

# James Cary Smith Community Grant Program

## Year One Evaluation: Grant Management Report (2022 – 2023)

### Background: The Refocused James Cary Smith Community Grant Program

The Bay Area Air Quality Management District's ("Air District") James Cary Smith Community Grant Program provides funding to community groups and nonprofit organizations to uplift local efforts that improve air quality and reduce exposure to air pollution. Funded projects develop and deepen capacity-building efforts that seek to address air quality concerns in communities that have historically faced inequitable pollution impacts.

In 2021, the Air District combined elements of both the previous James Cary Smith Grant Program and the Community Health Protection Grant Program to create a refocused James Cary Smith Community Grant Program. The realignment aimed to better meet the needs of community-based organizations while advancing the Air District's efforts towards increasing the equitable distribution of funding. As part of the realignment, the Air District increased the maximum amount for individual grants, provided multi-year grants, and offered ongoing support and technical assistance to organizations during the application and contracting processes.

### Overview & Highlights

The Air District's Community Engagement Office contracted with RDA Consulting ("RDA") to evaluate the realignment of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program and the ways in which the program meets its aims. The Community Engagement Office is particularly interested in understanding how the grant program supports communities of color and communities disproportionately burdened by air pollution, or environmental justice (EJ) communities.

This report presents data, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from the baseline questionnaire, kickoff polls, midpoint focus groups, and endpoint questionnaire administered to grantees to understand **how changes to the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program over time affected grant applicants, grantees, and environmental justice communities**. This Year One report represents grant management evaluation findings, distinct from findings related to program outputs and community impacts realized through the efforts of grant-funded programs.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> RDA shared evaluation findings related to program outputs and community impacts realized through the efforts of grant-funded programs in a separate evaluation presentation.

## Successes

### **Outreach & Application:**

- Grant managers' outreach and relationship building effectively promoted the grant program, expanding its reach into environmental justice communities.
- Pre-application webinars were beneficial for organizations applying to the realigned James Cary Smith Community Grant program.
- Changes made to the application process reduced the burden on applicants, supported applicants to complete applications successfully, and prompted reflection on proposed projects.

### **Contracting:**

- Offering meetings and support to grantees when developing the scope of work is helpful.
- The experience of the Year Two contracting process improved for grantees, in part due to increased communication and supports provided by grant managers.

### **Grant Management & Program:**

- Grant managers provided helpful support overall, including regular communication, calendar invitations, and check-ins for key deadlines.
- The quarterly reporting template and resources provided by grant managers to grantees are user-friendly and helpful.
- Grantees found technical resources, workshops, and funding notifications to be helpful.

## Areas for Improvement

### **Contracting:**

- Contracts and funding that require annual amendments and approval pose challenges to grantee program sustainability and increase administrative burden for both grantees and the Air District.
- Additional clarification and guidance are needed to streamline the development of grantee scopes of work and quarterly milestones.

### **Grant Management & Program:**

- The majority of grantees are not fully utilizing available technical assistance resources.
- Grantees would benefit from translation of community education materials about air quality into even more languages.
- Grantees would benefit from more peer-to-peer collaboration with other grantees.

## Recommendations

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- ❖ Elevate grantee findings to align Air District strategic priorities to advance local capacity building efforts.
- ❖ Streamline the development of grantee scopes of work to reduce the burden of renewing funding annually.
- ❖ Promote awareness among grantees about technical assistance resources.
- ❖ Continue soliciting input throughout the year to tailor program elements.
- ❖ Establish periodic grantee convenings.
- ❖ Continue effective outreach and application processes to promote future grant cycles of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program.

# Key Findings

## Grant Management Successes

### Outreach & Application

Grant managers' outreach and relationship building effectively promoted the grant program, expanding its reach into environmental justice communities.

- Among the 33 organizations funded for Year One activities, 18 received a Community Engagement grant for the first time and 15 had received a grant in the past. This demonstrates the grant program is maintaining a pool of repeat grantees while expanding its reach to new organizations and communities.
- Grantees reported that they learned about the grant opportunity primarily through direct contact with the Air District, through other organizations, or because they previously received a grant. Fewer organizations learned about the grant through social media or general Air District communications, indicating that relational approaches to outreach are important to increase the reach of the grant program.

### Outreach & Application

Pre-application webinars were beneficial for organizations applying to the realigned James Cary Smith Community Grant program.

