



## PROGRAM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

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### USING REBATES TO PROTECT OUR WATERS: INCREASING EQUITABLE UTILIZATION IN THE RAINWISE REBATE PROGRAM FOR DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Session A, Breakout Room #: 10

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A disproportional amount of white and higher-income homeowners utilize the RainWise rebate as lower-income populations still can't handle the upfront costs of the green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) projects that are covered. Fewer people using the rebate means more stormwater is being drained into our sewage systems and overflowing into waterways. This study aimed to identify ways to increase the installations within disadvantaged communities to decrease stormwater entering our waterways. To accomplish this, I interviewed 12 customers and four community organizers familiar with the program to gain insights into the barriers to using the rebate and their solutions to increase equitable access to the program. The interview results indicate that the rebate is inherently inequitable as many people can't handle the upfront costs of the projects' thousands of dollars. Switching to a grant model or promoting grant options, rethinking outreach strategies towards disadvantaged communities, and expanding the eligibility requirements of RainWise are some changes to increase equity. To help renters interested in the program, RainWise reps talking directly to landlords to provide specialized information could be a potential solution. Through these pathways, more people can reap the benefits of having GSI. People with cisterns can collect water to water their gardens and save money on their water and sewage bills, while homeowners with rain gardens can have increased value in their property and the aesthetic of their yards. With more people, especially disadvantaged communities, installing GSI on private properties, the stormwater issue can be reduced to protect our waters.