



## OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Tiffany Ward  
Director and Chief Equity Officer

### MEMORANDUM

October 22, 2024

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director  
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director  
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #25-25  
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriation #25-25 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant has the potential to advance racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County. Available information suggests that the program will prioritize reaching schools with “high socioeconomic and demographic indicators.” “Socioeconomic and demographic indicators” are not clearly defined within available information; however prioritizing schools with higher percentages of BIPOC and low-income students could help to address inequities in flood risk and damage as well as access to the academic and developmental benefits of outdoor learning opportunities.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #25-25 National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) Grant is to allocate a \$500,000 federal grant from the NFWF’s Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund (the Fund). The Fund supports projects within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed that promote community-based efforts to protect and restore local ecological environments, “helping local communities clean up and restore their polluted rivers and streams and restoring and protecting key Chesapeake Bay

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species”<sup>1</sup>. The Fund supports four competitive grant programs and targeted investments<sup>2</sup>. As of 2021, the NFWF offers guidance related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and environmental justice in grant and cooperative agreements. NFWF’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) strategy implementation plan lays out a number of objectives and actions that demonstrate how projects like those funded by the Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund could help increase “equitable distribution of benefits and improvements and considerations for reduction of disproportionate adverse environmental impacts in communities of color, low-income communities and other underrepresented groups”<sup>3</sup>.

The NFWF grant will allow MCPS to create Resilience, Education, Action, Climate, Habitat (REACH) hubs at six to eight district facilities to be retrofitted with infrastructure to manage stormwater runoff. According to a September 2024 memo from Thomas W. Taylor, Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools to Members of the Board of Education, the retrofitted facilities will offer a nature-based learning environment, while also building green infrastructure and reducing stormwater runoff<sup>4</sup>. The creation of REACH hubs is part of a district effort to build outdoor environments that strengthen local ecological systems while providing place-based, hands-on learning opportunities. Project goals include enhanced water conservation, the creation of wildlife habitats, climate resilience, and accessibility to green space. At the time of this analysis, specific project documents outlining the planning, implementation, and evaluation of REACH hubs, as well as progress with the first REACH Hub at A. Mario Loiederman Middle School, were not readily publicly available. That said, the goals of the REACH Hubs (as described in documents that accompanied this supplemental appropriation request) are aligned with the MCPS Division of Sustainability and Compliance, whose work “aims to ensure that healthy learning and working environments are equitably accessible across MCPS”<sup>5</sup>. REACH Hubs also align closely with the goals of the Montgomery County Climate Action Plan<sup>6</sup>, in particular, Goal P-15: Use School Gardens or Other Outdoor Learning Facilities as a Jumping-Off Point to Address a Multitude of Climate-Related Topics and Goal P-16: Develop Increased Opportunities for Students to Participate in Climate Change Learning Experiences Outside of the Classroom.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund. The National Fish and Wildlife Federation. Available at: <https://www.nfwf.org/programs/chesapeake-bay-stewardship-fund>

<sup>2</sup> The Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund.

<sup>3</sup> DEIJ Strategy Implementation Plan | Chesapeake Bay Program. Chesapeake Bay Program: A Watershed Partnership. 2021. Available at: [https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/deij\\_strategy\\_implementation\\_plan\\_august\\_2021\\_final.pdf](https://www.nfwf.org/sites/default/files/2022-02/deij_strategy_implementation_plan_august_2021_final.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Memo from Thomas W. Taylor, Superintendent MCPS to Members of the Board of Education. Subject: Recommended Fiscal Year 2025 Supplemental Appropriation for National Fish and Wildlife Foundation Grant. September 12, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Division of Sustainability and Compliance. Office of Facilities Management. Available at: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/departments/facilities/sustainability/>

<sup>6</sup> Montgomery County, MD Climate Action Plan. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/climate/Resources/Files/climate/climate-action-plan.pdf> (pg 265 and 266)

**III. ANALYSIS:** This NFWF Grant aims to create two main benefits. The first is improvements to local ecological ecosystems where REACH Hubs are located. The second is expanded access to green spaces and outdoor hands-on learning opportunities.

Within the area of local ecological ecosystems, there is a growing body of research related to how green infrastructure investments (projects and programs like those proposed in this grant) interact with historical and current inequities in exposure to environmental hazards, inequalities in access to environmental amenities, and displacement<sup>7</sup>.