- At least 23 organizations attended the optional pre-application webinar in August 2021 and at least 27 organizations attended the optional Tips & Tricks webinar in September 2021.
- Among grantees, organizations rated the webinars as helpful in completing the application.

The James Cary Smith Community Grant informational webinars hosted by the Air District were helpful to complete the application. (n=20)

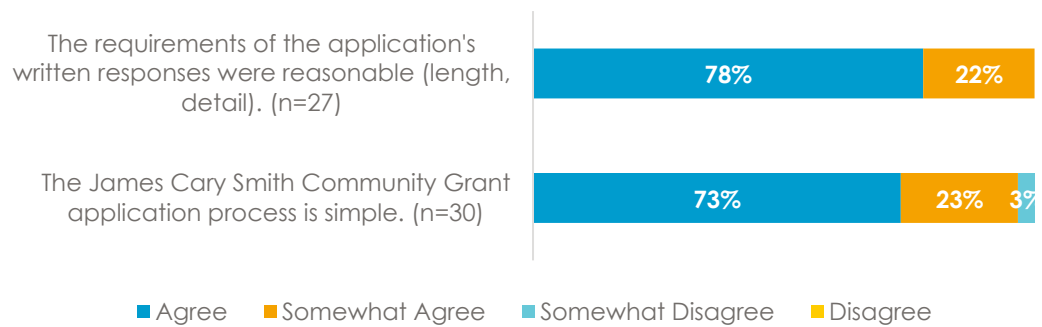


■ Agree ■ Somewhat Agree ■ Somewhat Disagree ■ Disagree

### Outreach & Application

Changes made to the application process reduced the burden on applicants, supported applicants to complete applications successfully, and prompted reflection on proposed projects.

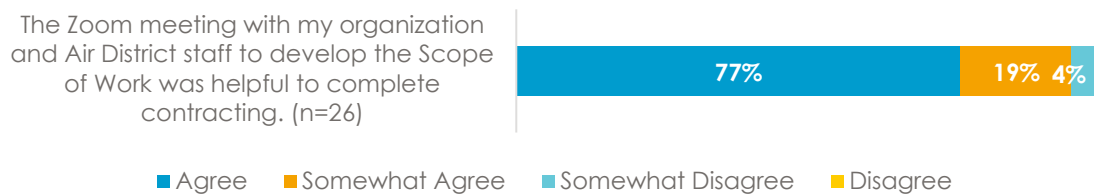
- The realigned, streamlined application was perceived positively by grantees.
- Grantees expressed that the announcements, reminders, and instructions from the Air District were helpful in completing the application accurately and on time.
- Several grantees also described the application process as straightforward and concise, with application questions that allowed flexibility for their proposal while prompting reflection on their projects.



### Contracting

Offering meetings and support to grantees when developing the scope of work is helpful.

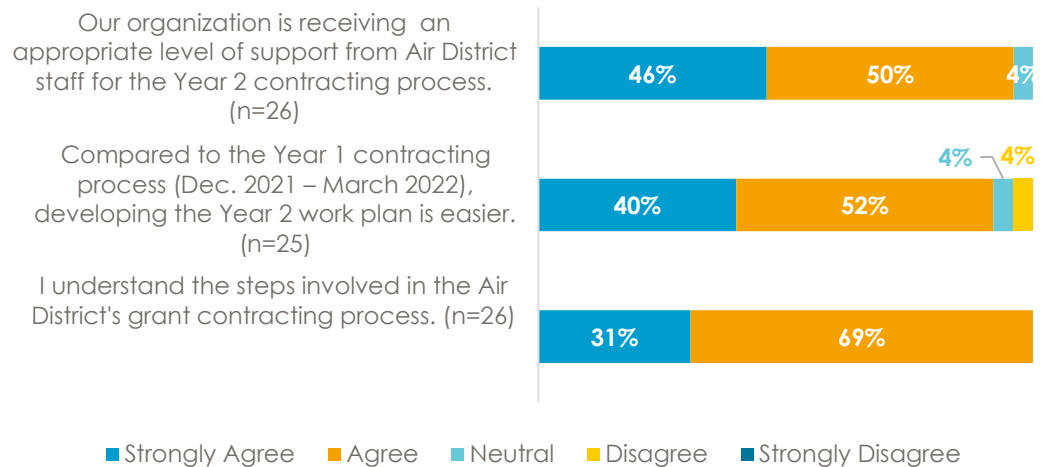
- The Zoom meeting offered by grant managers to develop each grantee's Year One scope of work was rated as helpful by grantees.



