

**Interagency Environmental Justice (EJ) Committee
Draft Meeting Minutes
August 11, 2023**

Note to reader: These are draft minutes were compiled by Phoebes Potter, drawing on notes taken by support staff from the Agency of Natural Resources. If you would like to see any changes to these draft minutes, please reach out to phoebes.potter@vermont.gov.

Date: August 11, 2023

Meeting Time: 9:30am – 12:00pm

Location: Calvin Coolidge Conference Room (6th floor), Agency of Commerce and Community Development, 1 National Life Drive, Montpelier, VT.

Online Option: The meeting was hybrid.

Attendance (*indicates they joined virtually)

- **Interagency EJ Committee Members Present:** Abbey Willard, Amy Redman*, Claire McIlvennie, Sabina Haskell*, Xusana Davis*, Elizabeth Schilling, Stephanie Smith, Karla Raimundí, Neuvic Kalmar Malembanie, Gretel St. Lawrence and Grace Vinson representing Josh Hanford
 - **EJ Advisory Council Members Present:** Reverend Canon Walter B.A. Brownridge*
 - **Vermont State Agency Staff Present:** Phoebes Potter, Alex Lintner, Megan Cousino, Emily Rogers
 - **Members of the Public Present:** Kati Gallagher (Vermont Natural Resources Council), Michael Fernandez (Bennington Conservation District)
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Minutes organized by Agenda Topic:

Opening (~9:30am – 9:40am):

Phoebes Potter opens meeting:

- Housekeeping notes and introductions
- Reviewing [community agreements](#) for IAC and AC meetings / working together
- Review and approval of [agenda](#) (consented to by all present; no stand asides)

Core Principles of Community Engagement – Circle Process and public comment (~9:40am - 10:30am):

Note to the reader: [Draft 1](#) of the Core Principles of Community Engagement is posted on the online [meeting folder](#).

Phoebes Potter opens with explanation of exercise: IAC members go around in a circle – on their turn, invited to: 1) pass; 2) add a principle; 3) change/modify a principle; 4) thumbs up a principle.

Clarifying Questions and Discussion:

Amy Redman – Willing to talk about how you organized the principles?

Phoebes Potter – First came up with list of 18 and then reflected on whether there was a useful order. Two rough categories emerged: (1) prepare and build capacity (principles 1-9) and (2) what engagement should look like when it is happening (principles 10-18). Can be adjusted!

Elizabeth Schilling – Need more background on drafting core principles and how they will be used to inform comm engagement plans. Plans will need to be different for each agency – context for how the principles will be applied would be helpful. Don't want to set us up for failure, may not fit into agency framework, need principles that are actually doable.

Phoebes Potter – Draft up for public comment Sept. 1 including comments from agencies; Agencies have until July 2025 to write plans on how to implement.

Claire McIlvennie – Whole list feels expansive, struggled with starting to implement – how do we build capacity and how do we implement.

What would be helpful – parallel thinking, when building capacity what does building into work look like, maybe can't do it all at once, in what types of scenarios is this absolutely needed, at what level, how deep do we go when?

Grace Vinson – Method for engaging on EJ issues – have processes but don't have standardized set of community engagement plans – institute at the state level to make sure state is committed to EJ.

Elizabeth Schilling – Constraints but love the principles, what we're doing now may change. Where are we going hard to respond without knowing.

Phoebes Potter – We don't know exactly where we're going but this is part of the process. Forging a new path; should extend us past our comfort zone if we are doing it right.

Circle Process Feedback:

Abbey Willard – Thumbs up to #3 building internal capacity, setting intention and targets; #18 accountability

Principles are what we're aiming for – create space for implementation but also create space for growth, while holding ourselves accountable.

Neuvic – Two levels of work at agency and how do we work together with agency to implement. Did a great job at relaying principles. I am a part of the work – I am being considered. Agencies feel represented and appreciated opportunity to provide feedback.

Stephanie – Feeling behind because of flood emergency, #7 systemic barriers for reaching communities, statutory requirements that butt up against goals, #8 coordinating with other agencies – interagency engagement plans, so much overlap with outreach need to figure out how to coordinate.

Grace – Thumbs up Stephanie’s comments; #9 we can get really siloed and need to work on this; need to work with orgs working with communities. Go to them instead of waiting for them to come to us – they have expertise.

