



**BAYOU CITY**  
**WATERKEEPER®**

# **Strategic Plan**

# **2023-2026**

# Executive Summary

Over the last two decades, Bayou City Waterkeeper has emerged as a bold advocate for communities across the Lower Galveston Bay watershed. Through sound science and creative legal strategy, we work toward a shared vision of water justice. As we shape policy solutions that embrace the strength of our region's natural systems, we are most effective when we center the experience of communities most vulnerable to water, climate, and infrastructure injustices.

**Whether flowing through our bayous, draining into a pipe, or raining down from the sky, we view water as a catalyst for change.**



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# Mission

Bayou City Waterkeeper works to protect and restore the integrity of our bayous, rivers, streams, and bays through advocacy, education, and action.

**We achieve this mission through our core program areas:**

**Wetland  
Protection**

**Clean  
Water**

**Just Climate  
Transitions**

# Core Values

## We View Water As A Catalyst For Change

In recognition of the complexities of our watershed, the challenges we face to protect our waters from the harms of current urban development and industrial activities, and the importance of being responsive to the needs of the communities we serve, our work is guided and informed by five values:

### **Interconnectivity**

Work in collaboration across disciplines and create multiple ways to engage in our work.

### **Fluidity**

Embrace movement and adaptability in our work.

### **Bold action**

Have hard conversations, disrupt dysfunctional systems, create new frameworks, bring together unconventional allies, and transform data and research into action.

### **Justice and equity**

Call out inequities in our watershed arising from historic injustices and disinvestments.

### **Regeneration**

Recognize that water is a site for healing, joy, celebration, reflection, and growth.



# The Strategic Planning Process

## **1. Background Review**

Review of existing documentation and research provided by BCWK.

## **2. Stakeholder Focus Groups and Surveys**

Input from diverse stakeholders (community members, community partners, board, funders, etc.) through surveys, interviews and focus groups, as well as an equity assessment and conversations with board and staff.

## **3. Blue-Sky Session I: Review Research**

Review findings of the research in a way that allows board and staff to participate in ‘blue sky thinking’ –open-ended thinking, imagining, thinking flexibly, and taking responsible risks –about what can be possible for the future of BCWK.

## **4. Blue Sky Session II: Vision & Goal Development**

Having considered all the research and taken into consideration the impacts of the pandemic, board and staff to set the overall strategic direction and goals for the next five years.

## **5. Action Plan Development**

Having developed the overall strategic direction and goals for the next five years, board and staff to set the action steps for reaching each goal with related assignments and timeline.

## **6. Strategic Plan**

Strategic plan approved by BCWK’s Board of Directors.

# Why it matters

Most of the bayous, creeks, streams, and bays across our watershed are classified as “impaired” under the Clean Water Act, meaning they don’t meet water quality standards. At the same time, our wetlands, which serve to improve water quality and provide stormwater detention for our flood-prone region, are being lost at an alarming rate, and storms, which amplify the impacts of both issues, are growing in strength as a result of climate change. Low-income communities and communities of color generally bear an unfair share of the burden of water pollution and storm impact.





# BCWK brings critical strengths to addressing the issue.

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The number of nonprofits willing to take on litigation work is shrinking, so BCWK's legal capacities have grown in importance as many believe that legal action is the best way to move the needle meaningfully. Also, sharing legal knowledge has been an important resource to community partners.

*"BCWK's lawyer has been critical in offering 'back of the envelope' advice to guide our work."*

**Community Partner**

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BCWK's relatively new environmental science work provides data-to-action tools and approaches that support our legal work and are vital to educating and engaging community members on sewage justice and wetland losses in their neighborhoods.