### Contracting

The experience of the Year Two contracting process improved for grantees, in part due to the increased communication and resources provided by grant managers.

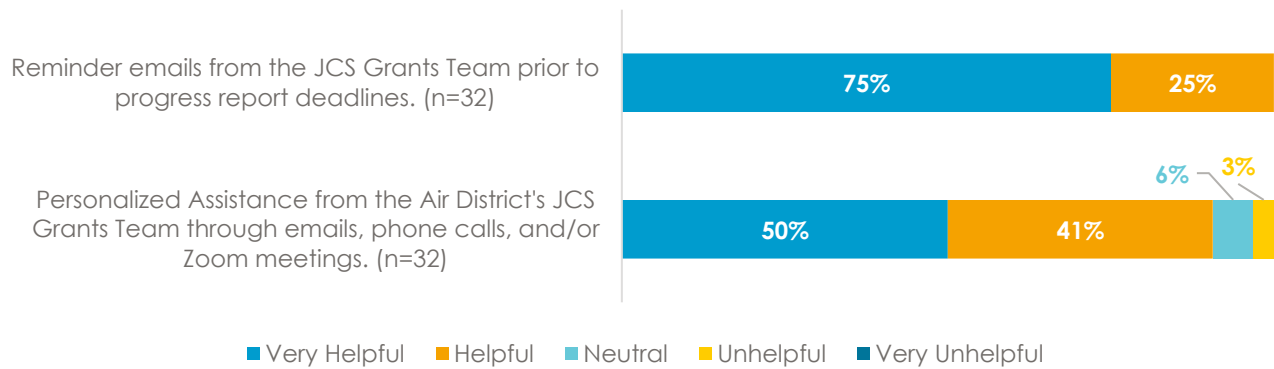
- In response to feedback from grantees during the baseline and midpoint evaluation phases, grant managers provided a timeline and outline of contracting steps to address confusion and provide clarity.
- Grantees indicated the Year Two contracting process was easier, that they understand the steps in the process, and that they received an appropriate level of support.



**Grant Management & Program**

**Grant managers provided helpful support overall, including regular communication, calendar invitations, and check-ins for key deadlines.**

- Grant managers adapted and responded to feedback, making changes to grant management processes and resources throughout the evaluation.
- Grant managers increased consistency in communication and sharing resources with grantees.
- Timely communication and quick responses to questions was appreciated by grantees.
- The grant deadline calendar and reminder emails from grant managers were especially helpful for grantees.
- Support and assistance from grant managers felt personalized and was very helpful.



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*"Things such as reminder emails or emails for additional opportunities/programs are super helpful because they keep things on our radar."*

*"I just want to say that the community team involved on this has been amazing. So kind and responsive. Kudos to all."*

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**Grant Management & Program**

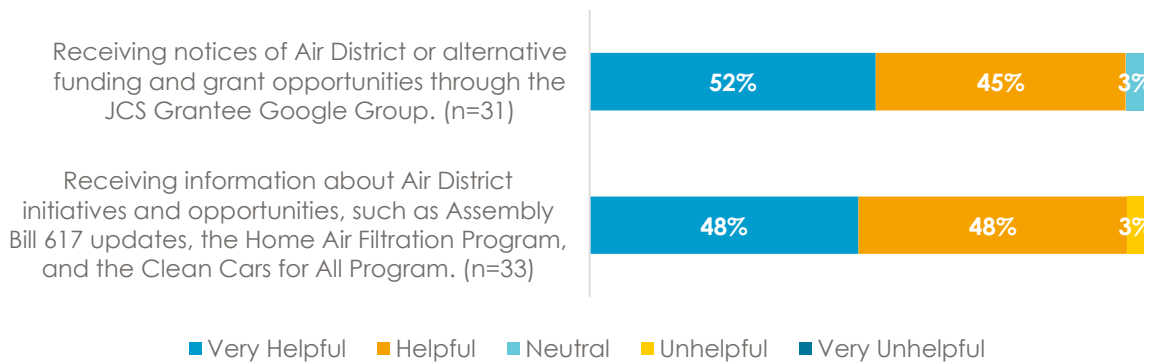
**The quarterly reporting template and resources provided by grant managers to grantees are user-friendly and helpful.**

- Both the quarterly reporting template and the sample quarterly report were helpful for grantees.
- The changes made to the quarterly reporting template to convert it from PDF to Word addressed the challenges grantees experienced with the original PDF.
- In response to feedback from grantees during the midpoint evaluation phase, an optional, open-ended question was added to the quarterly report to address grantees' concerns and allow them to share adjustments made throughout implementation.

