

Social Equity Caucus Evaluation and  
Strategic Planning Project:  
*Executive Summary*

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## Acknowledgements

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We are also deeply indebted to Carl Anthony, founder of Urban Habitat, who contributed many hours to deepen our understanding of the vision and history of the Social Equity Caucus. His pioneering work did much to insert the social equity imperative into the conversation about regional sustainability and smart growth.

Finally, we wish to express our appreciation to the more than thirty-five SEC stakeholders who contributed time from their busy schedules to give thoughtful input on the successes, challenges and future direction of the Social Equity Caucus. A complete list of stakeholders who participated in the evaluation and strategic planning process appears as Appendix A. We look forward to watching the SEC’s progress in the coming years.

With much respect,

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The **Institute for Social & Environmental Justice Education (ISEJE)** is a nonprofit organization dedicated to increasing the effectiveness of social-change organizations, grassroots groups and coalitions. ISEJE supports these groups by building their capacity to use planning and evaluation tools to advance their organizational mission and goals.

## Preface

The Social Equity Caucus (SEC) is a coalition of organizations working for social equity in the nine Bay Area counties. The collaborative was conceived as a multi-issue, multi-sector regional body that provides a forum for diverse organizations to build a common vision for an equitable Bay Area. Urban Habitat has been convening and managing the SEC since the caucus' inception in 1998.

With the Social Equity Caucus approaching a ten year milestone, Urban Habitat decided to step back and engage SEC stakeholders in a process of reflection to assess past successes and identify opportunities for improvement and growth. Urban Habitat hired the Institute for Social & Environmental Justice Education (ISEJE), a nonprofit planning and evaluation organization, to work with staff to document the SEC's history, theory of change, and accomplishments over the past ten years in relation to its articulated goals and objectives, and to use findings from the assessment process to set a strategic direction for the next phase of the SEC's development.

We greatly appreciate having had the opportunity to engage with and learn from the many dedicated stakeholders who shared their views about social equity issues and their perceptions of the Social Equity Caucus' success in advancing a regional equity agenda.

## Executive Summary

The Social Equity Caucus (SEC) is a coalition of organizations and individuals working for regional equity in the nine Bay Area counties. The coalition was conceived as a multi-issue, multi-sector, regional body that provides a forum for diverse organizations to build a common vision for an equitable Bay Area. Urban Habitat has been convening and staffing the SEC since the caucus' inception in 1998. The SEC program has convened coalition members on a quarterly basis to share information and strategies, network, and develop a unified vision of social equity for the region. The SEC has also attempted to help build members' organizational capacity, access resources, and connect members' campaigns to other regional and global efforts. In 2003, the SEC took on the work of spearheading specific campaigns. These have included an aggressive mobilization to defeat Proposition 54 and issue-specific campaigns to ensure transportation equity and quality jobs.

With the Social Equity Caucus approaching a ten year milestone, Urban Habitat decided to step back and engage SEC stakeholders in a process of reflection to assess past successes and identify opportunities for improvement and growth. Urban Habitat hired the Institute for Social & Environmental Justice Education (ISEJE), a nonprofit planning and evaluation organization, to work with staff to conduct a participatory evaluation and strategic planning process. Our principal objectives were to help Urban Habitat document the history of the SEC, to articulate the SEC's theory of change, to document SEC accomplishments over the past ten years in relation to its stated goals and objectives, and to use findings from the assessment process to inform the next phase of the SEC's development. The evaluation and strategic planning project was initiated in January 2007. Data collection methods and sources included extensive document review, analysis of membership records, a series of focus groups, and interviews with key informants. Key findings and recommendations are presented below.

### *Findings*

1. **Interviewees thought the most important role the SEC had played during the past ten years was that of convener and facilitator of information sharing among social equity advocates and activists.** Many stakeholders said it was the value of networking with other activists that brought them to the SEC in the first place. Most individuals described the quarterly meetings as a good place to deepen existing working relationships and to find new groups to connect with. Focus group members spoke of the benefits their organizations received from connecting with other SEC organizations. A few respondents pointed to connections between policy-oriented groups and grassroots organizations as examples of the SEC's multi-sector approach in action. A majority of respondents identified participation in SEC meetings and on the Bridging the Bay listserv as ways their organization gained knowledge about what other groups were working on. One respondent called the listserv the "pulse of the social equity movement in the Bay."
2. **The SEC coalition has included a diverse mix of intermediaries and grassroots groups from throughout the region who are working to advance a regional equity agenda.** Based on quarterly SEC meeting attendance rosters, 276 individuals representing 129 organizations attended SEC meetings between December 2001 and December 2006. (Records prior to 2001

were not available). SEC members were based in eight of the nine Bay Area counties as well as in Sacramento and Santa Cruz Counties. The county most represented was Alameda County (43%), followed by San Francisco and Contra Costa counties. Although public, private and nonprofit sectors are all represented, the latter by far reflected the largest percentage of members (83%). Members represent a wide array of issue areas, from youth empowerment to health advocacy to land use and development.