Gretel – #16 commit time to doing it well; take time after engaging to assess engagement and actually implement suggestions from engagement.

Amy – #5 thumbs up – Incorporating and explicitly stating EJ Law language into principles; #10 compensation – being more explicit again, what are recommendations? The more explicit the better!

Sabina – Administering Act 250 Law as it is written, do not do a good job reaching impacted populations currently. Need to work on this but also need legislative and statute changes to actually reach appropriate populations.

Xusana – #4 thumbs up; #6 modify – what they really mean, don’t make things too different for current populations, often about maintaining character of community. In practice, don’t seek to pattern match, current patterns are incongruous with where we should / need to be.

Karla – Thumbs up #1 and #10 these two are catching attention because they speak to onus on agencies / work of state to ensure we are overcoming barriers to engagement. Modify #5 make it explicit – incorporate language from the EJ Law, support structures trying to advance.

Claire – Pass.

Abbey Willard – Pass, verbalize effort to analyze #11 – what do we mean by this principle?

Neuvic – Emphasize #11 suggestions – Emphasize how Act 154 can take into consideration diversity and inclusion work. Represents people that do not have a chance to represent themselves, feel responsible for doing that – if they are not represented may slip into tendency of status quo, we want to make things different.

Elizabeth - #3 thumbs up. Modify compensating communities wording “advocate for budgets that allow them to compensate community members.”

Stephanie – Agree with Elizabeth’s comment on compensation wording changing; how do we do both groundwork and implementation at the same time?*10:15: Open for public comments*

Kati – Thumbs up #4 and #8. These two in particular enable agency change and integrate EJ work fully into agency work.

Michael – No one else from southern VT present at the meeting. Representing this problem. Resource conservation districts doing this engagement work for a long time. People don’t feel represented at the table – Conservation districts are partners at the table willing to engage and do the work, please engage with us.

10:15-10:30: Circle continues with open invite for public comment

Grace – Thumbs up #11. Putting things in plain language is very important. Technical assistance materials from the Agency of Natural Resource Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit are great models.

Gretel – Accessibility. We talk about it but we don’t know what it means in practice – coordinate and learn from other agencies that have had success in this area.

Amy – Thumbs up #12 meeting community members where they’re at. Show up and be present. Add being mindful of white comfort – entering spaces being mindful of how we show up in spaces we are invited to.

Sabina – Pass.

Xusana – Reflect on comments from round about plain language. Developmental Disability Council key resources. Language access report from Racial Equity Office another key resource.

Principles being practiced give hope. State government needs to commit to owning these principles and in doing so working to ways that actually allow us to do the principles – money for compensation being budgeted into budgets etc.

Karla – Captured position on feedback about Michael’s comment on donation based compensation. We have to overcome barriers to implementing principles like compensation, reflect plain language. Thumbs up on principles about planning. Important to utilize existing guidance for community engagement – don’t reinvent the wheel, tap into preexisting structures. Shift burden from communities to state government – rebalancing power dynamic and structure. Addressing systemic barriers #7 incredibly important. How we enter spaces to do this work will help us shift power imbalance?

Claire – Reaction to Elizabeth’s language change suggestion. Don’t change because the principle is the goal. How can we change to reach the principles not how can the principles change to work for agencies.

Breakout Sessions - Core Principles of Community Engagement (~10:30am – 11:00am)

Note to the reader: [Draft 1](#) of the Core Principles of Community Engagement is posted on the online [meeting folder](#). Breakout sessions used this [handout](#) to guide their conversations.

NOTES FROM GROUP 1: Principles 1-5

Attendees: Stephanie Smith, Abbey Willard, Michael Fernandez (public)

Suggestion for additional principle: Shift State of Vermont mind set toward technical assistance over regulatory focus.

Principle 4 (Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships): why does it matter:

- Value of “educate before and while you educate” model. NRC approach to engaging producers. VEM example: pre-monitoring visits to ensure following requirements rather than following up afterward that results in taking back funds.

