

Vermont Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022)
Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)
Onboarding Manual

Purpose

This document outlines the roles, responsibilities, and other necessary knowledge for the Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC) members. This document sets expectations for individuals appointed to this council and is designed to support them in acclimating to the role.

Introduction

Also known as [Act 154 of 2022](#), the Vermont (VT) Environmental Justice (EJ) is the state's first law specifically meant to address environmental health disparities and improve the health and well-being of all Vermont residents. The VT EJ Law establishes Vermont's Environmental Justice State Policy.

The purpose of the [Environmental Justice Law](#) is to ensure all Vermonters regardless of race, cultural background, or income have equitable access to environmental benefits such as clean air and water, healthy food, and public transportation. The VT EJ Law also protects communities from disproportionate environmental burdens such as polluted air and water, climate change impacts, and limited access to green spaces. The VT EJ Law requires State agencies to meaningfully engage Vermonters in the environmental decision-making processes.

The VT EJ Law created a body made up of ten representatives from communities disproportionately burdened by environmental injustice and one representative from the State Office of Racial Equity. The AC supports in the implementation of the [VT EJ Law](#) by using their expertise and lived experience. The communities represented on the [Advisory Council](#) are (as of January, 2025):

- Municipal Government – *Vacant*
- Social Justice Organization – Britaney Watson
- Mobile Home Community -- *Vacant*
- Environmental Justice Focus Population – Walter Brownridge
- Food Security Organization – Mariana Lamaison Sears
- Immigrant Community – Maryam Shabbir Abbasi
- Statewide Environmental Organization -- *Vacant*
- Vermont Native American Tribe Representative – Rich Holschuh
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board – Trey Martin
- Natural Resources Conservation Council – Jennifer Byrne

- Office of Racial Equity – Xusana Davis

Roles and Responsibilities

AC members play an integral role in the implementation of the Vermont Environmental Justice Law by guiding and advising implementation and creation of deliverables. Below are some of the roles and responsibilities for membership on this council.

1. Attend and participate in public meetings for the VT EJ Law.

AC members are expected to attend and participate in VT EJ Law public meetings where their attendance is requested (AC-only meetings and Joint meetings of the AC and Interagency Committee). Attending and participating in meetings includes:

- Provide a complete response to scheduling inquiries within one week of the inquiry, including but not limited to Doodle Polls. A complete response includes indicating if you are intending to attend remotely, in-person, or for only part of the meeting,
- Indicate any changes to attendance two weeks in advance of a public meeting,
- Preparing for agenda topics in advance by reviewing supplementary materials and considering important prompts provided by the EJ Coordinators,
- Listening actively to the thoughts of your fellow AC and Interagency Committee members,
- Actively contributing to public meetings by sharing expertise, lived experience, and thoughts to advance the VT EJ Law,
- Actively collaborating in public meetings through multiple formats (e.g., Teams chat, breakout sessions, group activities or surveys),
- Abiding by the [Community Agreements](#),
- Completing post-meeting assignments, when applicable,
- Communicating with EJ Coordinators in between meetings regarding implementation of deliverables and any issues as needed.

2. Advocate for the perspectives and needs of represented communities.

The AC is made up of ten representatives from historically marginalized and overburdened communities and one representative from the State Office of Racial Equity. To the extent practicable, the AC is intended to represent diversity in race, ethnicity, age, gender, urban and rural areas, and different regions of the State. In this way, the AC is the mechanism through which the work of the VT EJ Law is constantly tapped into the needs and perspectives of Vermont's communities. Members of the AC represent their communities and must regularly connect with their communities to effectively do so.

3. Consistently utilize the Principles of Environmental Justice in practice.

The VT EJ Law seeks to advance the [Principles of Environmental Justice](#), which outline values, affirmations, and demands of historically marginalized and overburdened communities disproportionately exposed to environmental injustices. The Law is also influenced by the [Just Transition Principles](#), which seek to outline what a Just Transition from an extractive economy to a regenerative economy will look like. AC members are expected to be well-informed of these principles and to utilize them in their work under the VT EJ Law. The advice and guidance of AC members should be informed by these principles to support in integrating environmental justice into State programs, policies, and activities.

4. Maintain communication with the EJ Coordinators.

AC members are expected to maintain regular communication with the EJ Coordinators. EJ Coordinators regularly contact AC members to schedule upcoming meetings and solicit feedback on important items under the VT EJ Law. It is important that AC members provide timely responses to the communications of EJ Coordinators to ensure efficient implementation of the VT EJ Law. AC members should inform the EJ Coordinators of any specific communication needs or preferences, which will allow the EJ Coordinators to make necessary adjustments where possible. For example, if additional phone calls or text messages would be helpful, the EJ Coordinators can arrange those accommodations.

