



A guide to support the development of the core principles of community engagement

Created to aid the implementation of the Vermont
Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022).

This is a living document.

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Note to the reader

Welcome reader! The goal of this guide is to provide foundational information about the **core principles of community engagement**, the first deliverable of the Vermont (VT) Environmental Justice (EJ) Law ([Act 154 of 2022](#)).

Before diving into the content, a couple of items to note:

- We want to hear from you! If you have advice about this packet’s contents, please fill out our public input [survey](#).
- If you come across words and terminology that are unfamiliar while reading this packet, please consult the **glossary** at the end of this packet.
- This is a **living document** prepared by the EJ Coordinators. A living document is a text that is continually updated and modified to reflect changes in circumstances, knowledge, or understanding. So, it remains relevant and adaptable over time rather than being static.
- This guide is informed by the contributions of the [Environmental Justice Advisory Council](#) and [Interagency Environmental Justice Committee](#). Special thanks to Jennifer Byrne for her invaluable support.
- This document is only intended to be a guide. Please refer to the VT [EJ Law](#) itself for the complete enacted language.

Nondiscrimination statement and language access

The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) operates its programs, services, and activities without discriminating on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, national origin (including limited English proficiency), ancestry, place of birth, disability, age, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or breastfeeding (mother and child).

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Introduction to the core principles of community engagement

Meaningful community engagement is a central pillar of environmental justice and the VT EJ Law ([Act 154 of 2022](#)).

The VT EJ Law requires that State agencies create and adopt community engagement plans to provide the opportunity for the meaningful participation of all individuals, with particular attention to environmental justice populations, in the development, implementation, or enforcement of any law, regulation, or policy.

Developing core principles of community engagement is the first deliverable of the VT EJ Law. The ten State agencies covered under the VT EJ Law (the “covered agencies”) will apply these core principles as they develop and adopt their community engagement plans (due in 2025). These principles will be developed by the Interagency EJ Committee, in consultation with the EJ Advisory Council and the Agency of Natural Resources.

Excerpt from the VT EJ Law: Sec. 1. FINDINGS

(16) The 1991 Principles of Environmental Justice adopted by The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit demand the right of all individuals to participate as equal partners at every level of decision making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.

Core principles of community engagement as written in the VT EJ Law

“The Interagency Committee shall (. . .) develop, in consultation with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Environmental Justice Advisory Council, a set of core principles to guide and coordinate the development of the State agency community engagement plans (. . .).” 3 V.S.A. § 6006 (c)(2)(B).

The covered agencies’ “[c]ommunity engagement plans shall align with the core principles developed by the Interagency Environmental Justice Committee (. . .) and take into consideration the recommendations of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (. . .). Each plan shall describe how the agency plans to provide meaningful participation in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.” 3 V.S.A. § 6004(c).



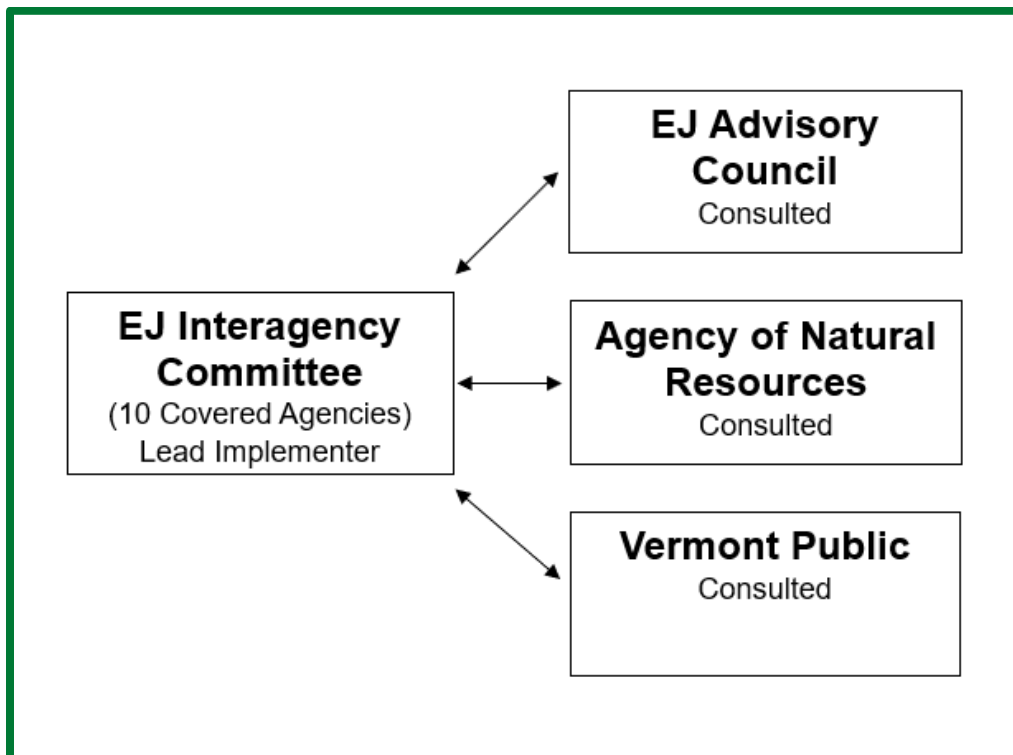
Deadline for the core principles of community engagement

