to pursue grants. Meanwhile, state and federal agencies generally view multijurisdictional applications favorably, as well as applications from municipalities that have multijurisdictional planning documents.
- **Targeted support for special districts could strengthen the resilience of critical infrastructure systems in Marin County.** Special districts, particularly those responsible for water, wastewater, flood control, and transportation infrastructure, manage the very assets stakeholders identified as the county's highest priorities to protect, yet have been largely disconnected from countywide SLR adaptation planning efforts. This Study engaged approximately 30 special districts and found that many have had limited involvement in countywide adaptation planning efforts to date. Across focus groups, special districts frequently cited limited staffing capacity, competing operational and capital priorities, reliance on existing engineering and design standards, and funding constraints associated with ratepayer-supported business models as barriers to engaging in long-range adaptation planning.

- **Collaborative value should be delivered at multiple scales**, with countywide support complemented by support for local planning among neighboring jurisdictions and agencies. Discussions held through OLU-level focus groups and BayWAVE breakout sessions revealed strong interest in continuing to work with neighboring communities on shared adaptation challenges, particularly where shorelines, infrastructure systems, and vulnerabilities overlap. In many cases, unincorporated Marin County is a key partner in these conversations. Stakeholders emphasized that the County can play an important supporting role by creating forums for coordination, facilitating knowledge-sharing, and providing technical assistance and grant support through the Climate Office, helping local and subregional collaboration efforts move from planning toward implementation.

5. Recommendations

Marin County is not yet ready for a formalized, new countywide governance authority to lead on SLR adaptation. However, there is strong interest in increased coordination, information sharing, and collective action, suggesting that the foundation for deeper collaboration exists and can be strengthened over time. The recommendations presented below can help the County strengthen regional coordination on SLR adaptation while building the relationships, trust, and capacity needed to support long-term implementation. Investment in a shared vision, trust-building, and pilot projects is needed first, to test what collaboration looks like in practice and build the sustained buy-in required for longer-term action. By taking deliberate, phased, incremental steps that address stakeholder needs, build momentum around shared priorities, and demonstrate the practical benefits of coordination, the county can create the conditions necessary for deeper collaboration and potential local ballot initiatives for new funding sources to support adaptation efforts.

In the short term, the County Climate Office can demonstrate the value of collaboration and build trust by providing leadership and support in the areas most frequently identified by stakeholders, including funding and grant strategy, technical assistance and capacity-building (particularly for smaller jurisdictions, special districts, and West Marin communities), regulatory coordination, and community education and engagement. The County can further strengthen regional coordination by advancing projects of shared regional importance, supporting coordination among neighboring jurisdictions and special districts, and helping agencies navigate emerging regulatory requirements and funding opportunities. By delivering tangible benefits and demonstrating the practical value of working together, the County can build the relationships, trust, and momentum needed to support deeper collaboration over time.

Role of the County Climate Office in Moving this Forward

The establishment of the County Climate Division represents the most significant structural development since the Study launched. The new Climate Office can be leveraged as an organizing, momentum-building force to support longer-term collaboration — a backbone agency.

The engagement findings identified six core functions the Division should prioritize in its early phase:

- **Position the County Climate Office as the countywide coordination backbone organization** responsible for convening BayWAVE, expanded collaborative meetings, RSAP working groups, internal County department alignment, and project-specific coordination efforts.
- **Strengthen partnership opportunities with private funders, chiefly Marin Community Foundation**, to support the County's backbone efforts, plus pilot projects, pre-development activities, and community engagement.

- **Build on prior collaborative efforts (e.g., BayWAVE) to work with cities, towns, agencies, and other partners to develop a shared collaboration framework and decision-making principles** supported by clear metrics, equity considerations, and alignment of countywide priorities and projects.
- **Lead collaborative efforts** by identifying and assisting jurisdictions with grant funding opportunities, coordinating multi-jurisdictional applications, and advocating for sequencing projects to improve competitiveness and reduce duplication.
- **Establish a flexible Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) structure** to support shared planning, technical coordination, and implementation across jurisdictions, such as through RSAP development
- **Provide technical assistance and implementation support** related to navigating regulatory requirements like RSAP, grant administration, compliance tracking, permitting coordination, and project delivery, particularly for smaller jurisdictions with limited staffing capacity.

