

State of California Air Resources Board Board Item Summary

Item # 22-9-2: Public Meeting to Consider AB 617 Community Air Grants to Environmental Health Coalition

Staff Recommendation:

The California Air Resources Board (CARB or Board) staff recommends that the Board approve the proposed 2021 AB 617 Community Air Grant to Environmental Health Coalition to support implementation of the Community Emission Reduction Plan (CERP) for San Diego Portside Environmental Justice Communities; and ratify the 2018 AB 617 Community Air Grant to Environmental Health Coalition to educate San Diego residents on air quality issues and health risks, provide leadership development, and support community-based research on local air quality. This item has been added to the agenda to satisfy Board approval and ratification requirements in Government Code section 1091 because one Board member is affiliated with Environmental Health Coalition.

Discussion:

Pursuant to Assembly Bill (AB) 617 (C. Garcia, Stats. of 2017) and California Health and Safety Code Section 44391.2 (d), and in support of the California Air Resources Board (CARB) Community Air Protection Program, CARB staff have selected awardees for the Community Air Grants Program for the three state fiscal years from 2017-2020.

At the February 24, 2022, Board meeting, staff presented an informational update on the Community Air Grants Program and the preliminarily selected 2021 Awardees. Projects funded through the grant program include community-driven air monitoring, dissemination of information on local emission sources, and development of actions to reduce air pollution in their community.

To meet the legislative directives to support community-based technical assistance and participation in AB 617 implementation, CARB works to fund as many eligible projects as possible with the funds available to the Community Air Grants Program. Utilizing an evaluation team approach and the scoring criteria included in the published Request for Applications, staff selected 39 projects for FYI 2019-2020 grant funding.

The Environmental Health Coalition is among the awardees selected by CARB staff pursuant to the guidelines and procedures established through a public process. In accordance with the process specified in Government Code, section 1091, the Environment Health Coalition grants are being presented to the Board for approval and ratification.

The selected 2021 AB 617 Community Air Grant to Environmental Health Coalition would support implementation of the CERP for Portside Environmental Justice Communities. After years of effort, Portside residents have developed their vision for cleaner air and improved respiratory health. Through this project, they will collaborate with residents and stakeholders to advance this community-driven vision into a reality.

The 2018 AB 617 Community Air Grant provided the Environmental Health Coalition with the support and technical assistance to improve local air quality in San Diego County. The project is located in the San Diego city/county neighborhoods of City Heights, Sherman Heights, National City, and Barrio Logan. The project aim was to increase residents' understanding of air quality issues in their communities and resulting health risks, leadership development to engage residents in community advocacy on AB 617, and community-based research on local air quality and development of resident-scientists. Under the grant, Environmental Health Coalition engaged residents that reflect their communities' voices, experiences, and priorities in regional air quality planning, towards a reduction in air pollution and exposure to harmful emissions.

Summary and Impacts:

The 2021 Community Air Grant project will build a stronger public voice in air quality decisions, and Portside residents will have more meaningful involvement in the decisions impacting their health. Through community organizing and leadership empowerment, Environmental Health Coalition will ensure that resident voice is incorporated throughout the CERP implementation and the development of air pollution reduction strategies. Community Action Teams meetings (who are a dedicated group of community members) and AB 617 Steering Committee meetings will take place monthly, and Environmental Health Coalition will continue to support public members of the Steering Committee, so they feel confident in actively participating in strategy development and implementation. Additionally, air quality trainings will take place before advocacy opportunities. Approval by the Board of the 2021 grant will authorize staff to proceed with execution and implementation of the grant.

The 2018 Community Air Grant convened a task force, the Healthy Air Network, for monitoring and emissions reductions education and actions. As part of its community monitoring component, the project installed eight low-cost sensors at residents and area schools in Barrio Logan and Sherman Heights neighborhoods. The project also included the development of a curriculum for inclusion in Environmental Health Coalition existing leadership program SALTA (Salud Ambiental Lideres Tomando Acción) and created Community Action Teams to engage with community residents and stakeholders. Ratification of the 2018 grant will confirm that the grant met the procedural requirements of Government Code section 1091 to be considered a remote interest.