

Vermont Environmental Justice Advisory Council - Complaints Response Worksheet

Directions:

1. Start at your designated starting point - answer the question as thoroughly as possible. Record your answers **in bold**. Add any off topic questions or comments in the purple box at the bottom. Do not move on to the next section until the facilitator gives you next instructions. **(15 mins)**
2. Move to the box directly below where you started (Group 1 moves to orange, Group 5 starts back at red) - Discuss what the previous group wrote with your partner/group (discussion is key! this is not an individual activity). Add suggestions, comments, and questions - in regular font - **not bold - write your names at the end of your responses**. Rotate in a downward direction at your own pace. **(15 mins)**
3. At the facilitator's direction, return to your starting point. Read the suggestions and be ready to present your starting topic and the suggestions to the group. **(5 mins)**

Starting points:

Group 1 - Red - Trey and Gayle
Group 2 - Orange - Mariana and Walter
Group 3 - Yellow - Rich and Britaney
Group 4 - Green -

What steps should agencies take when addressing an EJ complaint? What would a good procedure be?

- The agencies need to categorize complaints and develop metrics for that.
- Agencies need to find the right people to remediate the complaint or issue.
- Agencies need to involve complainants and involve whoever was impacted in solution-building process.
- Naming that communities wouldn't even know where to send complaints *A thoughtful system needs to be put in place first and then made available clearly (Rich & Britaney)*
- Agencies need to reduce sending community members in multiple directions to file their complaints

Agree with all points! (Mariana)

- *Agencies need to track how EJ complaints are being addressed with the intent of getting to aligned responses, to ensure that all agencies are responding in a human-centered and consistent manner (Rich & Britaney) - **Agree (Mariana)***
- *Have a single person that is monitoring compliance with EJ law and signs off on reception of complaint to acknowledge before response is generated (Rich & Britaney) - **Agree (Mariana)***
- *Committed follow up to the complaints (Mariana & Walter)*

What are the elements of an EJ complaint?

- **topic/issues - description of the problem / situation**
- **Cause of the problem - if known**
- **Place / location / area**
- **Population**
- **Level of impact: Community / group / individual**
- **Name / Address / Contact info**
- **Possible remedies / solutions / what are the complainant' s needs**
- ***Ask if there's something missing, address that gap (Rich & Britaney)***

***Should be identified in an Intake form (or some mechanism that walks the person through).
Consider using the same intake forms as a Title 6 complaint - no need to reinvent wheel***

- A human person to walk the complainant through the process

How should agencies collect complaints? Written and orally? What parameters need to be considered?

- The various agencies should have multiple avenues to collect: oral, written, recorded, talk to text, voice memo, etc.
- One central database for all complaints, a central contact point to receive complaints (phone, email, mail), language accessibility is necessary (burden of provision on state, not complainant), and a dedicated staff person to receive and direct the complaints. Provide FAQ.
 - All agencies
- First come first served, highly responsive.
 - Responding as the complaints come in, set a goal of response time.
 - Staffing
 - If one complaint is more critical should it be elevated?
 - Who determines priority? - Juliet + Kim
 - What competencies and skills would that decision-making person need? - Kim
- Track pertinent agency for their respective complaint, follow-up, what was course of action, response, who resolved it
- Assess volume of incoming complaints, add staff as needed, go back to Advisory Council with updates, budget needs

What content should agencies include in their reports in the future? How should the agencies structure their summary reports?

- If the agency has a form (or mechanism) in place for collecting Title 6 complaints, then those forms could be re-written or edited to include language that allows for EJ complaints as well (MARIANA & WALTER). Perhaps there could be a brief explanation differentiating EJ from Title 6 and then have the entity complaining identify what type of complaint they think it is. Folks might not be able to differentiate necessarily what is an EJ vs Title 6, but given that there is so much overlap, we could use the same mechanism.
- *Accessible, plain language (6th grade level), translation services*
- *Iterative process, share case stories, ask for community feedback about process and effectiveness (Rich & Britaney)*
- *Metrics, how are we collecting and categorize concerns/reasons (Rich & Britaney)*
 - *Outward tracking in effort to be transparent with communities around which communities are struggling*
 - *Helps determine where invest in the future*
- *Structured in a way that is easy for AC to read. All look the same and have the same structure.*
- *Specific common sections?*

Additional Questions, Comments, Concerns

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