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ASSESSING THE FEASIBILITY OF DEVELOPING A CLIMATE COLLABORATIVE IN MARIN

DEVELOPED IN PARTNERSHIP BY:



Assessing the Feasibility of Developing a Climate Collaborative in Marin

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Executive Summary

About this Memo

The Marin Community Foundation (MCF), through its Building Resilient Communities Initiative (BRCI), engaged Coastal Quest in 2025 to survey climate resilience stakeholders across Marin to assess their appetite for the development of a climate collaborative to increase institutional capacity, provide technical support, and remove funding barriers for projects across hazards, jurisdictions, and sectors. Coastal Quest conducted desk research and interviews to understand the Marin climate resilience landscape, and to assess opportunities and best approaches to advance climate resilience across the county.

This memo summarizes Coastal Quest’s 2025 assessment, highlighting key findings that address increasing climate risks across Marin in the short, medium, and long term. It aims to inform strategic next steps to be considered by the Marin County Board of Supervisors on behalf of the Office of the County Executive’s new Climate division.

Research Approach and Key Findings

Coastal Quest interviewed 37 key stakeholders in Marin, including county, city, and inter-agency staff, elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and academic researchers. They also compiled 7 in-depth case studies of climate collaboratives operating in other counties, states and internationally.

Key findings included:

- Stakeholders interviewed almost unanimously **avored the establishment of an organizing body** for more comprehensive climate resilience planning and implementation **to guide regional approaches** that address multiple climate hazards across Marin. Numerous stakeholders stated that existing collaborative climate resilience efforts should be recognized and included in such an effort.
- Stakeholder interviews stated that **long-term sustainable funding is a key priority**. Coordinating across jurisdictions and sectors is critical to ensure success. In addition, case study research revealed that many collaborative efforts pursue **diversified funding sources** to meet service needs; however, they still face funding shortfalls. When seeking funding, pursuing larger pots of funding and funds that can be administered on longer time horizons is critical to increase staffing, accelerate project development and growth of needed programs and services.
- Case study research found that successful climate collaboratives shared similar strategies: 1) creating convening space to foster collaboration 2) providing **tangible tools for project and partnership development**, 3) supporting access to **funding and technical assistance**, and 4) **advancing equity** and environmental justice to support communities on the frontlines of climate impacts.
- Case study research also suggested that **a collaborative is more likely to succeed when governance is established early** and is inclusive of various issue areas and communities served.

Specifically, equitable governance allocations (or seats) include sectors, geography, and diverse expertise; convenings are led by a neutral entity; and buy-in and leadership from local jurisdictions, often with a county agency as a key unifier, is established.

Recommendations and Next Steps

The following are Coastal Quest recommendations based on findings from our interviews and case study research. Coastal Quest recommends the following next steps.

- **A voluntary countywide climate collaborative effort could be established to improve** coordination, facilitate partnerships and support access to project funding across hazards, jurisdictions, and sectors. This collaborative effort would need to **provide early wins on funding and partnership building** to earn stakeholder buy-in and trust, especially with frontline communities and historically underserved communities.
- A cross-sector **leadership body could be established to inform the design of a formalized collaborative entity**. This would help ensure Marin practitioners from across jurisdictions, sectors, and technical backgrounds could guide the development of collaborative governance, institutional arrangements, and other foundational activities from the beginning.

Introduction

For the purposes of this document, **climate resilience** is defined as the ability for individuals, communities, regions and local economies to prepare for, withstand, and recover from the impact of climate change, including those from physical hazards as well as social and economic disturbances.

Increasing impacts of climate change threaten business as usual for Marin communities, ecosystems, businesses, and critical infrastructure. Severe flooding in January 2026 inundated shoreline communities with tides up to 2.5 feet above normal on bayside lands, underscoring the climate challenges Marin faces. This event heightened public awareness of Marin’s climate vulnerabilities and amplified calls from many stakeholders for key climate actors to align on strategic, coordinated, and impactful next steps to build countywide resilience.

Several climate resilience efforts are already underway across Marin County. The Marin Wildfire Prevention Authority and MCE Community Choice Energy stand out as models in their respective fields, while multi-jurisdictional forums and initiatives like BayWAVE and the Marin Climate and Energy Partnership provide coordination and shared expertise.

