



Recommendations for Increasing Hispanic Leadership and Participation in Shaping the Future of Colorado River Basin Resiliency

Background

From March 29 to July 30, 2022, Hispanics Enjoying Camping, Hunting, and the Outdoors (HECHO) conducted a survey to better understand our current and potential Hispanic Conservation Leadership Council (HCLC) members’ participation and awareness of issues pertaining to Colorado River Basin resiliency and water boards. HECHO believes that existing Hispanic leaders, such as those in our HCLC, can leverage their position, network, and platform to help increase more widespread awareness and participation within Hispanic communities in establishing and implementing resiliency policy and projects for the Colorado River Basin. Through this survey, HECHO sought to answer two questions: (1) What are the top three barriers and top three needs for HCLC members/potential HCLC members to becoming more involved in *shaping the resilience of the Colorado River Basin*; and (2) What are the top three barriers and top three needs for HCLC members/potential HCLC members to *joining water boards*?

The Colorado River Resiliency Survey received input from 43 Hispanic elected, appointed, and community leaders from Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah, where HECHO functions, and where the effects of drought are severe, especially for the Colorado River. The survey asked respondents about their involvement and knowledge of the issues surrounding the Colorado River and about water boards.

The respondents’ answers helped HECHO articulate the barriers and needs related to HCLC members/potential members becoming more involved in shaping the resilience of the Colorado River and to joining water boards that impact the basin (see chart below).

<i>Top three barriers and top three needs for HCLC members/potential HCLC members to becoming more involved in shaping the future vision for CO River resiliency</i>	<i>Top three barriers and top three needs for HCLC members/potential HCLC members to becoming more involved in joining water boards</i>
<p><u>Barriers</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Complex water rights system, policies, laws, and institutions; 2. Time commitment required for greater involvement; 3. Understanding how community/local water issues connect to the resiliency of the Colorado River. 	<p><u>Barriers</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time commitment on top of other responsibilities; 2. Lack of clarity about the role of water boards; 3. Perceived need for technical skills in areas like law, policy, and institutional knowledge.
<p><u>Needs</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Basic water education covering history, basin goals, advocacy, policy, and legal information; 2. Support for developing additional skills and ongoing knowledge-building about the Basin and to effectively communicate high-level details to community members; 3. Assistance in understanding how local watersheds, cultural-specific practices, and day-to-day life plays into the resiliency of the Colorado River. 	<p><u>Needs</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Clear definition of water board roles and responsibilities in easily understandable terms. 2. Well-defined time commitment range for water board members (i.e., most respondents could make a commitment of 4-8 hour per month). 3. Specific opportunities that will directly mitigate the effects of climate change on water systems (i.e., wildfire and water quality, equitable allocation of water, and prioritizing water protection for living creatures).



In order to create actionable steps from the survey responses, HECHO drafted a series of recommendations to address the aforementioned needs and barriers, and vetted and improved upon those draft recommendations through follow-up conversations with HCLC members.

The following bodies were involved in the recommendation process:

- HECHO's Hispanic Conservation Leadership Council (HCLC)
- HECHO Advisory Board and Staff
- Partner organizations: Healthy Air and Water Colorado, National Young Farmers Coalition

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the Colorado River Resiliency Survey and additional conversations HECHO staff have had with HCLC members, we have divided our recommendations into the following three categories:

1. Convene and publicize opportunities to obtain a basic education about the Basin

There should be a dedicated effort to address gaps in water education and capacity. There is a need to mitigate these gaps by ensuring that the general public has a base-level of understanding about watersheds, conservation, and participation in the stewardship and management of water resources. These recommendations are intended to support that effort.

Recommendations:

- Create a central online hub to house a library of comprehensive, free, and easily accessible educational materials to support a person's ability to develop a deeper comprehension of Colorado River management, the governing policies and entities involved, and steps for engaging with local water boards within the Colorado River water basin.
- Ensure educational materials are available in multiple languages.
- Increase educational media opportunities and aim to consistently be elevating the basic elements of Colorado River Basin education components.
- Partner with public schools and community colleges to provide programming about the Colorado River Basin and how and why people should get involved.
- Recruit diverse community partner organizations to help with widely disseminating educational materials and messages (i.e. radio PSAs, churches, health organizations, etc.).
- Dedicate outreach efforts to Hispanic and Hispanic-serving communities, as well as other underserved areas, to ensure access to and utilization of these valuable resources.