*"Residents don't trust the drinking water and believe that government is not telling the whole story. BCWK's data science work has been important to educating the community about basic water infrastructure. It is an area of strength and needs more attention."*

**Community Partner**

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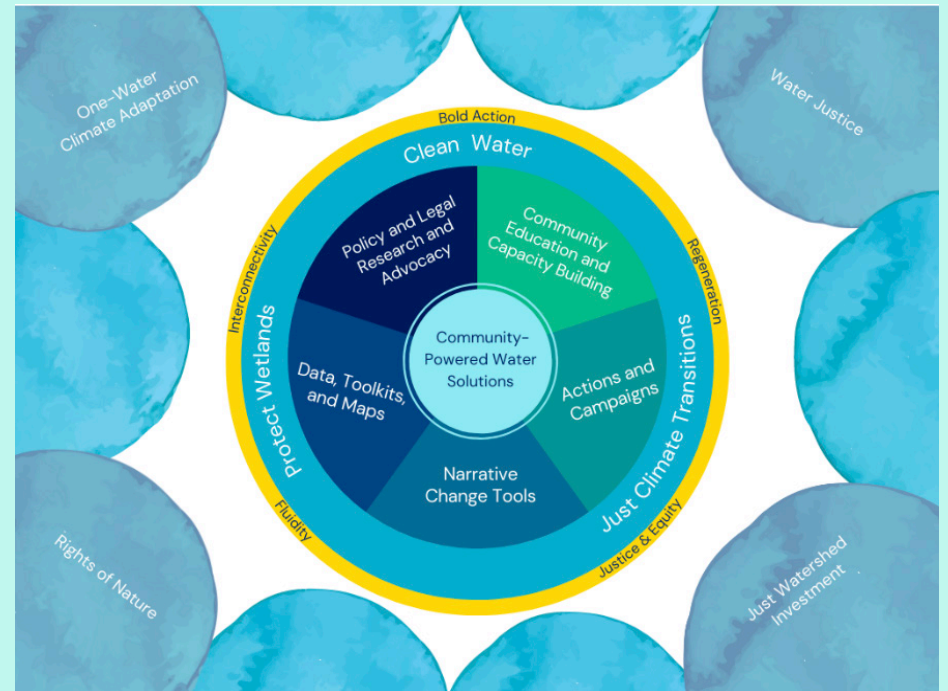
BCWK's leadership and staff are recognized as important partners to others working in this space. Community Partners note that BCWK brings unique voices that are needed to move policy; serves as a bridge to communities for statewide groups engaged in advocacy; and takes a leadership role in advancing environmental justice.

*"That BCWK's executive director is a person of color in this space is important. Plus, she is a reliable partner, being open-minded and good at engaging people."*

**Community Partner**

# BCWK's Theory of Change

BCWK will continue working in our three core areas. What will change is how we approach our work.



## We believe that we can strengthen our impact by:

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Centering community priorities and voices in our work.

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Integrating policy and legal work, community education and actions, data tools, and narrative change into every area of our work.

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Ensuring our core values guide all our work.

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Leveraging national actions and movements in play, such as Rights of Nature and One Water efforts.





# Our Strategic Direction 2023-2026

Drawing from nature to inspire our work, like the mycelium network that connects individual plants and trees together to transfer essential resources, over the next three years Bayou City Waterkeeper will achieve strong and just outcomes by creating deeper roots and stronger connections in the community.

ABOVE: The Mycelium Network.  
Image from BBC News, How Trees  
Secretly Talk to Each Other

# Five goals will guide our work

Expand the organizational **infrastructure** by adding 6 new staff and increasing the annual budget to \$1m

Develop integrative and just frameworks that center nature and people into our three core **program areas**

Step into stronger advocacy work by launching a **policy** agenda working to shift policies within the City and County

Bring **community** more powerfully into our work by establishing a network of community partnerships and residents

Leverage the power of **communication** by launching a values-driven brand and utilizing creative storytelling to further impact



# Goal 1

Expand the organizational infrastructure by adding 6 new staff and increasing the annual budget to \$1million per year by 2025. Staff and revenue will be increased in a way that aligns with BCWK values and culture of care to achieve deeper, transformational change in our work to protect our watershed.

## **GOAL 1 OBJECTIVES**

**Cultivate relationships with funders as transformational investors and thought partners that grow and diversify funding such that our annual budget increases to \$1 million by 2026.**

**Add 6 new positions by the end of 2025 to expand organizational infrastructure and capacity.**

**Set outcome goals for our work toward Justice, Equity, Diversity, Accessibility, Inclusion (JEDAI) and a culture of care; advance toward those goals through related emergent learning.**

**Update our mission / vision statements and bylaws and relaunch the Advisory Council, Legal Circle, and other committees as needed to enhance the Board of Director's capacity to provide oversight and fundraising support.**

**Develop frameworks to evaluate strategic progress, monitor capacity, and assess strategic risks.**

## Goal 2

Develop integrative and just frameworks centering nature and people through programmatic work in three core areas — wetland protection, clean water, and just climate transitions — which measurably build community power and fill enforcement gaps at the local level, towards equitable policy change.