Principle 3 (Build your agency’s internal capacity for meaningful engagement): actional ways agencies can put principle into practice:

- Build State of Vermont capacity through engagement with trusted community-based organizations to learn successful public engagement strategies.
- Community organizations function with more flexibility. AAFM & VEM Ex.: increase allocation to NRCs and RPCs so they can offer compensation to the public, who can gather at the community level. Easier to start here than change procurement laws for state government.
- Longer term action: Create EJ position capacity at each EJ participating Agency/Department - start process in FY25 with coordinated ask for EJ positions within each interagency - Recognize that this ask may take a few years to accomplish

NOTES FROM GROUP 2: Principles 6-9 (virtual)

Attendees: Xusana Davis (ORE), Sabina Haskell (NRB), Amy Redman (VDH), Megan Cousino (DEC), Reverend Walter Brownridge (EJ Advisory Council Member), Kati Gallagher (VNRC)

Principle 6 (Consider the local and historical context of communities you seek to engage):

- XD – ensure we're not pattern-matching and perpetuating historical segregation/exclusion in the name of "character of community" or other sameness-seeking approaches
- SH – agree with XD on this one, trying to keep it the way it always was doesn't always sound good, coordinate frequently with other agencies but not always as well as we could

- SH – administer laws that were created by legislature and what that means
- AR – historical context that is by design, is this the future that we want, social ecology tie in, do we need resources or education here? what are the action items to build in more understanding?

Principle 7 (Address systemic barriers to reaching particular communities):

- XD / AR – feels vague
- AR – this is a root cause
- XD – this one may be addressed in others, words need to be said, would this be better in an intro
- AR – should be in all of them, want more explicit call out of focus populations, incorporate more language from the law throughout core principles
- WB – called this one out and wants more detail throughout

Principle 8 (Coordinate with other agencies - de-silo policy conversations & share resources)

- XD – much of work is getting agencies on same page, have same understanding, people are enthusiastic about the work, not always aligned with statewide vision that we are looking to create
- XD – importance of sharing resources, example of receiving a training from an outside source and trying to have multiple agencies take that same training when jobs are similar
- AR – do we use these principles to start pointing people in directions, pull for collective actions
- SH – when agencies start to set priorities, it can start creating new silos/ re-silo, is there a statewide team that can help with connections, as a regular Vermonter you can get pretty bogged down in state bureaucracy and how we operate. State government navigator is needed.
- XD – Justin Kenney and his team at Chief Performance Office may be able to play a role in helping with connections.
- XD – what actionable responsibility is Legislature and Judiciary taking in helping to move this forward?
- SH – receives complaints that you need to hire in experts/lawyers to get through law, shuts the door for people that can't afford that.

Principle 9 (Collaborate with local, trusted community-based organizations):

- AR – VDH has funds right now that has allowed for more community partners, funds are going to end, how do they keep up these relationships without the resources, needing to have point of contact between local and state orgs, also don't want to overburden community partners, need good coordination and communication
- XD – trusted by whom is a question, who the state trusts vs who the community trusts, what does it mean for a group to be trusted or local, can have a bias for larger organizations, does it mean unique and boutique
- SH – think local should be who the community trusts

- XD – takes us to 6 and whether we are pattern matching
- AR – are we looking to take out trusted or define what local means
- XD – would cut local before trusted, think we need to clarify the trust piece

Question from public during breakout session:

- KG – is the thinking that each agency will be engaging in their own community engagement process? Feels close to overburdening people with how many organizations are trying to engage (state, non-profit, and others)
- XD – “engagement fatigue”
- AR – need a directory/map of community partners, have lots of transparency
- SH – create a list for how to move through state government for the public

NOTES FROM GROUP 3: Principles 10-13

Attendees: Claire McIlvennie, Gretel St. Lawrence, Elizabeth Schilling, Phoebes Potter (EJ Coordinator)

Principle 10 (Compensate community members for their expertise and efforts): suggested refinement or clarifications:

- Add sentence acknowledging that legislature must support this work
- In first sentence also make note (or somewhere) compensation for community-based organizations, not just participants.
- Cross-agency consistency is important in setting compensation expectations if we want to collaborate, break-down silos, promote equity.

Principle 10 (Compensate community members for their expertise and efforts): why does it matter?