5. Advise in and guide the creation and implementation of deliverables under the VT EJ Law.

AC members are expected to provide independent advice on matters relating to environmental justice to support the creation and implementation of deliverables under the VT EJ Law. In order to provide sound advice, it is important that AC members maintain awareness around VT EJ Law initiatives and progress and regularly engage in the discourse surrounding this work. AC members should communicate any additional support they need to effectively advise and guide this work. For example, if there are specific topics, terms, or deliverables that are unclear, sharing that information helps ensure everyone feels confident in how they can contribute.

6. Provide solutions-oriented recommendations to the covered agencies to support in advancing initiatives under the VT EJ Law.

AC members are expected to provide recommendations to covered agencies regarding initiatives under the VT EJ Law. An example of where the AC provides recommendations to the covered agencies includes making improvements to the agencies' civil rights and environmental justice complaint intake processes. AC members are expected to provide these recommendations in a solutions-oriented manner as they have first-hand knowledge of the needs and perspectives of their

communities and can provide recommendations that improve community experiences with the State's work.

7. Communicate the work of the VT EJ Law to communities.

As needed, AC members are expected to communicate the work of the VT EJ Law to their respective communities, solicit input from them, and return that input to the AC, Interagency Committee, and EJ Coordinators. Members of the AC represent their communities and must gather adequate information to effectively do so. As the bodies under the VT EJ Law begin identifying spaces for community feedback, it is important that the AC can effectively communicate with communities as one of many points of contact for this work. As soon as these opportunities become apparent to the AC member, they should reach out to the EJ Coordinators to support. This may also involve AC members taking the lead in facilitating community participation at public meetings and in other forums, to support community involvement in implementation the VT EJ Law.

Administrative Tasks

Environmental Justice Online Resource Library

All materials related to the work of the VT EJ Law are publicly accessible through the [Environmental Justice Online Resource Library](#). If there are any issues accessing the Environmental Justice Online Resource Library, please contact the EJ Coordinators to resolve the issue as soon as possible.

State of Vermont Open Meeting Law

The State of Vermont has an Open Meeting Law to help ensure transparency in government actions and decision-making. Open Meeting Law also helps in making decision-making processes accessible for members of the public to participate. Adhering to Open Meeting Law is a key part of state government work and work under the Principles of Environmental Justice.

All public meetings under the VT EJ Law are subject to Open Meeting Law. AC members should be aware of the requirements of Open Meeting Law to make sure they are following the requirements.

Please watch the presentation on the [Vermont's Open Meeting Law](#) by Michelle Anderson, Esq. of the Vermont Office of the Attorney General to the [Vermont Climate Council meeting, November 20, 2020 \(video 2 of 2\)](#), starting at 40:12 (approximately 16 min.).

Key Takeaways:

1. Vermont Open Meeting Law requires all meetings of public bodies be open to the public unless a specific exception applies. In order to make a meeting open, the public body must:
 - a. Provide advance public notice of meetings, including meeting agendas (must be posted 48 hours prior to the meeting).
 - b. Discuss all business and take all actions in open meetings, unless an exception applies.
 - c. Allow members of the public to attend and participate in meetings.
 - d. Take meeting minutes and make them available to the public (must be posted 5 calendars after the meeting).
 - e. Advisory Council and subcommittee meetings are warned and meetings posted at [Vermont Environmental Justice Law Event Calendar](#) and on the [Public Meetings Calendar for State Agencies](#).
2. A meeting is a gathering of a quorum of the members of a public body for the purpose of discussing the business of the public body or for the purpose of taking action. A quorum is a simple majority of the total members of the body regardless of any vacancies or recusals.
 - a. AC members should not “reply all” to emails sent to the AC, and business should not be discussed over email with a quorum of the AC, as that would constitute a meeting.
 - b. AC members should communicate to the EJ Coordinator’s ahead of time if they’re unable to attend a public meeting or can only attend a portion of a meeting. This is important as reaching quorum is necessary for the governing bodies to make decisions.
3. When discussing collaborating on online documents, name a point person who collects and compiles each member’s comments for later discussion at a public meeting.

State of Vermont Code of Ethics

In 2022, Vermont passed a State Code of Ethics which applies to all State public servants, including members of the Advisory Council. All Advisory Council members are required to complete training on the State Code of Ethics, available at: [Training | Ethics Commission](#).