**Grant Management & Program**

**Grantees found technical resources, workshops, and funding notifications to be helpful.**

- Grantees benefit from networking with other grantees, which grant managers supported by making introductions and sharing a grantee contact sheet.
- Grantees benefited from technical expertise provided by Air District staff from various divisions of the agency, made possible through connections fostered by grant managers.
- Grantees found it helpful when grant managers shared information about other sources of grant funding through the JCS Grantee Google Group that grant managers launched during Year One.
- Workshops were relevant and beneficial; even if grantees did not attend a workshop, they shared the resources with their broader networks.



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*"Data information focused on neighborhood was really helpful."*

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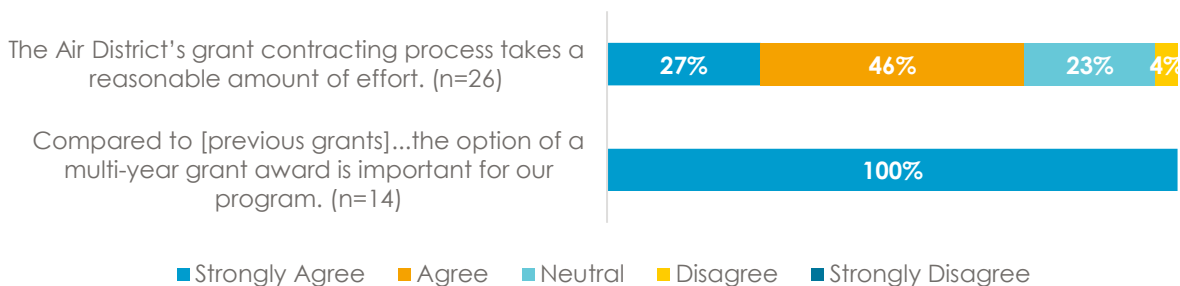


## Grant Management Areas for Improvement

### Contracting

Contracts and funding that require annual amendments and approval pose challenges to grantee program sustainability and increase administrative burden for both grantees and the Air District.

- Despite improvements from Year One, the contracting process overall remains time-intensive and administratively burdensome for grantees as well as multiple divisions across the Air District.
- The heavy lift of contracting – and in particular, the development of scopes of work – is especially challenging when grantees or the Air District experience staff transitions, contributing to delays.
- Delays in contracting also cause delays in program implementation.
- Time and energy spent on renewing contracts takes away from efforts that grantees or grant managers could otherwise contribute towards authentic community participation and capacity building.
- Single-year awards do not enable organizations to plan multi-year projects, which limits the effectiveness of certain efforts, like data collection in one year to inform program strategy in future years.
- Hiring staff for a one-year position is challenging and contributed to implementation delays and decreased programmatic impact.



*"...not knowing if we're getting Year two or three funded – this work is so relational, but we don't know if we can keep staff on, hire more staff, move part-time staff to full-time. The difference of a one-year or three-year grant is being able to invest in staff to build relationships for our work. It's really tough."*

*"Moving the start date affected more than just 'delaying the program,' it forced us to change the entire plan. Starting a program with high schoolers in January is entirely different – from recruitment to students taking [Advanced Placement] tests – it forced us to change our entire workplan structure and content."*

### Contracting

**Additional clarification and guidance are needed to streamline the scope of work development and quarterly milestones.**

- Grantees expressed confusion or a lack of clarity about the nature of the deliverables-based structure when developing scopes of work during contracting.
- Grantees would benefit from additional guidance on how to right-size their quarterly milestones which would also help streamline their quarterly reporting process.
- Grantees suggested having annual milestones would be beneficial and would allow quarterly reports to serve as progress updates towards the annual milestone.