- Fundamental to participation
- Equity
- We are actively seeking input from low-income communities for whom there are real financial burdens for participation

Principle 10 (Compensate community members for their expertise and efforts): actionable ways agencies can put principle into practice:

- Advocate for compensation to be included in budgets
- Highlighting structural barriers to achieving principle

Principle 10 (Compensate community members for their expertise and efforts): related resources:

- Community engagement budgeting tool already created (Claire will share)
- DEC pilot report has compensation structure that could be used

Principle 11 (Accessible and inclusive outreach): suggested refinements or clarifications:

- Need for organizational change management and learning from other’s experience implementing accessibility practices, such as Language Access
- Technical assistance and coordinated trainings. Consider phases to implementation.

Principle 11 (Accessible and inclusive outreach): why it matters:

- Flood response, covid: translation services. Need to learn, faster response time. Lean into flood experience as reason for investments.

Principle 11 (Accessible and inclusive outreach): actional ways agencies can put principle into practice:

- Collaborate with community-based organizations

Principle 11 (Accessible and inclusive outreach): resources:

- Office of Racial Equity, Language Access plan and resources
- Plain language training

NOTES FROM GROUP 4: Principles 14-18

Attendees: Karla Raimundi, Neuvic Kalmar Malembanie, Grace Vinson

Suggested clarifications or refinements?

Principle 14 (Transparency from inception):

- Recommend moving last paragraph to principle 18. Add a) transparency helps build trust, b) communicate challenges openly, and c) scope of project, d) if assurances are made, follow up.
- Add that transparency includes a recognition of historical harms and barriers for access of community being engaged with.

Principle 15 (Work toward a yes):

- Recognize that this implies a paradigm shift and identifies an approach consistent with adequate public service. Add: empathy and respect as modifiers of “listen generously”.

Principle 16 (Commit enough time to do engagement well):

- Allow flexibility with deadlines

Principle 17 (Iterative and adaptive approach to community engagement):

- Add cross-reference to principle #16 and that an iterative approach to community engagement should underpin a meaningful conversation. Add as a factor to “implementation approach” communities’ feedback.

Why does the principle matter?

#14 – builds trust

#15 – supports a paradigm shift

#17 – how can one be adaptive and iterate a work product if there's no flexibility with deadlines?

Actionable ways agencies can put principle into practice?

#14: develop engagement workplan per agency action requirement engagement. Share engagement workplan with relevant stakeholders and community, from initial stages, and allow for feedback; include challenges, and items out of scope. Build in feedback process, at various stages. Update agency community engagement plan regularly.

#16: provide for longer public comment periods and more than one at different stages of the process. Advertise for longer and using more diverse media. Identify central repository for media and advertisement outlets. Add cross reference to #19.

Resources or tools to aid implementation?

Generally no. Agencies are responsible for creating tools needed to ensure these principles are considered meaningfully and are impactful.

Group discussion on covered agency implementation & next steps (~11:10am – 12:00pm)

Phoebes – How do we take these ideas back to agencies and get them ready to do groundwork and implement?

- [Covered Agency Guidebook](#)
- [Guide to the Core Principles of Community Engagement](#) – prompts on page 11

Prompt for circle process: How ready is your agency to start working on this (or other short-term deliverables)? Rate 1 (I'm holding the bag, feel alone and overwhelmed) to 5 (fully ready, staffed, and resourced) and name one thing that would help move you closer to a 5.

Claire – 2.5. Right in the middle. Working to put leadership meeting on schedule about deliverables. Squeaky wheel since passing, funding for community engagement, don't have team in place yet.

Abbey Willard – 1.5. Not afraid to bring up to leadership. Have talked about it, but no plan, action, strategy, etc. There is interest and appreciation but what is needed (increased capacity) is not available. Needs models and examples to modify and implement – no capacity to be creative / come up with own models. Unfortunately, not in position to brainstorm and develop.

Neuvic – Alone, but didn't show up here by myself. Was recommended to show up and participate. Feeling like doesn't know where to begin. Needs agency to give him folks to do the work.

Elizabeth – 1-1.5. Just started. Has the binder, which is helpful. People in agency are aware. Support for advertising meeting. Not a great grasp on requirements, not a proactive approach.

Stephanie – Department of Public Safety is a -2. But Vermont Emergency Management is a 1.5-2. Moving things forward – have binder. Still in flood response, capacity tapped out with that. Over next couple of months set up meetings with leadership, examples of what that looks like would be helpful.