September 1, 2023

As enacted, the VT EJ Law established July 1, 2023 as the deadline for finalizing the core principles of community engagement. However, due to the EJ Advisory Council per diem authorization issue encountered in March 2023 (now resolved), the Legislature has been informed that this deadline will not be met. The new internal deadline is September 1, 2023.

Roles and responsibilities

- The Interagency Committee is the lead implementer for developing the core principles.
- The Advisory Council and Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) are supporting implementation by consulting with the Interagency Committee.
- The public is another key stakeholder who will be consulted.

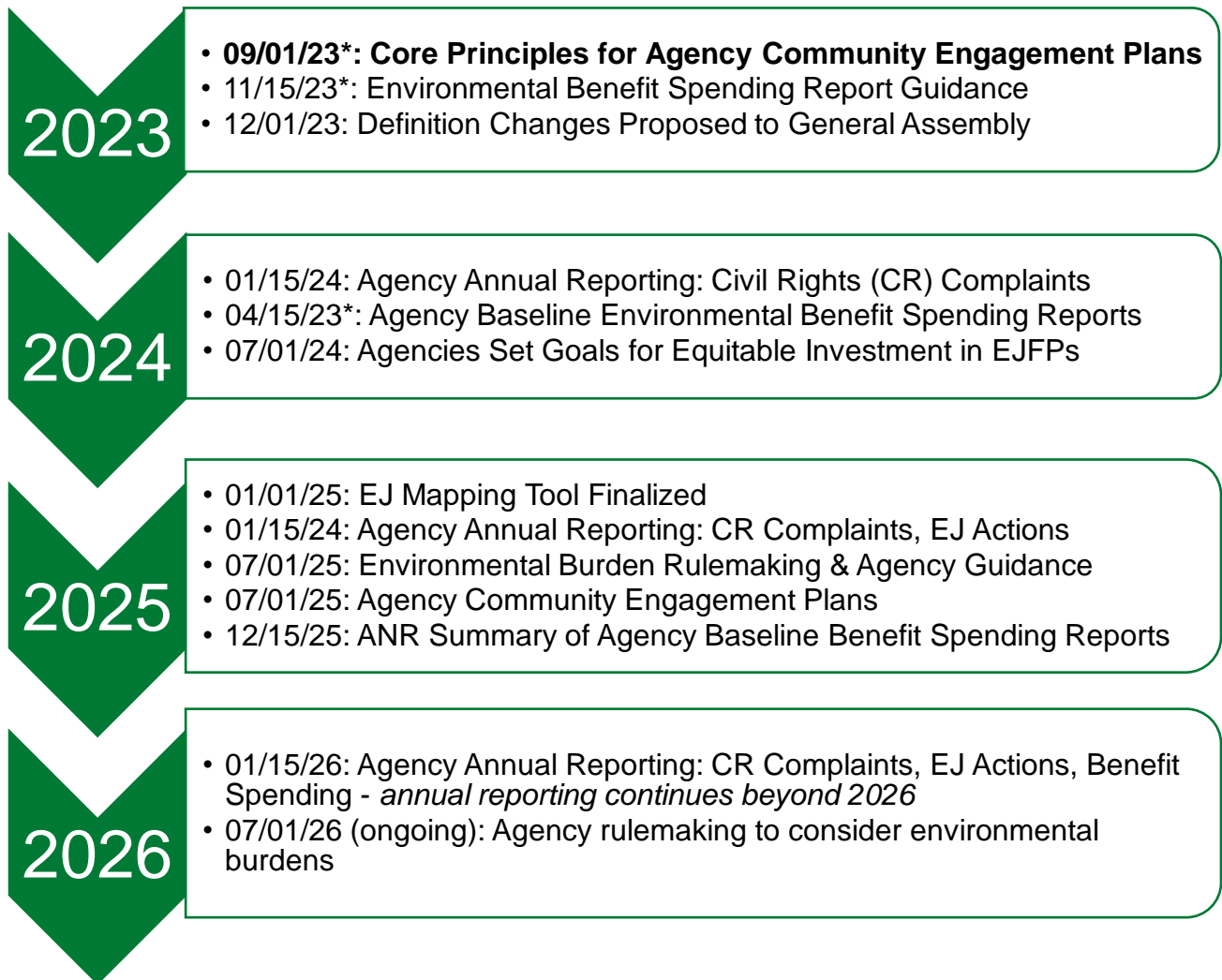




How do the core principles of community engagement relate to other deliverables?

This is the first deliverable of the VT EJ Law ([Act 154 of 2022](#)). These core principles will guide covered agencies as they develop their Community Engagement Plans (due on July 1, 2025). Community engagement is embedded into the development of all subsequent EJ Law deliverables.

Timeline of VT EJ Law Deliverables



*Note: Due date reflects a two-month extension resulting from a two-month delay required to statutorily authorize per diem payments for EJ Advisory Council members during the 2023 Legislative Session.



Timeline & suggested process for working together

This section is intended to guide a group discussion at the next convening of the EJ Advisory Council and Interagency EJ Committee. The following table suggests a process for developing the core principles of community engagement. Please review the table and prompts below which will be used to guide the development of a work plan for completing the core principles of community engagement.

Date	Advisory Council (AC)	Interagency Committee (IAC)	Agency of Natural Resources (ANR)
Jun 2023	Review expectations for core principles	Review expectations for core principles	Plan convening of AC and IAC in July
	Share materials to add to resource library	Share materials to add to resource library	Compile, synthesize, and share resources
Jul 2023	Suggest guidance for core principles of community engagement	Draft core principles based on AC and public input	Convene IAC and AC on July 18, 2023
	Provide opportunities for the public to give input on principles		Provide AC and IAC with technical assistance as needed