This County-led assessment produced a comprehensive body of research and stakeholder engagement that establishes a clear foundation for the County Climate Office. Across literature review, case study analysis, and engagement with jurisdictions, agencies, and community organizations, a consistent picture emerged: the appetite for regional collaboration is real, the barriers are structural, and the near-term opportunities—particularly around grant strategy, regulatory compliance, and implementation—are within reach. The County Climate Office is well-positioned to serve as the backbone agency that has been missing from Marin's SLR landscape, and these findings and recommendations are intended to inform its strategic direction as it establishes itself and builds the relationships needed for long-term, countywide SLR adaptation.

Next Steps

Near-term priorities focus on building collaborative value before any new formal governance authority is pursued, through actions the County Climate Office can advance immediately to strengthen trust, coordination, and implementation capacity. Mid- and long-term opportunities are framed as questions for further exploration, contingent on what is learned through early implementation efforts.

1. Establish the County climate office as the backbone agency

Position the County Climate Office as the countywide coordination backbone organization responsible for building on prior collaborative efforts (BayWAVE, this Study's Steering Committee, etc) and project-specific coordination efforts. Stakeholders broadly agreed that the County is best positioned for leading this effort. However, many noted that the County does not currently have the relational capacity needed to fully play this role and emphasized that it should continue building trust, strengthening relationships, and demonstrating value through tangible support and coordination. The new Climate Office can be leveraged as an organizing, momentum-building force to support longer-term collaboration under these conditions.

- Serve as a clearinghouse for regulatory information and coordination by tracking evolving requirements, funding opportunities, and guidance from agencies such as BCDC and the Coastal Commission and helping jurisdictions navigate permitting and compliance processes.
- Provide technical assistance and implementation support related to grant administration, compliance tracking, permitting coordination, and project delivery, particularly for smaller jurisdictions.
- Through the Climate Office, build alignment and capacity across County departments to support a coordinated approach to SLR adaptation.
- Explore co-location and shared working opportunities to support collaboration between jurisdictional staff.

- Prioritize engagement and support for special districts, and other infrastructure providers that are on the front lines of sea level rise adaptation. Many of these entities own, operate, and maintain the infrastructure most vulnerable to climate impacts but often have limited staff capacity and resources to pursue funding, navigate regulatory requirements, or participate in regional coordination efforts.
- Strengthen partnership with MCF to support early implementation efforts, pilot projects, pre-development activities, and community engagement.

2. Prioritize support for cross-jurisdictional SLR activities.

Climate hazards extend beyond political boundaries, making regional collaboration essential. Cross-boundary coordination enables outcomes that individual jurisdictions cannot achieve alone.

- Identify one or more pilot projects of clear cross-jurisdictional value, building on ongoing efforts to advance multi-jurisdictional RSAP planning under SB 272, as well as opportunities for coordinated permitting, funding, and implementation of nature-based solutions in sensitive habitat.
- Coordinate multi-beneficial shoreline, transportation, habitat restoration, and infrastructure projects to improve competitiveness for large-scale funding opportunities.
- Support San Rafael's Resilience District Incubator pilot.
- Help Special Districts accelerate and coordinate SLR projects.

3. Advance SLR adaptation countywide through collaboration with MCF.

Bring together the ongoing climate resilience efforts of the MCF and the County of Marin to jointly create a collaborative framework capable of accelerating and expanding adaptation results countywide.

- Develop a shared collaboration framework, including Vision, Mission, Goals, decision-making principles and a 2-year work plan within a 5-year roadmap.
- Develop a sustained countywide education and engagement strategy to improve public understanding of sea level rise risks, adaptation needs, funding challenges, and opportunities for participation.
- Secure adequate funding to resource the initiative start-up for 3 years minimum
- Establish a flexible Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) structure to support shared planning, technical coordination, and implementation across jurisdictions. The TAC should include staff-level representatives from local jurisdictions, special districts, community-based organizations, and other agencies engaged in SLR adaptation and related work. Paired with leadership engagement, this "zippering" approach helps build alignment across organizational levels while grounding countywide coordination in day-to-day planning and implementation needs. To support collaboration at multiple scales, the TAC could include geographic working groups organized around OLU's to facilitate planning among neighboring jurisdictions and agencies, as well as topic-based working groups focused on issues such as funding and financing, regulatory coordination, infrastructure resilience, or community engagement. These working groups would create opportunities for information-sharing, elevate community and technical expertise, and support broader participation around specific issues and geographies. Together, the TAC and its working groups could serve as a practical forum for collaboration while strengthening countywide and subregional coordination over time.
- Strengthen regional collaboration with BCDC, the Coastal Commission and others
- Clarify the collaborative's SLR activities in relation to Marin's other climate risks.