Even so, Marin County has not yet articulated a shared vision nor built the backbone infrastructure to help ensure climate resilience efforts can scale and be sustained in the face of compounding climate risks. A comprehensive, countywide collaborative governance and funding strategy that bridges jurisdictions, sectors, and hazards could offer an effective approach to meet this need.

Overview of Research Objectives and Methodology

Marin Community Foundation (MCF) launched its *Building Resilient Communities Initiative (BRCI)* in 2023 with a vision that all Marin residents, including its priority communities, are healthy and resilient to long-term climate impacts. In the Fall of 2025, Marin Community Foundation engaged Coastal Quest to survey key stakeholders working at the forefront of climate in Marin County about the barriers and gaps in climate resilience work in Marin, and to assess whether a voluntary countywide collaborative effort could help address them. Coastal Quest also assessed potential best fit models for a multi-hazard collaborative in Marin from insights gleaned from regional, national, and international case studies.

Coastal Quest carried out key stakeholder interviews with 37 individuals from August to October 2025. Key stakeholders were identified across climate-focused organizations and agencies in Marin County. Interviewees included: 16 nonprofit leaders, 11 County of Marin personnel, 3 city personnel, 3 multi-agency partnership personnel, 1 County of Marin elected official, and 1 academic researcher. Coastal Quest conducted semi-structured hour-long interviews focused on the following topics: 1) identifying barriers and gaps to conducting climate work in Marin; 2) assessing the need for and potential approaches to developing a countywide collaborative; 3) understanding effective stakeholder engagement strategies; and, 4) determining funding needs and gaps for climate resilience projects. Coastal Quest then analyzed responses to identify key themes which informed the findings and recommendations explored later in this memo.

Concurrently, Coastal Quest conducted high-level research on approximately 20 statewide, national and international climate collaboratives. It selected 7 case studies for further research using defined criteria including: 1) operation at a countywide or regional scale; 2) engages partners across multiple sectors; 3) demonstrates notable achievements and measurable impacts; 4) offers transferable lessons or models for Marin County; and 5) demonstrates variation in organization maturity, governance structure, funding models and geographic diversity across case studies selected. The following five California case studies were selected and explored in depth:

- Santa Clara County Collaborative
- Santa Barbara Climate Collaborative
- San Diego Regional Climate Collaborative
- North Coast Resource Partnership
- Sonoma Climate Resilience District (Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority)

One national case study (Southeast Florida Regional Climate Change Compact) and one international case study were also selected (KlimaatCoalitie in Belgium). Coastal Quest conducted in-depth desktop research and interviewed collaborative leaders from the five California case studies. While the findings are instructive and helped to identify key trends, Coastal Quest and MCF recognize that this assessment was limited given the breadth of climate resilience work happening in Marin County.

Summary of Key Findings

Coastal Quest's initial 2025 assessment offered critical insights into the factors that make climate collaboratives successful, the current appetite among key Marin stakeholders for a multi-jurisdictional, multi-hazard approach, and the ways priority projects could move forward more quickly.

Coastal Quest discovered the following key findings from stakeholder interviews:

- **County Scale Governance and Leadership:** Many resilience efforts in Marin are driven by organizations and single jurisdictions rather than shared cross-jurisdictional and sector goals. This results in siloed efforts, inconsistent criteria to assess risk and hazards, limited resource sharing, and uneven progress across the county. The majority of stakeholders interviewed voiced a desire for the County of Marin to take a stronger leadership role in aligning and coordinating countywide climate resilience efforts.
- **Resource and Capacity Constraints:** Most Marin informants noted a lack of accessible centralized information resources for climate practitioners, including a maintained directory of organizations, climate adaptation and planning documents, vulnerability assessments, projects under development and more.
The primary barriers limiting effective project development and implementation included:
 - Lack of staff time and resources to find, apply for, and manage suitable funding opportunities;
 - Uneven local, state and federal policy requirements affect the ability to plan for resilience efforts, secure funding, and ultimately implement projects.
- **Prioritization of Climate Projects and Building Diversified Revenue Streams:** Short term, sporadic public funding cycles make timely project completion and resilience progress difficult. Several Marin informants also noted a lack of equity considerations regarding how funding is and should be allocated across different priorities and regions within Marin County. Shared alignment of priorities and projects, adequate preparation in advance of funding opportunities, and identification of non-grant, diversified revenue streams would help address these barriers.
- **Collaboration Readiness:** Almost all interviewees favored a voluntary countywide collaborative effort that focuses on building multi-sector, multi-jurisdictional and multi-hazard partnerships and coordination to reduce climate risk and remove barriers to funding. Stakeholders emphasized that setting up such an effort will require thoughtful integration of existing collaborative efforts and strong stakeholder backing.