Grace – Communicating with Josh. Need to communicate with Commissioner. Sentiment in agency that since they do housing for low-income households, they are already doing EJ. Need to improve, not very good enthusiasm.

Gretel – Finding ways to spark enthusiasm and motivation because work will be done better if it is collaborative.

Amy – 3.25-3.5. Health equity team exists. Pulling together ad hoc group already doing similar work. Department commissioners looped in. She sees a pathway forward. Her contract and other contracts for supportive staff ends in May 2024.

Sabina – Enormous amount on plate administer law make sure it's being abided by. Uncertainty about statute, no idea how to get work started.

Xusana – Agency of Administration is a 2.5. Not because of substantive challenges but because of how involved agency will need to be at every phase. Group will need to lean on Agency of Administration and understand lead time needed – agency must be prepared for influx of work related to EJ Law implementation.

Karla – Examples?

Xusana – Liaisons to several Agency of Administration offices – need to coordinate analysts, contracts, etc.

Karla – Alex, Phoebes and I situated in the Agency of Natural Resources. One-person part-time show (only Karla) until recently. Have support of leadership. Have network of individuals representing departments and divisions. Readiness for it all 2-2.5 conservative because so many individuals needed to make work happen. For community engagement specifically feel at 3-3.5 – Agency has done prior contracts.

Circle process with prompt complete. Discussion moved to concrete next steps.

Phoebes – Revisit potential roadshow idea. Roadshow to get leadership talking across agencies; who should be involved?

Stephanie – Have to work across agencies on the day to day, how does this group relate to roadshow?

Xusana – Suggests bring a friend approach. Worried about buy-in. Demonstrate interconnectedness of the work. Not optional. Can't rely on single representative. Need to work across agencies to demonstrate interconnectedness and needs.

Karla – Create support system for Interagency EJ Committee members. Benefit from better understanding of each agency's functions, responsibilities, and operations. Contribute to better understanding of how we can collaborate and work together toward common goal. Idea – Agencies who are ahead pairing up with agencies not as far to help bring them along.

Elizabeth – How do we engage with public already? Would that be helpful?

Phoebes – Worksheet to support program review (page 17 the [Covered Agency Guidebook](#)). How agencies are already doing EJ work/community engagement.

Public comment period (~11:45am – 12:00pm)

Emily – Interagency coordination standard operating procedures needed.

Michael – Resource conservation districts at a 5-6 readiness level. We're already doing it and have the processes in place to do the work. Happy to contribute and be helpful and facilitate process.

There were no more public comments so the conversation about next steps resumed.

Abbey Willard – What should roadshow look like? Buck up and present to leadership/responsible parties in agency. As phase one of roadshow. Phase 2 is sharing best practices (ANR team, other agencies making progress, etc.). Feels responsibility on my shoulders to do phase 1 (with EJ Coordinator support).

Claire – Trying to schedule a meeting in early September with leadership to come up with plan to meet requirements. Series of director level meetings last fall. Phoebes/Alex come to that meeting to answer questions in real time. Anxiety about deadlines. Need to start having conversations now.

Phoebes – We can support meetings as initial prep for roadshow; roadshow phase two with covered agencies giving examples of how work is currently being done, etc.

Karla – Open up internal meetings to other agencies if interested so that more coordination can happen.

Phoebes – Early stages of setting legislative priorities. Priorities include increased per diems for EJ Advisory Council, expand capacity / resources for agencies, shifting due dates. Importance of building coalition to advocate for shared needs.

Alex – Proposed tangible next step for gathering legislative priority input from Interagency Committee members. Survey? One on one convos? Another method?

Elizabeth – Survey works. Interagency EJ Committee members are not steeped in this work every day but EJ Coordinators are.

Claire – Staffing problems. Timeline changes with staff versus without staff / additional capacity.

Abbey Willard – Not going to get EJ positions we ask for, but we should ask to start the conversation. Build in resources to support community organizations to do early work to that state government does not currently have capacity for but we could pay others that do to do the work. Nervous about blowing by timelines and deadlines. Wants to stick to them and not disregard them.

Michael – Geographic representation from East and South in these bodies needed. Have Resource Conservation District representative in Advisory Council; suggests a Resource Conservation District representative for the Interagency Committee too. Resource Conservation Districts are important resources to tap into throughout this process.