4. Incentivize greater collaboration through grant assistance and funding coordination.

Helping local agencies secure grant funding offers both the highest near-term value and the most broadly supported mechanism for bringing diverse stakeholders together. Existing grant assistance efforts led by organizations such as MCF and Coastal Quest, in coordination with the County, have demonstrated the value of collaborative funding support. Coordinating grant strategies can improve competitiveness, reduce duplication, and strengthen implementation capacity across Marin County.

- Maintain a centralized grant funding program that shares grant opportunities, eligibility requirements, grant writing support, and application status across jurisdictions. Allow local jurisdictions to identify adaptation priorities with collaborative efforts supporting funding identification, grant strategy, and shared implementation support.
- Provide shared grant administration, compliance tracking, and implementation support, particularly for smaller jurisdictions and special districts.
- Coordinate with MCF to leverage philanthropic capital for pre-development work and early project delivery.

Conclusion

The Study identifies a path forward for advancing SLR adaptation in the county through a deliberate, phased approach to collaboration, by identifying specific areas where collaboration can create immediate value, including funding and financing strategy, technical assistance, regulatory coordination, information sharing, and support for local and subregional planning efforts.

The next steps are straightforward. The County can dedicate resources to establishing the Climate Office—in partnership with MCF—as the countywide backbone organization and begin advancing the collaborative activities identified through this Study. With these foundational elements in place, the focus should shift from planning for collaboration to practicing it through coordinated projects, coordinated funding strategies, technical assistance, community engagement, and relationship-building across jurisdictions, agencies, and community partners. The opportunity now is to build momentum through tangible actions that demonstrate the value of collaboration and strengthen the foundation for future adaptation efforts.

As collaboration matures, more formal governance authorities may become appropriate. However, formalization should be tied to concrete triggers, not fixed timelines. Annual check-ins can assess progress, evaluate emerging needs, determine whether any of these triggers have been met, revisit governance considerations, and adjust priorities and approaches accordingly.

The path forward does not require establishing a new governance authority. It requires investing in relationships, building trust, and advancing shared priorities. By doing so, the county can continue building the capacity, alignment, and momentum needed to support long-term adaptation and resilience.

Appendix

Appendix A. Inventory of Existing SLR Adaptation Plans and Studies

Many SLR adaptation plans and studies have been conducted across the county's OLU and countywide. This Appendix provides a summary of representative plans and studies organized by Operational Landscape Unit (OLU).

Novato OLU

- **Resilient 37** – A Caltrans project to raise the low elevation sections of State Route 37 (SR-37) in Marin on a causeway.
- **Novato Baylands Restoration** – The Marin County FCD is working on restoring Deer Island Basin to provide extensive habitat areas and flood control benefits.
- **Bel Marin Keys Flood Protection Efforts** - Implemented approximately four miles of levee improvements supported through bond financing and grant funding. The effort included extensive community engagement and demonstrated early local support for adaptation, though long-term coordination and momentum remained ongoing challenges.

Richardson OLU

- **Sausalito SLR Task Force + Shoreline Adaptation Plan** – A task force to address the unique challenges of addressing SLR and coordinate adaptation efforts across Richardson Bay.
- **Marin City Stormwater Plan + Pond Flood Reduction Project** – The Marin County Flood Control District (FCD) is working with the Marin City community and California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) to address recurrent flooding.
- **U.S. Highway 101, State Route 1 Sea-Level Rise Project** – A Caltrans study to address flooding and SLR impacts from the Manzanita interchange to Marin City.
- **Mill Valley Coastal Flooding Adaptation Project** – An OPC grant was awarded to develop an adaptation plan informed by existing data on vulnerabilities and community engagement.
- **Tiburon General Plan** – Includes a chapter on SLR resilience that identifies vulnerabilities and potential adaptation methods.
- **Sausalito Gate 5 Area Drainage Management Study** – The City of Sausalito completed the Gate 5 Area Drainage Management Study to evaluate flooding challenges, drainage improvements, and adaptation strategies for vulnerable shoreline infrastructure and properties.