### Grant Management & Program

**The majority of grantees are not fully utilizing technical assistance opportunities.**

- Though some grantees find the optional office hours offered each quarter to be useful, the majority of grantees are either not aware of this resource or are unclear about how it could benefit them.
- Although some respondents indicated that the office hours were Very Helpful or Helpful, more than two-thirds of grantee respondents (n=21) indicated on the endpoint questionnaire that they did not utilize this resource.

### Grant Management & Program

**Grantees would benefit from translation of community education materials about air quality into even more languages.**

- Although the Air District provides educational materials about air quality in multiple languages, grantees expressed there is a need for additional translation support for grantees' air quality-related community education materials. Translating these materials would help them better reach more linguistically diverse communities.
- Needed translated materials include:
  - Flyers about air pollution
  - Community education workshop materials, like Air Quality 101
- Grantees also suggested the Air District could support translation needs by a) covering the cost of translation services through the Air District's existing contractors or b) providing additional funding for James Cary Smith Community Grant recipients for translation.

### Grant Management & Program

#### **Grantees would benefit from more peer-to-peer collaboration with other grantees.**

- Grantees consistently express a desire for time to connect with other grantees to both learn about existing projects and start new collaborations; this is one of the areas where they think the grant program could most benefit them.
- Grantees shared many ideas for how they could connect with other grantees to learn about “lessons from the field”:
  - Streamlining data collection: Grantees working in overlapping geographies can coordinate and share data, which helps reduce oversampling and survey fatigue of some communities.
  - Sharing needs assessment data: Grantees in similar areas could benefit from accessing other grantees’ community needs assessment data to help inform their work.
  - Sharing tools and resources: Grantee organizations working on similar topics, air quality issues, or with similar target audiences could benefit from sharing materials and resources, such as existing community presentations or translated materials.

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*“Some more intentional connecting between different recipients in the same communities could be useful - we organized some meetings to gather grantees and learn about each other’s projects and potential areas to support each other, but that would have been great for the Air District to facilitate in future years!”*

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## Recommendations

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- ❖ **Elevate grantee findings to align Air District strategic priorities to advance local capacity building efforts:** As grantees continue to collect community needs assessment data, surveys, and community perspectives, community members are increasing their capacity to engage in civic participation and advocacy. Elevating community members' insights within the Air District is an opportunity to leverage the investments of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program and the Air District's power as a regulatory agency to advance the planning and advocacy happening across Bay Area communities.
- ❖ **Streamline the development of grantee scopes of work to reduce the burden of renewing funding annually:** To address the challenges that result from annual contract renewals, grant managers and leadership should identify opportunities to streamline the processes around drafting and revising scopes of work, which contribute to delays in the contracting process. For example, if grantees can begin developing their scope of work in quarters three or four, the contracting process may be expedited. Alternatively, grant managers could pursue the option of having a three-year contract and scope with annual funding amendments. Finally, grant managers and executive leadership should continue conversations around advocating to the Board for sustained, multi-year funding, as grantees have emphasized that promoting authentic community participation, building capacity, and advancing equity are processes that require several years of sustained, committed programming.
- ❖ **Promote awareness among grantees about technical assistance resources:** To promote office hours, grant managers should also clarify the intent and ways in which grantees can access technical assistance. Additionally, with increased awareness, utilization, or even questions from grantees, technical assistance providers and grant managers may be better able to tailor support to meet grantees' needs over time.
- ❖ **Continue soliciting input throughout the year to tailor program elements:** To best meet grantees' needs, grant managers should continue collecting grantee feedback throughout the year using questionnaires, quarterly reports, and office hours. By soliciting input and feedback, grant managers have thus far been able to streamline processes and improve communication with grantees. In the future, grant managers can collect input on workshop topics, data of interest, and other program resources.
- ❖ **Establish periodic grantee convenings:** Establish periodic grantee convenings where grantees are provided opportunities to meet other grant-funded organizations working in their geographic communities or organizations with similar project approaches. These convenings should be facilitated for grantees so that they can engage with other grantees, learn, and establish partnerships they could continue between convenings.
- ❖ **Continue effective outreach and application processes to promote future grant cycles of the James Cary Smith Community Grant Program:** To continue leveraging the relationship building that contributed to effective grant promotion, grant managers should continue outreach efforts for future cycles of the grant program. Additionally, the pre-application webinars, supports, and streamlined grant application were helpful to grantees and, therefore, should be continued for future cycles.