Aug 2023	Provide opportunities for the public to give input on principles	Finalize and consent to core principles alongside AC	Provide AC and IAC with technical assistance as needed
	Review and consent to final core principles		
Sep 2023		Final principles made available to the public	Post final principles online



Additional Work Plan Details for Discussion

The prompts below will be used at our next convening as we create a work plan for completing the core principles of community engagement.

Who will do what between meetings to develop the core principles of community engagement?

- Would it help to establish a task group or subcommittee? If so, are there any external stakeholders we want to invite to participate in or advise that task group or subcommittee?
- Should we schedule smaller working group sessions between our joint group meetings?
- Should we establish internal deadlines for reviewing and giving feedback on drafts?
- What role can the EJ Coordinators play to help consolidate feedback and finalize the draft?
- How can we ensure that we comply with [open meeting laws](#) while working together?

Who will do what to gather public input on the core principles of community engagement?

- Who will you contact directly to encourage public input on the core principles of community engagement?
- What mechanisms can we use to share the public input [survey](#)? Do we want to use this survey or develop another survey?
- What events are already taking place where we can share about our work and gather input from community members?
- Should we hold our own public input sessions?



Facilitated prompts for stakeholders

Prompts for the General Public

- Have you been involved in Vermont State government community engagement efforts in the past? What worked? What did not work? What would you like to see changed? Bring your thoughts and reflections to public meetings of the [Advisory Council](#) and [Interagency Committee](#).
- Submit a community engagement principle by filling out this [survey](#). Your submission will be shared directly with the EJ Advisory Council and Interagency EJ Committee.

Additional ways for the public to stay engaged with the VT EJ Law

Interested in hearing about upcoming engagement opportunities related to the EJ Law? Request to join the VT EJ Law mailing list by filling out this [survey](#). Once you join our mailing list, you will receive updates on upcoming meetings, community engagement sessions, and other opportunities.

