



# Summit 2007

diverse partners for environmental progress

## Proceedings Report

### Western Regional Roundtable

Strengthening Leadership & Revitalizing Environmental Communities

February 2, 2007

Hilton Oakland Airport • Oakland, California

Preparation for Summit 2007

The Western Regional Roundtable Steering Committee prepared for the WRR bearing in mind a specific charge: To build on the work of the October 2005 Summit of Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress, and, by building on Summit 2005, to help prepare for the October 2007 Summit in North Carolina. Accordingly, the WRR Steering Committee organized the day to include morning exercises designed to prepare participants for three hours of concentrated small group work in the afternoon. The planners developed a process that honored the past and ongoing work of grassroots and other visionaries, created a space for every voice to be heard, and maintained an environment where it was safe to express any idea in the small group sessions. The charge of the small groups was to develop concrete principle/policy language and measurable benchmarks that can be used to increase organizational effectiveness.

To the extent those goals were achieved, a number of organizations and institutions were responsible for the success of the Western Regional Roundtable, including:

- Earthjustice
- The William & Flora Hewlett Foundation
- The Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation
- Latino Issues Forum
- The Nature Conservancy
- Rose Foundation for Communities and the Environment
- Sierra Club
- The Wilderness Society

However, while we proudly recognize and sincerely thank these institutions for their generous and timely support, at the most basic level of any organization or project, it is always about people.

At each of the organizations above and at others, there are champions who make support for the larger Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress Project possible. And while it is not possible to list the names of individual staff members here, we should always take a moment to recognize and thank those community and organizational members everywhere who continue to champion the ongoing work of building a more inclusive and effective social/environmental/economic justice movement. Together with the WRR Steering Committee, and with thanks to all the WRR participants, they are the practical visionaries responsible for making the day possible.

Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress

## Western Region Roundtable

Strengthening Leadership & Revitalizing Environmental Communities

Friday, February 2, 2007  
Hilton Oakland Airport  
Oakland, California

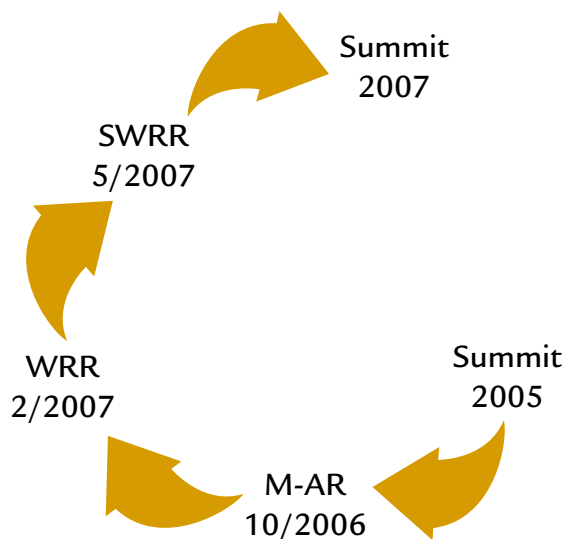
### Roundtable Agenda

- I. Continental Breakfast/Registration
- II. Opening/Introductions/Framework
- III. Break
- V. Bus Riders Union Presentation
- VI. Lunch
- VII. Work Group Breakout Session 1
- VIII. Report Back
- X. Work Group Breakout Session 2
- XI. Next Steps/Closing Comments

## Overview

The Western Regional Roundtable (WRR): Strengthening Leadership and Revitalizing the Environmental Community, was one in a series of regional roundtables that were developed as a follow-up to Summit 2005: Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress. The 2005 Summit was a groundbreaking event that brought key leaders in the environmental justice and environmental movement together in a spirit of authenticity, respect, and urgency. The goal of the summit was to develop a series of concrete “next steps” to create just and sustainable communities and economies.