## GOAL 2 OBJECTIVES

### Wetlands

Use our data-to-action tools and create multiple points of entry for community members and leaders to become informed about the role of wetlands in flood and climate resilience and to participate and collaborate in the protection of wetlands.

Expand federal jurisdictional protection of regional wetlands and develop and advocate for local policies/ordinances to enhance wetlands protection.

### Clean Water

#### City of Houston

Hold City of Houston accountable for delivering on the 15-year consent decree. Work with community members affected by sewage pollution to close gaps in the consent decree.

#### City of Baytown

Secure a consent decree that incorporates provisions to address community priorities for the City of Baytown to address water pollution and infrastructure injustices by 2025.

#### Sewage

Create and implement an advocacy strategy to address 1 to 3 sewage injustice hotspots.

### Just Climate Transitions

Work alongside partners to educate, engage, and organize communities left behind by the Coastal Texas Study to develop a community-powered policy framework and act collectively toward more just community-centered climate infrastructure planning.

Work with communities to reduce pollution, environmental injustices, and climate risks created by industrial facilities and infrastructure and improve systems of accountability and enforcement.

## Goal 3

Launch and implement the organization's first ever policy agenda, building on existing relationships to achieve policy shift within City of Houston, Harris County and Harris County Flood Control District.

### **GOAL 3 OBJECTIVES**

**Launch integrative and actionable climate justice framework across all programs centering conservation and environmental justice.**

**Collaboratively advocate for just and equitable on-the-ground disaster preparedness and recovery through an interdisciplinary water policy agenda, as our region experiences increased storms due to climate change, through research, actions, and resources that identify connections between water and other fields.**

**Advocate for economic power by tracking historic water infrastructure disinvestment and inequities, to better advocate for funding and investments prioritizing on-the-ground community needs and nature-based solutions, leading toward a framework for regenerative economics and the equitable redistribution of resources and power.**

**Through renewal of MS4 permit and related processes at the city of Houston, Harris County, and Harris County Flood Control District, advocate for stormwater policy changes that prioritize equity and working with nature and center communities' priorities.**

## Goal 4

In 2023, launch a new values-driven brand and strategic communications, including narrative shifts, campaigns, and creative storytelling to further impact and understanding of water issues confronted in our waterways.

## **GOAL 4 OBJECTIVES**

**Launch new brand and strategic communications centering data, people, communities, and water and opportunities for community action through campaigns.**

**Define guiding and accessible language that clearly defines water justice as it relates to environmental justice, climate change, and conservation, and that links to a larger JEDAI vision for our community and watershed.**

**Create opportunities for community action through artist-in-residence program and creative storytelling.**

**Leverage role as “watchdog” organization by communicating data gaps in service to communities, leveraging this transparency towards community action and legal enforcement.**

## Goal 5

To center the priorities of impacted communities in all our work, establish a network of partnerships with frontline community members, community-based organizations, and universities that identify collaborative solutions around environmental justice and climate resilience; sustain these relationships through education, legal support, and resource mobilization.

## **GOAL 5 OBJECTIVES**

**Identify and intentionally build partnerships in four “water justice zone” neighborhoods to deepen our ongoing work, identify new priorities and opportunities for action, and work as a strategic liaison between community and policymakers.**

**Launch a water justice resource hub including community-oriented data-to-action tools and legal resources (including maps, toolkits, research and analysis resources) to connect water with health equity and social vulnerability in water justice zones.**

**Develop flexible educational curriculum to build capacity for green infrastructure/nature-based solutions that uses an equity lens, working as strategic liaison education both community members and with government leaders to enact these policies locally.**

**Strengthen regional legal capacity to address water injustices, through increased internal capacity, external collaboration, and engagement with lawyers and law students, to build community power and create opportunities to implement community-driven policy goals.**





# Acknowledgements

## Board of Directors

Hugo Colón

Lindsay Dofelmier

Tanweer Kaleemullah

Jolea Payne

David Popken (Chair)

Rachel Powers (Treasurer)

Ken Teague

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