Corta Madera OLU

- **Corte Madera Climate Adaptation Assessment** – Identifies vulnerable areas, resilience project concepts, and policies to promote resiliency. The assessment identifies the need for alignment on SLR projections and priorities when planning for restoration projects.
- **Larkspur General Plan and Climate Action Forum** – Larkspur is currently in the process of launching a Climate Action Forum to help raise awareness on climate change issues and discuss potential actions to address hazards and vulnerabilities.

San Rafael OLU

- **San Rafael SLR Collaborative Outreach Efforts** – The Canal Community Resilience Planning Project explores the feasibility of different adaptation actions and preferred alternatives.
- **Canal Priority Development Area planning** – San Rafael advances Canal neighborhood development, balancing housing and adaptation needs.

- **San Rafael Community-Informed SLR Technical Feasibility Study** – San Rafael completed a community-informed technical feasibility study evaluating sea level rise adaptation alternatives and implementation considerations within vulnerable shoreline areas.

West Marin OLU

- **Stinson Adaptation and Resilience Collaboration (ARC)** – County-led project to engage the community, evaluate the feasibility of adaptation opportunities, and identify thresholds to trigger specific adaptation actions.
- **Tomales Bay Living Shorelines project, Tomales Bay Bulkhead Vulnerability Assessment** – Studies to identify adaptation opportunities in Tomales Bay and shoreline vulnerabilities in East Shore.
- **Local Coastal Program (LCP) Environmental Hazards Update** – Update to the Coastal Hazards section of LCP to shape adaptation opportunities on a parcel-by-parcel level.

Gallinas OLU

- **Santa Venetia Floodwall Project** – The Marin County FCD’s Santa Venetia Floodwall project addresses the intersecting challenges of subsidence of development on former marshlands, stormwater management, and SLR.
- **China Camp Feasibility Study** – Led by Marin County Parks to evaluate the feasibility of improvements to reduce high tide roadway flooding.

Countywide Efforts

- **SLR Adaptation of Marin County’s Transportation System** – This Transportation Authority of Marin study included a detailed analysis of SLR impacts to assets within 19 focus areas.
- **Multi-jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan – A 2023 update** to identify uniquely vulnerable areas and include mitigation actions to address erosion and flooding.
- **Race Equity Action Plan** – Developed by the County to guide racial equity in Marin County.
- **North Bay Water Reuse Authority (NBWRA)** – NBWRA is integrating SLR adaptation into regional climate resilience planning across Marin, Sonoma, and Napa counties. Efforts include protecting vulnerable water infrastructure, coordinating regional resilience planning, and supporting habitat restoration and nature-based adaptation projects.
- **Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM) Countywide Transportation Plan 2050** — TAM completed its Countywide Transportation Plan 2050, which incorporates sea level rise adaptation and resilience considerations into long-term transportation planning and investment priorities.
- **CA FWD Resilience District Incubator Pilot** — San Rafael and Marin County were selected as one of three pilot regions statewide for the California Forward Resilience District Incubator, supporting exploration of regional governance and financing approaches for climate resilience implementation.

Appendix B. Steering Committee Purpose & Membership

The Steering Committee was established to guide stakeholder engagement, review governance authority alternatives, provide jurisdictional and community perspectives, and help shape recommendations for a future countywide sea level rise collaboration framework. Details about the Committee are provided here.

Committee Membership

The Steering Committee, composed of representatives from each coastal incorporated Marin city and town, two representatives from West Marin, and representatives from the Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria, provided strategic guidance and reviewed findings throughout the Study.

- Stephanie Moulton-Peters, Marin County Supervisor (District 3)
- Dennis Rodoni, Marin County Supervisor (District 4)
- Kevin Burke, City of Belvedere
- Alice Fredericks, Town of Tiburon
- Max Perrey, City of Mill Valley
- Maika Llorens Gulati, City of San Rafael
- Eli Beckman, Town of Corte Madera
- Pat Eklund, City of Novato
- Joan Cox, City of Sausalito
- Stephanie Andre, City of Larkspur
- Andrew Alexander Green, Bolinas Community Public Utility District
- George Clyde, Marin Resource Conservation District
- Hector Garcia, Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria
- Kyle Rabellino, Federated Indians of Graton Rancheria

Steering Committee Meetings & Topics

Kickoff Meeting (Fall 2024)

- Project overview
- Committee purpose, role, and expectations
- Defining “governance”
- Stakeholder engagement strategy

One-on-One Discussions (late Fall 2024 through early 2025)

One-on-one discussions were held with each Steering Committee member to better understand their community priorities, goals for the committee, and any questions or concerns related to countywide sea level rise adaptation and collaboration.