Coastal Quest discovered the following key findings through case study research on regional, national, and international collaboratives:

- **Collaborative Services:** Across collaboratives, services provided most often were: 1) creating and/or implementing regional climate adaptation plans; 2) advancing climate equity; 3) supporting project funding through resource sharing and/or technical assistance; and 4) facilitating increased alignment and coordination across jurisdictions, sectors, hazards, and geographic regions.

- **Governance and Leadership:** Across collaboratives, leadership bodies were multi-sector and often included representatives from counties, cities, tribes, nonprofits (including community-based organizations), academia, and the private sector. Most collaboratives had an equity advisory body and/or designated seat allocations within the leadership body to ensure equity principles were reflected in decision-making, guiding documents, and programs.
- **Operations and Staffing:** Successful climate collaboratives most often leveraged cross-sector partners (e.g., County agencies and nonprofits) to provide operational and staffing support.
- **Funding:** Although all collaboratives leveraged multiple sources of funding, such as grants, base funding and in-kind staff support from backbone organizations, nearly all reported a lack of sustainable flexible funding as a key barrier to maximizing long-term impact because the tremendous time and costs associated with adaptation are not well served by competitive and abbreviated funding cycles. Few collaboratives had an associated blended financing mechanism, though many voiced the need to have one to advance projects and ensure long-term sustainable financing. Funding constraints often limit their ability to increase staffing, accelerate project development, and scale effective programs and services.

Recommendations

Near-term Priorities

As a result of the above findings, Coastal Quest recommends the following near-term priorities for completion within 12 months. Many of these recommendations are already underway as later discussed in the section ‘Current and Next Steps’.

- Provide high-touch technical assistance to Marin public agencies (County, cities/towns, special districts) and nonprofits on climate resilience projects to help develop competitive proposals for funding opportunities.
- Leverage catalytic philanthropic funding to help address pre-development needs and unlock public funding opportunities.
- Centralize various documents related to climate resilience in response to stakeholder requests for more accessible, localized information resources to reduce resilience planning and implementation siloes.
- Host learning sessions to increase climate practitioner knowledge on relevant, actionable topics and to build trust and partnership across sectors, regions, and issue areas.
- Facilitate multi-jurisdictional coordination on State requirements.
- Partner with existing local and regional collaboratives and organizations to explore how current efforts could integrate with a strategic, well-informed Marin multi-hazard climate collaborative.
- Set up an initial advisory body to inform the design of a collaborative structure.
- Develop a strategic plan complete with guiding documents to formalize the goals, operations, and governance structure(s) of a countywide collaborative effort, and create roadmaps to securing diversified financing.

Mid- and Long-Term Opportunities

Mid-Term Opportunities

- Establish a medium- to long-term plan for the collaborative governance structure under the guidance of the steering committee to enable decision-making for a countywide climate collaborative.
- Support continued engagement of stakeholders through convenings, topical working groups, and collaborative networks that build capacity for joint project development, resource sharing and implementation.
- Explore joint advocacy informed by engagement with jurisdictions, nonprofits, and public agencies.
- Develop new public and private revenue streams to fund priority climate resilience projects.

Long-Term Opportunities

- Pursue and secure a sustainable public and private blended financing mechanism to support climate collaborative operational costs and programming, as well as direct support for high-priority climate resilience projects.
- Institutionalize a durable countywide collaborative governance structure that serves as an umbrella for addressing resilience needs. Ensure it is actionable, coordinated, and equitable in advancing climate resilience.

Current and Next Steps

January through June 2026

County Engagement and Partnership with MCF

At the start of 2026, the Marin County Office of the County Executive and Marin Community Foundation initiated a public-private partnership informed by Coastal Quest’s research findings and based on a shared desire to accelerate climate resilience action across Marin. MCF also resourced Coastal Quest to facilitate cross-sector alignment and to catalyze coordinated climate resilience work through technical assistance, with an initial focus on sea level rise.