In the spirit of Summit 2005, WRR attendees participated in a process that encouraged communication and coordination across organizations and issues. Divided into small work groups, participants crafted principles/policy language that supports local community organizations as well as larger environmental organizations in their current work efforts. By the end of the day, a set of recommended policy and/or principle statements were developed which will guide program planning for the 2007 National Summit in October and increase the ability of organizations to work together at the local and regional level.



Planning for the WRR began in the summer of 2006, with the convening of a Steering Committee com-

prised of veterans of the 2005 Summit and others. In December, they sent out a letter of invitation to 150 individuals, organizations, and foundations throughout the Western Region, including Alaska, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington. The Steering Committee was also ultimately responsible for raising funds for scholarships, and for logistical and program planning and implementation.

The WRR was held on Friday, February 2, 2007, at the Hilton Oakland Airport in Oakland, CA. Of the 92 individuals who pre-registered for the convening, 79 participants (with eight sending last minute regrets) ultimately participated in eight hours of carefully structured activities.

The morning session consisted of opening remarks and an introduction process, an interpretive skit, and a presentation. Kevin Fong, facilitator, presented three working assumptions upon which the assembled group of diverse individuals could agree. The working assumptions were:

- We believe that a better, more environmentally sustainable and socially just world is possible;
- We want this meeting to be different from “business as usual;”
- The time to act is now.

These working assumptions provided a launching point for discussions that continued throughout the day.

### WELCOME

Sara Barth, California Regional Director for The Wilderness Society, welcomed the participants on behalf of TWS, fiscal sponsor of Summit 2005/2007 and the Western Regional Roundtable. Hazel Wong, Outreach Director for The Nature Conservancy, provided additional welcoming remarks on behalf of the Steering Committee, and explained the day’s activities and goals. She introduced Iantha Gantt-Wright, who set the context for the work of the WRR by reporting on Summit 2005 and the Mid-Atlantic Roundtable held in October 2006.

## GETTING ACQUAINTED

Mr. Fong facilitated a “get-acquainted” exercise where participants broke into groups of three based on pre-assigned numbers printed on name badges. Participants were challenged to take note of their initial impressions and assumptions of one another based upon appearance, speech patterns and the like, and then to put those assumptions aside for the day. The exercise continued as a member of the triads moved in a series of rotations that allowed each participant to learn something personal about and to interact personally with a significant portion of the assemblage.

## INTERPRETIVE SKIT

After the Triad exercise, and for purposes of underscoring and illustrating the point that there are always spoken and unspoken assumptions and biases brought to any convening, seven members of the Steering Committee and other volunteers performed a skit which was introduced as intended to provide exaggeration and comic relief highlighting very real preconceptions. In the skit the players were seated in a “get acquainted” circle of chairs and shared hand-held microphones. The role players and the “organizations” they represented included:

<i>Save the Penguins</i>	Felicia Marcus
<i>Homies for the Home Planet</i>	Jose Carmona
<i>National Council of Tree Huggers</i>	Carl Zichella
<i>Women In Charge</i>	Kristina Ortez
<i>Afro-American Environmental Alliance</i>	Charles Thomas
<i>East Africans for World Dominance</i>	Hazel Wong
<i>Gaia’s Shepherds</i>	Y. Armando Nieto

The players quickly warmed to the skit and their roles, and moved freely between what might normally be spoken in such settings, and those “thoughts” which would rarely if ever be expressed out loud. During the performance, for the most part the audience laughed and seemed to enjoy the performers’ efforts. At the conclusion of the skit, the performers received a solid round of applause. The message conveyed was clear and plausible.



Photo courtesy of Carrie Truong

*OBA, Inc., youth activists Carrie Truong, Simone Braithwaite, and Andrew Anderson with Charles Thomas, OBA Executive Director.*

## BUS RIDERS UNION

Eric Mann and Francisca Porchas of the Labor/Community Strategy Center in Los Angeles closed out the morning session by providing a presentation on the Bus Riders Union, followed by a question and answer period that explored the challenges the Bus Riders Union is now encountering after its initial grass roots efforts and victories. Highlights of the presentation included insights Mr. Mann was able to provide from his original experience with the Bus Riders Union and as an observer of organizing efforts in Venezuela and other countries. Francisca Porchas focused her comments on specifics of what the Bus Riders Union is doing today to continue to build membership, and the challenges of working with a new city administration. The numbers Francisca and Eric provided represent a staggering challenge—4 million Los Angeles City residents; 10 million Los Angeles County residents; 7 million registered cars in Los Angeles County.