- Governance authority preferences
- Coordination and implementation challenges
- Opportunities for countywide collaboration and implementation support

Combined BayWAVE and Steering Committee Meetings (Spring 2025)

Beginning in Spring 2025, Steering Committee discussions were integrated into BayWAVE meetings to leverage existing countywide coordination structures, broaden participation, and align discussions with ongoing regional sea level rise planning efforts.

March Steering Committee / BayWAVE Meeting

- Overview of engagement and findings
- Proposed governance authority alternatives and tradeoffs

- Criteria for assessing governance authorities
- Discussion of decision-making approaches
- SB 272 considerations

Appendix C. Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder engagement occurred between May 2024 and April 2025. Activities were designed to be comprehensive and exploratory, capturing perspectives across jurisdictions, agencies, community organizations, and regional partners.

The team conducted 52 individual engagement activities with 40+ unique stakeholder groups, reviewed 15 prior engagement efforts, and received 500+ public survey responses. The engagement was organized around five primary activity types: focus groups with pre-meeting surveys, community-based organization meetings, smaller targeted focus groups and one-on-one interviews, BayWAVE participation, and a countywide survey. The team also attended the San Rafael Sea Level Rise Assembly.

Prior stakeholder engagement efforts reviewed as part of this Study include:

- Bolinas Civic Group: Bolinas Sea Level Rise Initiative (2024)
- Corte Madera: Shoreline Adaptation Engagement Effort (2024)
- Marin Community Foundation: Advancing Climate Justice through Community Empowerment (2024)
- Multicultural Center of Marin: Community Outreach Partners Needs Assessment (2019)
- City of Sausalito: Sausalito Shoreline Adaptation Community Survey (2024)
- Shore Up Marin: Recommendations to Policy Makers (2013–14)
- Transportation Authority of Marin: Sea Level Rise Adaptation Planning for Marin County's Transportation System (2024)

Large Format Focus Groups (*May – June 2025*)

The project team convened focus groups with countywide agency stakeholders, special district representatives, and OLU-based community and agency stakeholders. Pre-meeting surveys were distributed to participants in advance of each focus group to gather targeted inputs, surface priorities and concerns, and inform the facilitated discussions. Focus groups were designed to build a broad understanding of local SLR conditions, barriers to collaboration, and what participants most needed from a regional coordination effort.

Who We Met With:

- **Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority (MWPA)** (*October 2024*)
- **Special Districts Association** (*November 2024*)
- **Marin Climate and Energy Partnership (MCEP)** (*January 2025*)
- **West Marin — Northern, Central, and Southern Meetings** (*January 2025*)
Large-format community meetings were held across West Marin's three subregions, convening a broad cross-section of community members, utility district representatives, community organizations, and local stakeholders from Bolinas, Stinson Beach, Inverness, Point Reyes Station, Marshall, Tomales, and Dillon Beach
- **Local and Regional Transportation Agencies** (*February 2025*)
Transportation Authority of Marin (TAM), Caltrans District 4, Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART), Marin Transit, Golden Gate Bridge Highway and Transportation District (GGBHTD)
- **San Rafael OLU** (*May 2025*)
Canal Alliance, Friends of China Camp, Multicultural Center of Marin, ResilientShore, San Rafael Sea Level Rise Steering Committee, Santa Venetia Neighborhood Association, Marinwood Community Services District, Flood Zone 6 (San Rafael Meadows), Flood Zone 7 (Santa Venetia), NHA Advisors, San Francisco Estuary Institute