3. **As the SEC's most important accomplishments, stakeholders most commonly pointed to: the convening of nearly one hundred activists at the Bridging the Bay conference in 2003, the success of regional organizing against Proposition 54 in 2004, and sustaining the quarterly meetings.** In addition, stakeholders said they thought the SEC had helped environmental justice organizations take their issues to a new level and had helped build networking relationships regionally. They also mentioned the SEC's role in ensuring that the voices of low-income communities and communities of color were represented in Bay Area Council's regional Smart Growth/Livability Footprint Project planning meetings in 2001 and the victories associated with the Transportation Justice Working Group's campaigns on transportation equity issues.
4. **Many stakeholders suggested that the caucus could be more effective if members (or Urban Habitat as the manager of the SEC) decided what the SEC's primary role/niche should and will be.** One stakeholder summed this sentiment up by saying, "My sense is that the challenge today is that the SEC is pulled in all kinds of directions, and that makes it hard for the SEC to emerge as a leader, and be seen as a leader who has to be listened to." This decision about where to place primary emphasis, several stakeholders suggested, will largely be influenced by whatever impact the caucus is trying to achieve. Many interviewees said they thought the strategic planning process was an important step toward gaining greater clarity about the SEC's role and strategic direction.
5. **A key theme across stakeholder groups was the need to address various membership-related issues, from conducting strategic recruitment, to delineating membership roles, responsibilities and expectations.** Archived documents suggest this has been a recurring theme throughout the caucus' history. Stakeholders suggested that as the SEC defines the membership structure and roles, it build in a certain level of flexibility. Some suggested using a tiered approach, identifying different levels of involvement for different member affiliates depending on their level of desired involvement and commitment of time and resources. Modest sliding-scale annual fees were mentioned by several stakeholders as a possible means for supporting the caucus financially and ensuring greater buy-in from members.
6. **Nearly every stakeholder suggested the need to address the intertwined relationship between Urban Habitat and the Social Equity Caucus.** While most stakeholders were clear that Urban Habitat manages the caucus, most were much less clear about how decisions are made and who has the authority to make decisions. They suggested Urban Habitat assume more of a leadership role and be explicit in claiming decision-making authority rather than leaving the issue vague.

7. **Many stakeholders said they did not perceive SEC as an entity that should be spearheading or even directly supporting single-issue campaigns except as it related to information sharing.** Many stakeholders described the tension between trying to spearhead or even support issue-specific campaign work and build the capacity of the SEC overall. Stakeholders added that when the SEC focuses on specific campaign issues, members whose work does not intersect with those issues become less engaged with the SEC. Some suggested a better role for the caucus would be to spearhead the development of a “regional equity platform or blueprint” that members could collectively develop, endorse, and advance.
8. **Key challenges the SEC has faced include staff turnover, the difficulty of managing tension between intermediary and constituency-based organizations, the resource intensity of staffing campaign work, the difficulty of ensuring regional representation and, as mentioned previously, the inherent difficulty of sustaining interest among individuals working on single-issues within a multi-issue coalition.**
9. **The majority of stakeholders suggested that the vision of creating a multi-sector, multi-issue regional caucus able to exert its collective power in the pursuit of social equity had yet to be fully realized.** Many described the SEC model as having “potential.” Numerous stakeholders suggested the SEC’s aims needed to be better defined to accurately assess the effectiveness of the model.

### *Recommendations*

1. **Clarify the SEC’s principal aims** - Develop a clear articulation of the caucus’ vision and principal aim that concretely describes the changes the caucus is trying to effect. Getting clarity on the SEC’s desired impact will help the SEC planning group affirm or modify the theory of change developed provisionally for the purposes of conducting this evaluation. Ultimately, Urban Habitat will need to settle on a few key outcome indicators that can help in monitoring and measuring the progress being made towards achieving these ultimate aims.
2. **Clarify issues of governance** - Develop a governance model that incorporates the consensus-based values of the SEC while clearly delineating who has authority to make decisions at differing levels for the collective body. Most stakeholders indicate a clear desire for Urban Habitat to assume a stronger leadership role for the coalition. We suggest that Urban Habitat clearly define its role and responsibilities as the manager of the SEC, and delineate the kinds of decisions it will need to make, to lead the coalition’s collective work plan.
3. **Incorporate a recruitment and retention component within the SEC model** - Strengthen the membership structure by delineating roles, benefits, and responsibilities associated with membership at one or multiple levels of participation. Develop a SEC recruitment and retention component charged with ongoing implementation and assessment of targeted recruitment strategies that support the SEC’s strategic goals. As suggested by some stakeholders, consider using anchor organizations as regional hubs to address geographic

barriers to participation in the SEC. Conduct research on other membership organizations similar to SEC to find best practices regarding membership structure, decision-making, benefits, roles, responsibilities, and fee structures.