### Sobering Statistics:

4 million residents in the City of L.A.  
10 million residents in L.A. County  
7 million cars in L.A. County

*Eric Mann, Francisca Porchas  
Labor/Community Strategy Center*

Another challenge Eric left the audience was the following: Transportation and other environmental justice challenges cannot be addressed without acknowledging the context of the larger social and economic justice environment. By way of example, he cited the growth of the number of prison inmates—from a population of 250,000 in 1980, to 2.5 million in 2007—where 1.5 million inmates are people of color.

### AFTERNOON WORK GROUPS

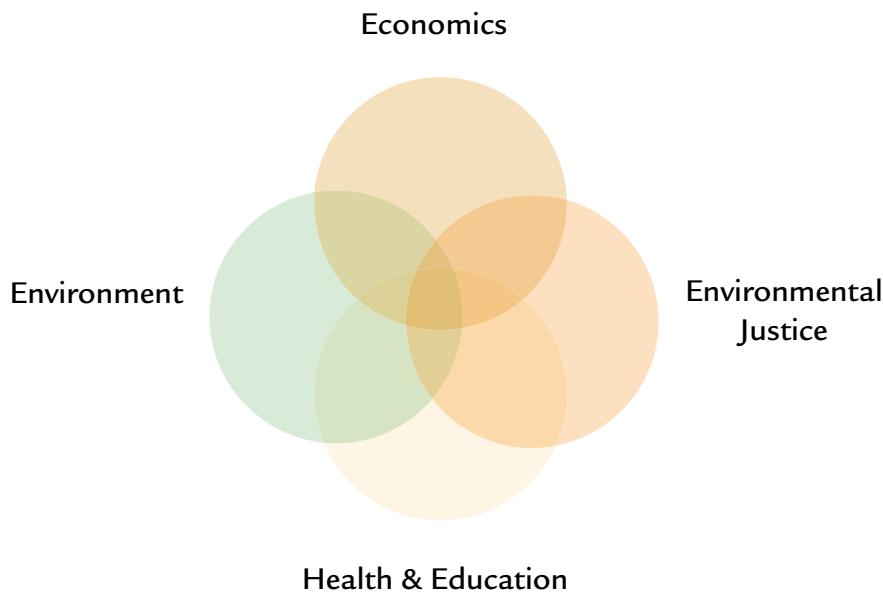
Following a lunch break with time for networking, the afternoon consisted of participants dividing into six facilitated groups to discuss the proposed policy/principles based on the Summit 2005 Report developed by the Steering Committee. The task of each group was to address one of the policy/principle statements, and develop at least two measurable benchmarks. It was made clear that the charge of the groups was to use their best thinking and collective experience to either work on the assigned statements, or to come up with new statements. Most of the groups elected to reframe the assigned statements in their own language.

Designed as an exercise divided into two rounds, after the initial work session, the groups presented

their findings to the larger group for feedback. Based upon feedback received, the groups then refined their statements and benchmarks accordingly, resulting in the work product presented in the next section.

Part of the strategy throughout the WRR planning process was to develop a new way of working together—a way that breaks out of the cycle of “business as usual.” In pursuit of that goal, the methodology for WRR implementation sought to honor process, allow opportunity for every voice to be heard, and make best use of the time allocated for group work.

Another deliberate effort in the Steering Committee’s program design was the assigning of diverse partners to small work groups, some of whom were asked to work outside their normal professional roles. A working premise was that the whole group would benefit by the active participation of foundation officers and media personnel, many of whom are usually on the “outside” of a group process. We think the program model has potential for future Regional Roundtables, Summit 2007, and for developing a way of doing business (not as usual) that benefit from a broad set of perspectives and personal experiences.



