

Working On Excellence (WOE) Partnerships

Vermont Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022)

Interagency Committee and Advisory Council

Background

The concept of a “buddy system” has been named in the past among the Advisory Council (AC), in which members of the Interagency Committee (IAC) are paired with members of the AC to help deepen relationship and trust-building, establish a shared understanding of the work ahead, and center accountability. Recently, this idea resurfaced, with the named desire for a loose structure for these partnerships, with support around conversational prompts and suggested meeting regularity as well as reminders.

Covered agency staff Sarah McIlvennie (AAFMM) and Richarda Ericson (PSD) recently proposed applying adrienne maree brown’s approach of Working on Excellence (WOE) partnerships. The WOE idea is explained in brown’s book, *Emergent Strategy*, and centers on the concept that we evolve in relationships of mutual transformation (coevolution). WOE relationships build upon the importance of:

- **Practice** – your WOE relationship could be a place to practice something - name what you want to work on
- **Accountability** – your WOE can hold you accountable to your own development, help you better understand how to be present and intentional
- **Idea sharing** -- learning from one another what tools have helped you in implementing and practicing Environmental Justice techniques

“What I am noticing is that it is not a privilege to practice coevolution through friendship – it is the deepest work. I believe it is how communities have survived.” -adrienne maree brown, in *Emergent Strategy*

Participation

Participating in a WOE partnership would be opt-in. AC and IAC members should indicate their level of interest in participating in a WOE partnership through [this survey](#).

The frequency at which each WOE partnership meets can be determined by the partners based on capacity, level of interest, and the current needs of the work under the Vermont (VT) Environmental Justice (EJ) Law. It is recommended that the WOE partnerships meet at least once per quarter.

Framework

In an effort to avoid prescribing the nature of the WOE partnerships, these partnerships will have a framework that will be determined by the partners themselves. When partners first meet, discuss how the partnership will advance each of your goals, build relationships, and support implementation of the VT EJ Law. Suggested topics and/or prompts will be provided but are always optional. Here are some ideas that can help guide your thinking:

- **Focus** -- It might feel challenging to identify “what is the work we want to take on together?” We want to remind you that relationship building is often the most important work. One disclaimer we need to mention is that AC members cannot be compensated for and Environmental Justice Coordinators cannot facilitate work that expands beyond the scope of the VT EJ Law. Please keep the work of your partnerships focused on relationship building and the VT EJ Law.
- **Roles** – Be mindful of your respective roles and responsibilities under the VT EJ Law. There are some things AC members must do or must build expertise in that is not expected of the IAC, and vice versa. This is an opportunity to discover our similarities and leverage our differences.
 - **Example:** The IAC supports their covered agency in implementing deliverables under the VT EJ Law. In this way, IAC members must build expertise in policy implementation processes and specific agency processes that AC members do not need to be intimately familiar with. Recognizing this difference and focusing on work that is shared helps

1 National Life Drive, Davis 2, Montpelier, VT 05620-3901
802-828-1294 | anr.vermont.gov

WOE partners feel like their contributions are valued and their expertise is being leveraged.

- **Communication** – As outcomes develop from your partnerships, it would be helpful if you could share some of what you’re working on with the broader IAC and AC groups, and there will be opportunities to do so. The primary purpose behind these partnerships is to deepen relationships and as such there are no expectations for you to “report back,” though if you land on an idea or approach you feel would benefit others, we encourage you to share.
 - **Example:** WOE partners could email the Environmental Justice Coordinators or Sarah McIlvennie or Richarda Ericson with a bullet point summary of your WOE conversation, ideas you are considering, or suggested prompts for further discussion.