Initial Actions

Together, Coastal Quest and MCF’s Building Resilient Communities Initiative, in partnership with the Office of the County Executive, are currently designing and implementing several of the early actions outlined in the Recommendations section above. MCF is also providing grant support to high-priority local projects addressing sea level rise and coastal flooding, wildfire, and clean energy resilience.

See actions taken to date below:

- **Climate Bond Prop 4 Funding Webinar (Project Lead: Coastal Quest):** In April 2026, a two-hour virtual Prop 4 Climate Bond funding webinar convened more than 60 Marin climate practitioners representing a broad range of sectors including cities, counties, non-profits, and even private

sector entities. The session included an overview of the Climate Bond program, a review of upcoming grant opportunities, a tour of Coastal Quest’s funding databases, and seven facilitated breakout discussions focused on priority projects, funding alignment, and cross-sector partnership opportunities. The webinar strengthened grant awareness, coordination, and readiness among participants.

- **1:1 Climate Bond Coaching (Project Lead: Coastal Quest):** In April and May 2026, Coastal Quest offered 19 individual 30-minute coaching sessions for climate practitioners seeking state Climate Bond funding for their priority projects. Participants received tailored guidance on best-fit Prop 4 funding pathways based on project scope, readiness, and alignment.
- **Round 1 of Climate Bond Technical Assistance Program (Project Lead: Coastal Quest):** In May 2026, Coastal Quest opened applications for high-touch technical assistance to support project development and grant submission to Climate Bond open requests for proposals (RFPs). Coastal Quest received 18 applications. Applicants included seven County departments, five nonprofit organizations, three public agencies, two community associations, and one city government addressing a wide range of issues, including sea level rise adaptation, extreme heat, wildfire resilience, urban greening, stormwater infrastructure and flood reduction, food and agriculture resilience, and resilience hubs. Three were selected to receive technical assistance for grant development in the areas of extreme heat, community and wildfire resilience, and urban greening. Services will include project refinement, partnership development and coordination, and grant writing support. In this first round, Coastal Quest anticipates supporting proposal submissions to three Climate Bond-funded RFPs, requesting several million dollars in funding.
- **Building Resilient Communities Initiatives’ Sea Level Rise Small Grants pilot program (Project Lead: Marin Community Foundation):** In June 2026, the Marin Community Foundation awarded small grants ranging from \$125,000 to \$250,000 to five sea level rise projects to accelerate project readiness and unlock future larger-scale public grant opportunities. Selected projects will also receive targeted technical assistance from Coastal Quest to support readiness and implementation.

July 2026 Onward

See actions to be completed below:

- **Climate Bond Technical Assistance (TA) Program (Project Lead: Coastal Quest):** Additional rounds of TA may be offered based on emerging Climate Bond grant opportunities and aligned climate resilience projects in Marin County. TA services will be strategically designed to support projects when funding opportunities match project components.
- **Climate Resilience District Incubator (Project Leads: County of Marin, City of San Rafael, and Coastal Quest):** In April, a joint application by Marin County and the City of San Rafael was one of four regions in California selected for a Resilience District Incubator designed by California Forward and Resilient Cities Catalyst. The purpose of the Incubator is to assess and support the development of Climate Resilience Districts, which can utilize various funding and governance options to help address climate impacts. With input from the County and City, California Forward

will develop a roadmap over the next 6 months that explores the appropriate scale, cost, and feasibility of implementing a Climate Resilience District in Marin, with an initial focus on sea level rise in the San Rafael area.

- **Insurance for Good Incubator grant (Project Lead: Marin Community Foundation):** In June, MCF awarded a grant to Insurance for Good to develop a Marin Insurance Innovation Incubator. Through education, collaboration, and solution design, the Incubator will help participants identify viable insurance and disaster-financing strategies that support equitable and sustainable resilience.
- **Marin County Online Directory (Project Lead: Coastal Quest):** The directory will create a first-of-its-kind resource for Marin County that localizes resources on climate organizations, collaborative efforts, adaptation and climate plans, and other reports, such as vulnerability assessments, in a unified, public facing directory. By making critical information easier to find and understand, it will reduce duplication, strengthen partnerships, and support more strategic, coordinated climate resilience action countywide.