- **Corte Madera OLU (May 2025)**
Corte Madera Climate Action Committee, Friends of Corte Madera Creek, Mariner Cove Neighborhood Association, San Quentin Village Association, Flood Zone 9 (Ross Valley)
- **Richardson Bay OLU (May 2025)**
Center for Sea Rise Solutions, Logan Link Home, Hagstrom Law, Dorman Associates, Tam Valley Sea Level Rise Task Force, Tam Design Review Board, Tam Valley Community Services District, Marin City Neighborhood Response Group, Marin City Stormwater Management Plan Task Force, Marin Climate Justice Collaborative, Marin City Community Services District, Flood Zone 3, Flood Zone 4 (Bel Aire, Strawberry, Tiburon), Port of SF, CMG Architects, SFSU Estuary Ocean Science Center, Marin City People's Plan, Mill Valley StreamKeepers, Sausalito Floating Homes Association, Sausalito Galilee Harbor, Strawberry Community, Sperry Capital, Richardson Bay Sanitary District, Strawberry Design Review Board
- **Novato OLU (May 2025)**
Bel Marin Keys Community Services District, Flood Zone 1, Sustainable Novato

Collective Findings:

Planning: Community Factors

- Many communities are facing more pressing and immediate challenges which makes prioritizing and planning for SLR adaptation complex and at odds with the daily challenges being faced.
- The threat of SLR is interconnected with and compounds long-term systemic barriers including displacement fears, a lack of affordable housing, frontline communities, public health concerns, and underinvestment in communities and infrastructure.
- Communities of color and low-income residents have historically been excluded from climate change conversations which means their priorities and needs have not been adequately
- Uncoordinated and duplicative engagement efforts are overwhelming and resource intensive for communities which overburdens community members, misses opportunities to address immediate community needs, and slows down realization of tangible benefits.

Planning: Agency Factors

- A lack of coordinated, multi-jurisdictional SLR adaptation planning results in a project-by-project approach that does not address the scale of Marin County SLR challenges.
- Competing priorities often delay or complicate SLR adaptation planning as projects compete for resources with other more immediate pressing needs, such as housing, transportation, and economic prosperity.
- Agencies are small with limited capacity which limits the ability of individual entities to pursue funding, manage projects, and lead the engagement required to successfully plan for and implement SLR adaptation projects.
- Effective SLR adaptation planning requires strong partnerships between municipalities and agencies which are challenging to build, require trust between entities and the community, and shared priorities.
- Municipalities and agencies face logistical challenges in planning for large-scale adaptation projects including a lack of clearly assigned responsibility to address SLR between departments and between stakeholders when working across municipalities and agencies.

Implementation

- Permitting for SLR adaptation projects is challenging and resource intensive which can slow down progress and is too onerous for municipalities, agencies, and communities.
- Even small-scale investments are resource-intensive and take years to plan, fund and implement which makes progress slow and can make large-scale investments seem unachievable.

- There lacks a unifying, driving force that brings municipalities and agencies together to collaborate and plan for and implement SLR adaptation, including establishing consistent approaches and coordinated efforts.

Funding

- Individual communities, municipalities, and agencies lack sufficient funding capacity to pay for projects that are not immediately critical which means entities must seek external resources to fund SLR adaptation.
- A lack of coordination in pursuing grant opportunities results in municipalities and agencies competing for the same funding which is inefficient, duplicative, and results in missed opportunities.
- Grant applications and post-award management processes are resource intensive and complex which makes securing funding for SLR adaptation prohibitive for municipalities and agencies, especially for those with constrained resources.

Special District & Transportation Agencies

- Community engagement and outreach is limited which reduces public participation in decision-making related to infrastructure investments that directly impact them.
- Inconsistent levels of understanding among agencies and community members related to the risks of SLR impacts decision-making and limits support for necessary adaptation measures.
- Inconsistent and cumbersome processes slow down progress especially when preparing larger studies that cross multiple jurisdictions.
- The lack of a formal, agreed upon collaboration framework impacts municipal and agency ability to align priorities and overcome barriers presented by competing interests.
- Overlapping jurisdictional boundaries and unclear roles and responsibilities hinder effective planning for SLR adaptation projects, often leading to inefficiencies and delays.
- Competing interests for limited resources puts SLR adaptation and infrastructure hardening in direct competition with higher-priority capital improvements.
- Many special districts are already faced with deteriorating infrastructure which makes it challenging to incorporate SLR adaptation into existing maintenance practices and to upgrade plans without additional resources.
- The existing permitting process is complex and isn't aligned with infrastructure needs making it difficult for agencies to execute critical infrastructure projects in a timely manner.
- Limited funding and resources from federal and state partners impacts an agency's ability to execute a fuller suite of infrastructure investments.
- Agencies lack in-house grant writing expertise which limits their ability to secure and manage funding for SLR adaptation projects.
- Special districts often compete for the same funding opportunities rather than collaborating on a unified funding strategy, resulting in missed opportunities for large-scale solutions.