## Policies/Principles

All of the small groups stressed the need for a preamble to define and acknowledge the institutional story of the larger environmental movement, as well as the diversity and inequity of power and resources that continues to exist. While there were separate discussions about viewing the many efforts of groups as pieces of a larger movement, it was generally agreed that a preamble should consider the following points:

- Respecting diverse groups and promoting inclusion is important;
- There are imbalances of power among organizations, communities, and individuals;
- Language is critical, because it can reflect those power imbalances;
- Improving communication is only one piece of a larger diversity strategy to strengthen organizations and the Environmental/Environmental Justice movement; and
- It is necessary to clarify and interpret the assumptions behind communications.

Draft language presented to the small groups:

1. We will develop a mechanism to have all of our publication materials, educational materials and public relations messages reviewed on a regular basis by a qualified group as to their promotion of inclusion and respect for diversity.
2. As a means of creating a healthy and diverse community of organizations, we will make substantial efforts to connect with others outside of our traditional environmental issue area of interest. In this regard, “outside others” will include communities unlike our traditional constituents or members.
3. We will re-evaluate and change our recruitment methods, retention incentives and organizational culture in order to diversify our workforce and

membership (where “membership” is part of the organizational structure).

4. We will examine our budget and funding systems on a regular basis to assure equity and promote processes that support partnerships with culturally diverse entities and institutions.
5. We will allow and encourage others to objectively judge us on how well we are doing in developing trust with other organizations, being transparent in our business activities, and connecting with communities other than those we have traditionally served.
6. Recognizing that diversity and being inclusive are fundamentally important to the health and continued success of our respective organizations, we will commit a specific percentage of our budgets and seats on our governing boards to the effort.

From the draft language presented to each small group, the participants developed the policies/principles and benchmarks that follow, in accordance with and building upon the recommendations from the 2005 Summit Report. The limited time available to work on these statements was intentional. By design, the morning activities were intended to prepare participants to recognize, acknowledge and then work beyond some of the barriers—preconceptions and prejudices—that can inhibit collaborative undertakings.

All the participants’ products will be forwarded as works in progress to the National Summit planning committee.

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 1:**

We will communicate to promote inclusion and respect to diverse communities and interests.

### **Benchmarks:**

- Building relationships with representatives of diverse communities
- Committing resources
- Conducting a needs assessment within organizations

- Consider participating in the effort to develop a “diversopedia”
- Incorporate reviews by members of diverse communities of communications modes/content.

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 2:**

We will create deliberate strategies to understand, share values, and respectfully work with others beyond our traditional network of partners, constituents, and allies to achieve multiple, long-lasting environmental and social benefits and justice for all!

#### **Benchmarks:**

- There is significant involvement of organizational leadership in future summits and roundtables
- We engage in dialogue with potential community partners before making plans to “save them.”
- A national caucus on the environment inclusive of diverse organizations has been founded
- At least 25% of organizational projects advance the goals and objectives of all partners
- There is increased equity across the board in relationships concerning funding our organizations, in particular our leadership, are trained on issues addressing power dynamics in the environmental field
- The development of at least one project that requires joint funding with a group other than traditional partners
- There are ongoing assessments of partnership ventures: who are we working with and why?
- To learn more about each other we develop programs such as staff cross trains from one organization to another
- This work is embedded in our organization strategic plans as a critical need for success and growth

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 3:**

We will re-evaluate and change our recruitment methods, retention incentives and organizational culture in order to diversify our workforce and membership (where “membership” is part of the organizational culture).