2. Increase awareness of water boards to promote engagement and future leadership

Survey respondents cited the perceived time commitment required to serve on water boards as a major obstacle. As a result of many water board positions being voluntary, they compete with paid jobs, family time, and other personal responsibilities, further limiting participation. However, in our analysis of our survey of Hispanic leaders, we found that a majority of survey respondents say they would like to be



engaged in shaping the vision for the resilience of the Colorado River Basin even though most respondents reported they have never worked on Colorado River-specific issues.

Recommendations:

- Develop a multi-lingual public information campaign to inform people about what water boards do, the training and time commitment needed, and how they enact changes for the community.
- Chart out a ladder of engagement for the types of experiences people should obtain to feel confident in being on a water board.
- Utilize innovative strategies to publicize vacant water board roles, responsibilities, and meetings, ensuring accessibility through translations in Spanish (and other pertinent languages) and utilize a range of communication channels for increased awareness and meaningful engagement of multi-lingual communities.
- Translate Basin Implementation Plans and other water-related documents into relevant languages using approachable language that is easy to understand, to ensure equity regardless of language background or technical expertise.
- Create a central hub with information about all the various water boards that provide input on decisions about Colorado River Basin. Information should include geographical jurisdiction, number, availability, how often the water board meets, knowledge requirements, length of term of board positions, and confirmation of financial compensation, and whether or not the water board position is appointed or elected.
- Create a robust training and mentorship program to be offered by water boards that supports building a pipeline of new water leaders and fosters the building of networks within the water management sphere.
- Collaborate with and outreach to acequia parciantes to connect Hispanic heritage and traditional water conservation to broader water conservation planning and policy-making.

3. Build a pipeline of Hispanic leaders that help shape decisions to increase the resiliency of the Colorado River Basin

The survey indicated that Hispanic leaders face barriers to engaging in Colorado River Basin issues and joining water boards due to a lack of capacity, including policy and institutional knowledge, skills, and financial resources necessary for effective participation and decision-making. Resources to increase capacity should include access to educational and training programs, networking opportunities, mentorship, and financial support.

Importantly, most respondents noted that they are very familiar with the water issues within their communities, and we recommend leveraging and building upon these existing assets to support these leaders to consider joining water boards that connect communities to the larger vision for the basin.

Recommendations:

- Provide a virtual and/or in-person orientation about the Colorado River Basin with inroads to learning more and continuing their involvement with Colorado River issues to all new elected



officials within the first six months of their tenure, with a focus on historically underrepresented populations, including Hispanics. Include specific trainings for leaders outlining how their community members' water is connected to Colorado River resiliency, and communicate pathways to water board membership.

- Develop funding streams to provide financial assistance and scholarships to reduce barriers for and support historically underrepresented individuals' ability to build the experience and confidence needed to join water boards.
- Enhance the worth of water board positions by implementing a comprehensive approach that includes financial compensation, such as offering stipends or per diems tailored to individuals' income levels.
- Develop training self-assessments to support baseline setting and self-evaluations to gauge progress and reflect growing issue expertise.
- Articulate policy and/or law education institutions or pathways that lead to professional water management careers, and elevate initiatives like the Water Education Colorado's [Water Fluency Program](#), as well as other educational opportunities and certifications in areas where Hispanic communities and Hispanic serving institutions are prevalent.
- Collect demographic and other data on existing water board members throughout the Colorado River Basin, including demographics of those they represent/serve, assess whether and how water board members engage those they represent/serve, and identify the pathways of how water board members come to their service (elected/appointed), including an audit of the historical demographics of boards to have a baseline understanding and record of the gaps in ethnic and racial diversity.

Conclusion

These recommendations were thematically chosen to directly address the barriers that were identified in the survey. HECHO's goal is to catalyze public conversation on diverse representation in water conservation issues and water boards. HECHO and the HCLC's goal is to work with water board ecosystem entities to take at least 3 actions toward increasing representation of people from racial and ethnic backgrounds reflective of and proportional to the racial and ethnic diversity of the communities their respective entity serves, through the collaborative implementation of these recommendations.