West Marin

- The lack of unified SLR adaptation planning across West Marin results in fragmented efforts, creating inconsistencies in priorities and approaches that can hinder effective regional coordination.
- Misaligned priorities between federal, state, and county entities create delays and complicated pathways to implementation. The absence of a coordinated approach to engage with regulatory agencies leaves local communities without a clear strategy when working with agencies like the California Coastal Commission.
- Navigating collaboration and permitting with the County can be challenging due to a lack of internal alignment, which affects external coordination and community-led adaptation efforts.

- Communities struggle to secure funding for SLR adaptation projects due to the competing interests of County funds and the competitive grants landscape, leaving West Marin at risk of losing access to resources specific to coastal communities.
- A coordinated grant strategy would enable West Marin to pursue grants independent of bayside activities and provide grant application technical assistance to help reduce barriers to apply for and secure funding.
- Stronger coordination with regional, state, and federal regulatory bodies would help align adaptation priorities, reduce permitting obstacles, and streamline project approval.

Community-Based Organization Meetings *(May 2024 – May 2025)*

The project team held dedicated meetings with community-based organizations serving frontline and historically underrepresented communities. These were conducted separately from focus groups to allow for candid conversation in community-controlled settings.

Who We Met With:

- **Canal Alliance** *(May 2024 - May 2025)*
- **Marin Multicultural Center** *(August 2024 - May 2025)*
- **North Marin Community Services** *(November 2024 - May 2025)*
- **West Marin Collaborative** *(September 2024 - May 2025)*
- **West Marin Fund** *(June 2024 - May 2025)*
- **Marin City / Marin Climate Justice Collaborative** *(June 2024 - May 2025)*
- **Marin Community Foundation** *(August 2024 - May 2025)*
- **Marin Conservation League** *(November 2024 - May 2025)*
- **MarinCAN** *(January 2025)*

Focus Groups *(November 2024 – May 2025)*

The project team convened a series of smaller, targeted focus groups organized by geography or stakeholder type to go deeper on specific local conditions, priorities, and concerns.

Who We Met With:

- **Southern Marin Kickoff Roadshow** *(June 2024)*
- **Marin City Stormwater Committee** *(June 2024)*
- **Marin County Health and Human Services** *(August 2024)*
- **Flood Zone 4 Advisory Board** *(October 2024)*
- **Marin Planning Directors Meeting** *(November 2024)*
- **Eastshore Planning Group** *(November 2024)*
- **Marin Managers Association** *(January 2025)*
- **TAM** *(January 2025)*
- **MCEP Staff-level Engagement** *(January 2025)*
- **Special Districts — Las Gallinas** *(January 2025)*
- **Special Districts — West Marin** *(January 2025)*
- **Marin Managers Association** *(March 2025)*
- **West Marin Flood Control Advisory Board** *(April 2025)*
- **Flood Zone 1 Advisory Board** *(April 2025)*
- **San Francisco Estuary Institute** *(May 2025)*

Surveys

Two types of surveys were developed and distributed during engagement. Pre-meeting surveys were shared with stakeholder groups prior to focus group engagements to gather targeted inputs and inform

discussions. A public survey was posted on the County website and shared as part of community-focused engagement activities to gather broad community perspectives. The purpose of both surveys was to develop a baseline understanding of challenges, opportunities, and prioritization of SLR issues and governance.

- **Public Survey** (500+ responses)
 - 90% of respondents think that communities and agencies should work together to plan for SLR.
 - When asked which assets they were most concerned about, respondents identified roads and transportation infrastructure (65%), sewer and drainage systems (64%), and residential properties (47%) as their top three priorities.
- **Stakeholder Pre-Meeting Survey**
 - Respondents identified a countywide approach, including both the bay and coast sides of the county, as the most appropriate scale for SLR adaptation planning.
 - When asked to rank the assets they were most concerned about, respondents identified protecting transportation networks (57%), protecting utilities (43%), and protecting privately-owned parcels and buildings (29%) as their top priorities.
 - When asked about the biggest barriers to SLR adaptation, respondents identified coordinating with state, federal, and/or regional agencies (23%) as the single largest barrier, followed by capital resources such as funding (19%), people resources (15%), coordinating with other local agencies (15%), technical data (12%), community engagement (8%), and regional guidance and support (8%).