Key Takeaways:

The Code of Ethics generally prohibits:

1. Conflicts of interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest, as reviewed by an impartial person;
2. Providing preferential or prejudicial treatment of any person;
3. Misusing an official position for personal or financial gain;
4. Misusing information obtained during State service for personal or financial gain;

5. Misusing government resources;
6. Former public servants from knowingly and intentionally communicating with or appearing before the State on certain matters in which the employee personally and significantly participated during government service; and
7. Soliciting or accepting gifts.

If you have a question about a potential conflict of interest, you can contact the [State Ethics Commission](#) for confidential advice.

Vermont State Ethics Commission
6 Baldwin St. Montpelier, VT 05633-7950
802-828-7187
Christina Sivret, Executive Director
<https://ethicscommission.vermont.gov/>
Christina.Sivret@vermont.gov

State of Vermont Public Records Act

Please watch the presentation on the [Vermont Public Records Act](#) by Charity Clark, Esq. of the Vermont Office of the Attorney General to the [Vermont Climate Council meeting, November 20, 2020 \(video 2 of 2\)](#), starting at 3:32 (approximately 20 min. followed by Q&A).

Key Takeaways:

1. The Advisory Council is considered a public body.
2. A public document or public document is defined as “any written or recorded information, regardless of physical form or characteristics, which is procured or acquired in the course of public agency business.” 1 V.S.A. § 317(b).
3. The Public Records Act applies to public records that are stored in private accounts or on personal devices. When requested, public records must be produced “promptly” upon request. “Prompt” means 3 business days. 1 V.S.A § 318(a).
4. Documents considered personal, or documents subject to attorney-client privilege are exempt from Vermont’s Public Records Act.
 - a. A communication is protected by attorney-client privilege when there is existence of attorney-client relationship, the communication was made for the purpose of facilitation the rendition of proessional legal services, the client sought lawyer’s “skills and training,” or the client reasonably would have expected communications to be confidential.
 - b. A communication is considered a personal document and is therefore exempt from Vermont’s Public Records Act when the privacy of an individual is involved, it reveals intimate details of a person’s life, it might subject an individual to “embarrassment, harassment, disgrace or loss of

employment or friends,” or if it contains information that would not normally be shared with strangers.

5. You can use personal or business email addresses for Advisory Council communications, but you should understand that doing so opens any other communications in those email accounts to public records requests related to the Advisory Council.
 - a. Auto forwarding of emails to accounts outside Vermont.gov is prohibited as of March 2021.
6. Best practice would be to always include your state partner email address on Advisory Council communications, even if using your work or personal email.

State of Vermont Partner Email

You will be set up with a State of Vermont Partner email address. All Advisory Council communications will be sent to this email address once an account is established for each member.

The State of Vermont Partner email address is the preferred method of communication regarding all work AC members do relating to the VT EJ Law. AC members can use their personal or business email addresses for AC communications but doing so opens those email accounts to public records requests.

When accessing documents (such as Microsoft Word documents) for collaborative work, AC members will only be able to collaborate using their partner emails.

To activate your email address please contact the Agency of Digital Services (ADS) Help Desk at 802-498 7873 to setup your passwords. Press 1 when you get through. Once you have your password, you will need to open a browser and go to portal.office.com to login to check your email. Your email address will be first.last@partner.vermont.gov.

EJ Advisory Council Per Diem and Expenses

Members of the Advisory Council and its subcommittees are entitled to compensation for their work as an Advisory Council and/or subcommittee member.

In accordance with 32 V.S.A. § 1010, Advisory Council members are entitled to the per diem amount of \$50 a day for attendance at subcommittee or Advisory Council meetings. For any other necessary work performed, the per diem rate will be prorated for the actual time spent on the work based on an 8-hour day and must be approved by the board chair to receive reimbursement. That equates to \$6.25/hour for work outside of official Advisory Council or subcommittee meetings. The maximum compensation for all work is \$50 per day.

Invoice Submission

To set up and submit per diem payment:

1. Follow the steps in the attached document titled: [Environmental Justice Advisory Council Per Diem and Expense Guide](#) -- This guide was created to support Environmental Justice Advisory Council Members access their Per Diem payments, mileage, and meal reimbursements.
2. Submit the [Fillable Personal Expense Form](#) to Karla Raimundi (Karla.Raimundi@vermont.gov) within 30 days of the expense being incurred or the service being performed.
3. You will receive a confirmation email when your expense form has been sent to processing with the ANR finance department. Processing usually takes about one month.
4. You will receive a check in the mail.
5. If you have questions or need assistance in completing the form, please contact the EJ Coordinators (EJCoordinator@vermont.gov) or Karla Raimundi (Karla.Raimundi@vermont.gov).

It is the responsibility of the Advisory Council member to fill out and submit a completed expense form in a timely manner. The Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit is not responsible for monitoring the payment of the expense forms.