Prompts for Advisory Council Members

Compile and share resources

- If you have not done so already, please share resources that inform how you approach community engagement with the EJ Coordinators (contact information on page 2). EJ Coordinators are working to compile, synthesize, and share study resources with the Advisory Council, Interagency Committee, and public on the [Online Resource Library](#).

Brainstorm best practices

- What are some best practices for community engagement for the community you represent on the [Advisory Council](#)?
- Now working backwards, what principles underlie those best practices?

Brainstorm common missteps

- What are the most common missteps you have seen with community engagement by government agencies?
- What principles can we develop that counteract these missteps?



Suggest how Interagency EJ Committee should approach drafting the core principles of community engagement

- What principles or other advice would you suggest guide how State agencies ensure the meaningful and equitable participation of all Vermonters, with special consideration of environmental justice focus populations?
- What principles or other advice would you suggest regarding how State agencies resource, organize, and coordinate community engagement efforts across government to reduce the burden on local communities?

Suggest how the core principles of community engagement should be used through EJ Law implementation

- Once finalized, how should the Advisory Council and Interagency Committee use the core principles of community engagement to conduct engagement related to the VT EJ Law implementation? For instance, how could we apply these principles while developing the environmental benefit spending guidance (due November 15, 2023)?

Prompts for Interagency Committee Members

Note: The following prompts suggest actions that will prepare you and your agency to contribute to the development of the Core Principles of Community Engagement. These prompts also include actions that will prepare you and your agency to create and adopt the community engagement plans.

Prepare your Agency for EJ Law implementation

- ☐ **Inform agency staff of the requirements of the VT EJ Law regarding community engagement. Consider:**
 - Different approaches to ensure everyone from senior leadership to frontline staff are aware of the agency's obligations under the EJ Law. Examples of approaches to share information with agency staff include factsheets, all staff trainings, SharePoint / Teams sites, etc. Reach out to the EJ Coordinators to brainstorm ideas.
 - How to generate buy-in from agency leadership that this community engagement planning process is important and needs dedicated resources.
 - How to sustain ongoing, two-way dialogue with staff throughout the drafting of the Core Engagement Principles and agency Community Engagement Plan.



- ❑ **Identify staff from your agency that can be part of a task group or network to support you with:**
 - Providing supporting documents and input during the drafting of the Core Principles of Community Engagement (due Sep 1, 2023).
 - Conducting an agency-wide assessment of community engagement practices guided by the Core Engagement Principles (additional guidance forthcoming).
 - Drafting your agency's community engagement plan (due July 1, 2025, additional guidance forthcoming).
 - Continuously identifying and engaging stakeholders in the work.

Contribute to the drafting of the core principles of community engagement

- ❑ **Compile and share readily available information from your agency regarding:**
 - Any written policies, best practices, frameworks, checklists, or other guidance used to inform community engagement within your agency.
 - Any other information that may inform the drafting of the Core Community Engagement Principles.

- ❑ **Review best practices for community engagement compiled in the learning library (see below) and consider the following:**
 - What principles and best practices are being identified as important when directly engaging members of the community?
 - What actions does your agency need to take to sustain ongoing, relationship-based community engagement? Consider staffing patterns, funding levels and restrictions on use, the role of external contractors, etc.
 - What actions could your agency (or the State more generally) take to build the capacity of local communities to meaningfully participate in environmental decision-making?
 - How can cross-program or cross-agency coordination support meaningful community engagement and break down silos?



- Where does your agency currently fall on [Rosa González's Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)? What would need to happen for your agency to move toward greater community ownership?

□ Work with other Interagency Committee members to collectively draft the core principles of community engagement

- Review recommendations from Advisory Council and the public to collectively draft:
 - Principles to guide how State agencies ensure meaningful participation with Vermonters, with special consideration of environmental justice focus populations.
 - Principles to guide how State agencies resource, organize, and coordinate community engagement efforts across government to reduce the burden on local communities.

□ Use Core Principles During EJ Law Implementation

- Work with Advisory Council members to identify how to use these principles to conduct community engagement related to the VT EJ Law implementation? For instance, how could we apply these principles while developing the environmental benefit spending guidance (due November 15, 2023)?