4. **Build knowledge about the collective capacity of the SEC** - Identify the data elements Urban Habitat needs to collect about SEC members to better understand the collective capacity of the SEC and how that capacity can be leveraged. Develop processes for collecting, analyzing, and updating the data. Ideally, the SEC staff would also find ways to use the membership data to strengthen alliances and relationships among members.
5. **Use the SEC's collaborative advantage** - Use the "theory of collaborative advantage" as one criterion by which to assess the appropriateness of proposed strategies and actions. Ask the rhetorical question: "Does this or that proposed strategy or action take us in a direction that capitalizes on the assets and power of the coalition as a collective body?" We suggest that this type of questioning might result in the SEC adopting some stakeholders' idea of developing a Bay Area social equity platform or agenda that could offer members a shared pursuit as opposed to pursuing single-issue campaigns.
6. **Incorporate ongoing evaluation and reporting processes** - Develop measurable process and outcome objectives, timeframes, and performance targets and a variety of formats for sharing progress with members. Enhance the SEC's web-based capacity and communications infrastructure to strengthen members' alliances, gather member input, and communicate progress regularly.

## Key Milestones in the History of the Social Equity Caucus

1989	Carl Anthony, Karl Linn, and David Brower of Earth Island Institute found the Urban Habitat Program (UHP, later UH). Anthony becomes Executive Director. UH is one of the first environmental justice organizations in the Bay Area.
1990	In 1990-91, The Bay Vision 2020 Commission gathers approximately thirty leaders from the Bay Area to debate how regional economic and population growth could be managed more humanely and effectively. Three people of color are appointed to the Commission: James Head, NEDLC, Eileen Hernandez, a private consultant, and Lynette Lee, EBALDC. Several Bay Area organizations representing environmental and economic issues were represented.
1991	UH attends First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit and presents on the connections between environmental justice (EJ) and sustainability issues.
1993	The President’s Council for Sustainable Development (PCSD) is established.
1994	Vice President Al Gore brings a multi-million-dollar redevelopment package to SF for the Presidio. UH attends a Presidio Council meeting with Gore and distributes its <i>Sustainability and Justice</i> report.
1997	The Bay Area Alliance for Sustainable Development (now BAASC or BAA) is formed.
1998	Urban Habitat convenes between sixty and eighty representatives from Bay Area social and environmental justice groups at an initial meeting to shape the Social Equity Caucus. The SEC is established.
1999	The BAA begins work on the Compact for a Sustainable Bay Area and the Community Capital Investment Initiative (CCII) with SEC member participation.
2000	The BAA begins its Smart Growth/Regional Livability Footprint Project. ABAG contracts with UH and the SEC to conduct regional development community meetings in the nine Bay Area counties.
2001	Footprint community meetings are opened with a video, “Voices from the Community: Perspectives on Social Equity and Smart Growth,” produced by UH and Earth House Center that features interviews with SEC members. ♦ Anthony leaves Urban Habitat and becomes a Program Officer for Sustainable Metropolitan Communities at the Ford Foundation. ♦ Juliet Ellis becomes UH’s Executive Director. She convenes the SEC to evaluate its future.
2002	Manual Pastor of U.C. Santa Cruz’s Center for Justice, Tolerance and Community (CJTC) facilitates an SEC strategic planning process. ♦ The SEC sends delegations to Johannesburg, South Africa for the World Summit on Sustainable Development and to Washington, D.C. for the Second National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit.
2003	SEC and CJTC host the Bridging the Bay regional summit in April, attended by approximately ninety-five individuals. Two priority SEC campaign issues are identified – Transportation Justice (TJ) and No on Proposition 54. ♦ The No on Proposition 54 Taskforce is established. Prop 54 is defeated in October. ♦ The TJ Working Group (TJWG) is formed.
2004	The SEC sends a delegation to the World Social Forum in India. ♦ TJWG efforts influence the Metropolitan Transportation Commission and contribute to the allocation of \$200 million to the Lifeline Program.
2005	The SEC sends fourteen members to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. ♦ UH and the CJTC release a report: “ <i>The Big ‘G’ Word: What’s Globalization got to do with the SEC?</i> ”
2006	The SEC’s Quality Jobs Working Group (QJWG) is established. ♦ The TJWG has a significant victory when the MTC adopts two of four proposed EJ principles. ♦ Members of the TJWG file suit (on-going) against the MTC over alleged-discrimination in transportation funding patterns.
2007	The QJWG releases its “Quality Jobs” edition of <i>Race, Poverty &amp; the Environment</i> and tools to define and measure job quality. ♦ An SEC delegation participates in the first-ever U.S. Social Forum in Atlanta, Georgia. ♦ Urban Habitat hires ISEJE to guide the SEC evaluation and strategic planning projects.
2008	The SEC will celebrate its ten year anniversary.