#### **Benchmarks:**

- Allow staff to attend these types of forums more often and meet with each other

- Include training and hands-on activities as part of conferences
- Expand who we reach out to on a regular basis
- Be willing to change what you’re thinking
- We will commit to continue these dialogues outside of the box of what we do everyday
- We will acknowledge and look for where these diverse partnerships exist and grow them
- Diversify our ideologies outside of the “environment”
- Diversify partnerships
- Understanding of each other’s organizations, mission and roles
- Inventory of stakeholders
- Preach the urgency of our goals/vision to gain allies
- Focus on movement building
- Extend our ideas of who we are serving
- Commitment and access to each other
- Look for and maintain as well as grow our partnerships
- Expand who we are reaching out to.

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 4:**

As the current systems and structures are inadequate, the funding sources should re-examine their budget systems on a regular basis. This should ensure power and resources are shared in a manner that engages culturally diverse partnerships.

#### **Benchmarks:**

- All funding sources (nationally) allocate \$500 million to culturally diverse, environmentally-based organizations and EJ efforts.
- Foundations should significantly invest in minority communities and minority-led organizations so that they have the capacity to address a wide range of environmental issues, not just Environmental Justice issues.
- Create public audit process of funding sources
- Create an easy to access directory of funding sources relating to culturally diverse, environmental organizations
- For larger environmental organizations to provide resources to create a dedicated position as liaison to developing and maintaining multi-year partnerships

- Create criteria for establishing partnerships that include best practices for collaborating with culturally diverse environmental organizations. Encourage partners (large and small) to adopt these indicators.
- Promotion of collaborative programs as a means to facilitate partnerships.
- Funders should establish an EJ sector of xx% of funds/year
- Create goals and strategic plans to ensure culturally diverse partnerships are part of decisions
- Identify and document progressive increases per year
- Dialogue and develop goals that are proportionate to demographics capturing needs based on race, class, etc.

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 5:**

Environmental/conservation organizations shall invite and encourage evaluations and feedback.

#### **Benchmarks:**

- Establish measurable goals to diversity organizations in key leadership positions
- Design model for feedback from constituents and staff (add to website)
- Assessing what community wants, not tokenism
- Jointly setting goals/common goals
- Change or expanding vision statement to state diversity is a priority
- Commit to cultural training staff and volunteers to broaden their views and identity out of their bias and prejudice – real, meaningful interaction/immersion in the community
- Share success stories of groups who have gone through the process of diversifying, and who is currently in the process. Share lessons learned at 2007 Summit
- The family that plays together stays together. Get to know new partners

### **POLICY/PRINCIPLE 6:**

The group working on the suggested language for policy/principle No. 6 concluded there is no one path or “one size fits all” measure which, if achieved, ensures that diverse views are solicited and incorporated at all levels of decision making, so as to produce more just outcomes from work within and work outside the organization. However, without measurements and benchmarks, there is no way to assess progress, determine accountability, and learn from best practices. Bearing these two points in mind, policy/principle No. 6 has been rewritten as follows:

*Recognizing that diversity and being inclusive are fundamentally important to the health and continued success of our respective organizations, we will become an organization worthy of our diverse cultures and communities.*

#### **Benchmarks:**

- Need to track and share best practices, to measure programs against
- To achieve and prioritize environmental justice and to avoid environmental injustices, we need to develop an annual audit or report of partnerships, collaborations, and consultants with diverse programs in specific communities.
- Organizations must represent communities impacted by their actions, and those they are located in. Include them at all levels of the organization
- Next steps are to focus on two or three practical issues that the principles above can be applied to, e.g., cap and trade, water, air pollution, etc.

# Follow-up and Evaluation

## Summit 2007 Expectations

WRR participants expressed a variety of hopes for the October 2007 Summit in North Carolina. Common themes expressed included a call to action, emphasis on solutions, and consensus building. A sample selection of comments includes:

