

# FINDING EQUAL FOOTING

## PRINCIPLES FOR EQUITABLE FLOOD MITIGATION ADVOCACY



Texas  
Living Waters  
Project



**Equity is not the same as equality.** Equality means treating everyone the same regardless of needs, which can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help.\*



## Who We Are

The Texas Living Waters Project is a collaboration of conservation groups working to ensure the people and ecosystems of Texas have both the freshwater and flood protection they need to thrive amidst an age of change. TLW partners include National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club Lone Star Chapter, Galveston Bay Foundation, and Hill Country Alliance.

## How We Define Equity

In mitigating the impact of flooding, equity is achieved when we prioritize providing communities with the resources and tools needed to be safe and secure. This is not the same as equality. Equality means treating everyone the same regardless of needs, which can only work if everyone starts from the same place and needs the same help.\* By prioritizing the needs of the most vulnerable communities, equity actively moves everyone closer to safety and security by bringing all up to a baseline level of support.

## Our Commitment

The organizations of the Texas Living Waters Project recognize that the long-term underinvestment and disinvestment of flood mitigation infrastructure in communities of color and low-income communities in Texas has led to disproportionate impacts from flooding in these underserved communities. TLW advocates for equitable flood mitigation across Texas communities, with an emphasis on natural and nature-based solutions where appropriate. We understand that the protective value of nature is not a catch-all solution to extreme weather events and flooding, it must often go hand-in-hand with structural components. We will not limit our support to nature-based solutions when a different approach is needed and is supported by the community. We value the lived experiences of community members and believe that impacted residents should have leadership roles in mitigation planning and project selection.

\*Adapted from *Everyday Feminism*

*We commit to the following principles as we advocate for funding and solutions in flood-prone communities in order to ensure we do our PAART:*

## Perspective

We will work to understand historical injustices that have resulted in underinvestment or disinvestments in a particular community, and how those actions continue to shape current needs and vulnerabilities.

**We will pay acute attention to underserved communities that require greater investments to overcome historical injustices.**



## Agency

Communities have intimate knowledge of what projects they need and where they should go. We will place an emphasis on lived experiences and actively support agency through community participation and leadership when decisions are being made that will impact that community. **We will use our voice to call attention to barriers to active community participation such as a lack of access to language translations of materials and meeting notices.**

## Advocacy

As established conservation organizations, we will use our power to elevate frontline voices. This includes knowing when to step back and when to challenge institutions, partners, and peers failing to advance equitable solutions. Where appropriate, we will advocate for projects that incorporate natural or nature-based features that can provide multiple benefits to communities affected by various hazards and can improve quality of life for nearby residents. **We will demand investments in sustainable, climate-resilient solutions that will continue to protect communities in the face of climate change.**

## Resources

We recognize that we have resources and technical expertise that are valuable and can be shared with communities, as appropriate. We also recognize our work depends on the input and support of community members whose contributions of time and expertise deserve just compensation. **We will help communities access data and best available science to identify risks, assets, and vulnerabilities. We will provide appropriate support and compensation when we seek input from community members.**

## Transparency

Transparency requires accurately reflecting your intentions and actions, and clearly sharing outcomes - good or bad. We understand that much needs to be done to ensure our intentions and actions are truly supportive of frontline community needs. We also recognize that all projects may have unintended consequences that may need to be planned for, including non-structural and nature-based projects. For example, buyouts may be a preferred option for floodplain professionals, but may not be appropriate if there is inadequate support from the community and lack of adequate resources for resettlement. **We will be transparent about potential consequences and plan for them by seeking community-based solutions.**

By internalizing these principles in our work, Texas Living Waters will be able to better advocate for equitable funding and solutions in flood-prone communities. We understand that additional work will be needed in order to make these guidance principles actionable and measurable. We look forward to sharing resources and continuing dialogues with peers, partners, and other stakeholders on how to ensure our work is truly equitable.



**Texas  
Living Waters  
Project**



**National Wildlife Federation  
Texas Coast and Water Program**



**SIERRA  
CLUB**

LONE STAR CHAPTER



**GALVESTON BAY  
FOUNDATION**



**hill country alliance**