Understanding these dynamics and how Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) and low-income communities have been excluded from land use decision-making processes is essential for considering where and how best to implement green infrastructure projects. ORESJ and the Department of Environmental Protection's Climate Action Plan have described how local housing and other economic inequities have created areas of increased vulnerability to flood risk while limiting available resources to repair flood damages. This is echoed in the racial equity impact assessment (REIA) of Supplemental Appropriation #22-72 Flood Control Study<sup>8</sup> which explained how BIPOC, and low-income communities are disproportionately harmed by the effects of flooding events due to historical inequities that have affected several factors impacting flood risk and government response. Given REACH Hub's planned emphasis on stormwater management and water conservation, it's valuable to highlight Figure 19<sup>9</sup> in the County's Climate Action Plan which illustrates projected increases in precipitation events and areas where more than half of the residents are considered socially vulnerable by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

The second area that the grant impacts is access to outdoor learning opportunities for students and community-members where the REACH Hubs will be located. In our research we identified several articles focused on the Nature Gap<sup>10</sup> and the benefits of

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<sup>7</sup> Zbigniew J. Grabowski, Timon McPhearson, Steward T.A. Pickett, Transforming US urban green infrastructure planning to address equity, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, Volume 229, 2023, 104591, ISSN 0169-2046, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104591>.

(<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0169204622002407>)

<sup>8</sup> REIA of Supplemental Appropriation #22-72 Flood Control Study. Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice. April 8, 2022. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-72.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Figure 19. Projected increase in the 10-year precipitation event for 2050 and climate scenario RCP 8.5 outlining areas ranked in the top 50% most vulnerable by the CDC Social Vulnerability Index. Montgomery County, MD Climate Action Plan. Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/climate/Resources/Files/climate/climate-action-plan.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Emma Gosalvez. "Nature Gap: Why Outdoor Spaces Lack Diversity and Inclusion". NC State University College of Natural Resources News. December 14, 2020. Available at: <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2020/12/outdoor-diversity-inclusion/> and Jenny Rowland-Shea, Sahir Doshi, Shanna Edberg, and Robert Fanger. "The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America". The Center for American Progress and Hispanic Access Foundation. Available at: <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-nature-gap/>

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access to the outdoors and environmental education<sup>11</sup>. According to available information, MCPS plans to engage schools with high socioeconomic and demographic indicators to participate in REACH hubs. The Center for American Progress, in collaboration with the Hispanic Access Foundation, commissioned an analysis<sup>12</sup> by Conservation Science Partners. The analysis revealed several trends that support the REACH hub's prioritization of schools with disproportionate percentages of low-income and BIPOC students than in the County overall. The following data points from the analysis<sup>13</sup> are relevant to the proposed grant program:

- People of color are more likely than White people to live in an area that is nature-deprived.
- Low-income communities are more likely to experience nature deprivation<sup>14</sup>;
- Three-fourths of census tracts with large numbers of families of color with children live in nature-deprived places, while less than 40 percent of white families with children do.

In addition to these data points and given related work already underway in Montgomery County Public Schools Outdoor Environmental Education Programs<sup>15</sup>, it would be valuable to leverage learning and best practices for effectively engaging communities where the REACH Hubs will be located.

cc: Thomas W. Taylor, Superintendent of Schools, Montgomery County Public Schools  
Tricia Swanson, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

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<sup>11</sup> University of Minnesota Extension. "Creating inclusive and impactful outdoor learning experiences. Available at: <https://extension.umn.edu/youth-learning-and-skills-resources/creating-inclusive-and-impactful-outdoor-learning-experiences> and Ming Kuo, Michael Barnes, and Catherine Jordan. "Do Experience with Nature Promote Learning? Converging Evidence of a Cause-and Effect Relationship". Available at: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00305/full>

<sup>12</sup> Conservation Science Partners. Analysis of Disparities in Nature Loss and Access to Nature. Submitted to Center for American Progress and Hispanic Access Foundation. May 29, 2020. Available at: [https://csp-inc.org/public/CSP-CAP\\_Disparities\\_in\\_Nature\\_Loss\\_FINAL\\_Report\\_060120.pdf](https://csp-inc.org/public/CSP-CAP_Disparities_in_Nature_Loss_FINAL_Report_060120.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Jenny Rowland-Shea, et. al

<sup>14</sup> According to the report, communities are considered nature deprived if their census tract has a higher proportion of natural area lost to human activities than the state-level median.

<sup>15</sup> Outdoor Environmental Education Programs. Montgomery County Public Schools. Available at: <https://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/outdoored/outreach/environmental-resources/>