Appendix D. Case Studies

Case studies provide informed guidance about the benefits and limitations of existing governmental structures. The goal of this approach is to create a framework for discussion about the opportunities and gaps in existing SLR efforts in Marin County in addition to potential outcomes, roles, and challenges associated with various structures.

Case studies were developed using desktop research, discussions with subject matter experts at AECOM, and interviews with BayWAVE members. A long list of case studies was created, which was then reviewed and consolidated based on relevance and feedback from the County project team and BayWAVE members.

Selected case studies:

- Marin County Wildfire Protection Authority*
- OneShoreline*
- Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority*
- San Francisco Bay Restoration Authority*
- Duwamish Valley Resilience District
- Resilience Authority of Annapolis and Anne Arundel County
- Oakland Alameda Adaptation Council
- Delta Stewardship Council
- San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority
- Hayward Area Shoreline Planning Agency
- Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact
- ResilientCoasts Initiative

* Indicates organizations for which case study interviews were conducted.

Key Themes:

- **What Makes Collaboration Impactful**
 - Cross-boundary coordination enables outcomes, such as funding, shared infrastructure, and project delivery, that individual jurisdictions cannot achieve alone. Climate hazards extend beyond political boundaries, making regional collaboration essential.
 - Early, visible project delivery is the most reliable measure of impact and credibility. Tangible results, not governance structures or plans, build public confidence, demonstrate institutional effectiveness, and create momentum for expanded authority over time.
- **Purpose of Collaboration**
 - Shared risk motivates formation, but sustained participation depends on tangible benefits, such as funding access, technical support, and coordinated permitting.
 - Coordination and convening, not control, are typically the starting purpose, with most efforts beginning as planning and alignment bodies and evolving over time. A narrow initial scope is a deliberate strategy for building alignment, trust, and a broad coalition.
- **Process For Developing Collaboration**
 - Catalysts (e.g. urgent events or strong champions) are typically required to initiate regional efforts and create momentum for collaboration.
 - Alignment at the staff and city manager level is foundational, with trusted subject matter experts providing the technical credibility needed to sustain collaboration through political complexity; board-level buy-in typically follows.
- **Roles and Responsibilities**

- Board composition is a critical (and often contentious) design decision, with approaches such as representative structures and weighted voting used to balance interests across jurisdictions.
- Layered governance structures distribute responsibilities effectively, drawing on policy, operational, and technical expertise without overloading any single body.
- Shared staffing is a practical early-stage solution, enabling organizations to build capacity and deliver results without requiring full independent staffing.
- **Resourcing**
 - Layered funding models are the norm, combining member contributions, grants, and dedicated revenue to support both operations and project delivery.
 - Parcel taxes are the most proven mechanism for sustained local funding, but require significant public support and demonstrated project value.
 - Governance structures can form before dedicated funding is secured, with member contributions and shared technical support providing an initial foundation for coordination and early capacity building.
- **Participation Is Driven By Clear Value**
 - Access to funding is the strongest participation incentive, as jurisdictions see clear financial returns (e.g. grant eligibility, pooled revenues, cost-sharing).
 - Technical support is a meaningful secondary incentive, with shared data, coordinated permitting, and planning capacity helping smaller jurisdictions overcome resource constraints.
 - Preserving local autonomy is a critical condition of participation, with successful structures maintaining local control.
- **Results Build Trust**
 - Small, visible wins are the most reliable tool for building trust, demonstrating credibility, and creating momentum for larger, more complex efforts.
 - Formal governance should follow demonstrated effectiveness—structures that emerge from proven value are more likely to sustain participation and legitimacy.
 - Stakeholder readiness varies and should guide the pace of formalization, with collaboration evolving in line with actual engagement and capacity across jurisdictions.
- **Governance Evolves Incrementally**
 - Informal and semi-structured mechanisms are effective first steps to build trust and allow iteration.
 - Flexibility should be built in from the outset, with governance structures designed to adapt over time as conditions, priorities, and collaboration mature.
 - Formalization should be tied to concrete triggers (e.g. specific events, completed plans, successful ballot measures) rather than fixed timelines.
 - The formation-era steering committee and future governing board serve distinct functions. Early coordination bodies build consensus/structure and formal governing bodies focus on implementation.