- I hope we figure out a way to share resources that leaves people feeling empowered and rewarded, not co-opted and unappreciated.
- More progress in raising awareness about the multiple benefits of continuing to increase diversity among environmental organizations
- To impact the environmental movement to make it a movement belonging to all people
- I hope that there is significant emphasis on how to open up the environmental and environmental justice dialogue to groups and sectors that have not traditionally been involved in these movements.
- Concrete benchmarks from all organizations in respect to the EJ/Env=Social Justice movement in order to win some ground.
- Concrete, measurable indicators that a group of organizations will commit to trying them out. We need to move beyond discussions to action of environmental and EJ groups making commitments and taking action.
- An emergence of a national agenda
- I think it will be a challenge for the 2007 Summit to make the big enviros that must have been the majority in 05 acknowledge the connection between justice and sustainability, to acknowledge their privilege and to move out of their comfort zone.
- Buy in from all groups at the executive level
- Establish a strong foundation for more collaboration among EJ/Enviro groups in an effort to push strong agenda and present a stronger front nationwide.

## Evaluation

The Steering Committee was gratified to receive completed evaluation forms from 66% of WRR participants. Evaluations reflected that the roundtable was a positive experience, and that participants were most pleased with the diversity of the participants present, the opportunity to meet many people, and to network with others in the field. The presence of young people was noted and appreciated. Participants expressed encouragement by the youth present, and a desire for increased youth involvement in future activities. Below is a sampling of comments from the evaluations:

- There is a difference between “diversity” (a narrow and confining word in some ways) and diverse interests.
- I’m not sure how to make the distinction, for the many that don’t realize there is one, on being committed to environmental justice in the sense of “just environmental outcomes” and not necessarily meaning adopting all the “environmental justice” principles outlined at the 10th Anniversary of the EJ Summit.
- Solving this issue is going to be and require a long-term commitment
- We’ve got to learn how to be relevant to young folk to make a difference
- Need to constantly re-assess our own assumptions and biases within organizations
- Very diverse organizations and their respective agendas within the movement can share ideas and work together
- The importance of incorporating diverse ideologies into our work
- The family that plays together stays together
- I learned that if you/I listen, youth voices can be heard
- That people come at this with very different perspectives and needs

In terms of next steps, some participants committed to the following:

- Talk to funders about convening a meeting of directors on this same topic
- Create focus to assess, improve and initiate partnerships between our organizations and others
- Start convening a regional meeting to bring together diverse stakeholders
- Try to think of better suggestions for October for more concrete discussions
- Attend at least two out of region and out of county events
- Contact some folks around the room to continue the conversation about collaboration
- Plan to attend Summit 2007
- Figure out resources to support the work of Partners for Progress
- Stay engaged.
- Work with a sense of urgency

A number of participants also cited specific people that they would follow-up and connect with in the coming weeks.

## WRR Lessons Learned

The WRR evaluation process also identified significant and specific (and sometimes conflicting) points, some of which are noted below as Lessons Learned:

- Not enough time to network
- Wanted more time for building connections
- Needed more time! – Built in mechanisms to come back together?
- Too vague in terms of goals and hopeful outcomes
- Needed more content to work on the statements

- People didn't have a chance to speak to one another about their assumptions. Put it out on the table in a larger group setting.
- Not enough conversation regarding the actual mainstream effects of certain mainstream environmental movement policy changes on communities of color – I think ultimately that is at the core of a real negotiation that must occur between both movements vs. diversity hiring or funding/power fights.
- Conversation geared to those in the field. Felt like an outsider even though I am entrenched in EJ issues.
- Power dynamics continue to be a topic to avoid.

To summarize, the WRR evaluation provided ideas, insights and suggestions which will be valuable to those planning Summit 2007, such as a need for more expert small group facilitation.



Photo courtesy of Jack Shu

*The Steering Committee met for a debriefing session on the evening of February 2, and decided that it will continue to meet for the time being to follow up on the Western Regional Roundtable and to provide guidance for the 2007 Summit.*

## Diverse Partners for Environmental Progress

# Western Region Roundtable

## Acknowledgements

### Steering Committee

Charles Thomas, *Outward Bound Adventures, Inc.*  
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Marcelo Bonta, *Center for Diversity & the Environment*  
Nina Roberts, *San Francisco State University*  
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