Online resource library

The EJ Law [online resource library](#) includes an evolving collection of resources related to equitable community engagement. The library is maintained and regularly updated by the EJ Coordinators and is accessible to the general public. The resources found in the library were co-curated by the EJ Advisory Council, the Interagency EJ Committee, the Agency of Natural Resources, and community partners.

The resources found in the library are wide-ranging. In the section below, a few key resources have been identified. Please visit the [online resource library](#) to explore the full range of learning resources available. You can scan the QR code to visit the library.

To submit suggestions for resources to add to the library, please fill out this [survey](#) or reach out to the EJ Coordinators (contact information on page 2).



Key resources in the online resource library

KEY RESOURCE #1

Title: [Guiding Principles for a Just Transition](#)

Creator(s): Vermont Climate Council, Just Transitions Subcommittee, Kiah Morris

Background: This document was created by the Just Transitions Subcommittee, a subcommittee of the Vermont Climate Council established by the Global Warming Solutions Act (Act 153 of 2020). This document established six guiding principles for a Just Transition in Vermont. Just Transition is a framework that centers workers and frontline communities as we collectively transition from extractive economies to regenerative economies in response to the climate crisis. In addition to these guiding principles, this document includes questions that are intended to assess equity and justice implications of Climate Council actions.



KEY RESOURCE #2

Title: [Connecting People to Power](#): Community Engagement Pilot Report and Planning Recommendations to the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation

Creator(s): Britaney Watson, Susannah McCandless, Jennifer Byrne, Ginny McGinn; Center for Whole Communities, Rights and Democracy Institute, Vermont Law and Graduate School Environmental Justice Clinic.

Background: This report was funded by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) within the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR). The report details an 18-month community engagement pilot program conducted by the Center for Whole Communities, Rights and Democracy Institute, and the Vermont Law School Environmental Justice Clinic. The report includes the stories of several Vermont communities directly impacted by environmental burdens and details guidance for equitable and inclusive community engagement. Included alongside the report is an online resource [folder](#).

KEY RESOURCE #3

Title: [Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership](#)

Creator(s): Rosa González at Facilitating Power

Background: This public participation tool helps chart a pathway from community engagement to community-driven ownership. The tool can help agencies set goals to transform current systems of public participation.



Glossary

The goal of this glossary is to support reader comprehension. Definitions of terms are pulled from a wide array of sources. Citations are provided. Whenever possible, definitions were taken from the Vermont EJ Law ([Act 154 of 2022](#)) or resources in the [online resource library](#).

Glossary of key terms

Term	Definition
Agency of Natural Resources (ANR)	“The Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) is charged with oversight and management of Vermont's natural environment on behalf of the people of Vermont. [The Agency endeavors] to draw from and build upon Vermonters' shared ethic of responsibility for our natural environment, an ethic that encompasses a sense of place, community and quality of life, and an understanding that we are an integral part of the environment, and that we must all be responsible stewards for this and future generations.” Source of definition: Agency of Natural Resources
Community	“A community is a group of people who are brought together by something in common. This can include things like cultural background, shared experience, and geographic location. One person can belong to many different communities.” Source of definition: Washington State Department of Health
Community Engagement	“The process of working collaboratively with and through groups of people affiliated by geographic proximity, special interest, or similar situations to address issues affecting the wellbeing of those people. It is a powerful vehicle for bringing about environmental and behavioral changes that will improve the health of the community and its members. It often involves partnerships and coalitions that help mobilize resources and influence systems, change relationships among partners, and serve as catalysts for changing policies, programs, and practices.” Source of definition: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Community Engagement Plans	A community engagement plan is a document that describes how the covered State agencies will provide meaningful participation to all individuals, with particular attention to environmental justice



	<p>focus populations, in the development, implementation, or enforcement of any law, regulation, or policy.</p> <p>“Each of the covered agencies shall create and adopt on or before July 1, 2025 a community engagement plan that describes how the agency will engage with environmental justice focus populations as it evaluates new and existing activities and programs. Community engagement plans shall align with the core principles developed by the Interagency Environmental Justice Committee (...) and take into consideration the recommendations of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council (...). Each plan shall describe how the agency plans to provide meaningful participation in compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law</p>
<p>Covered Agencies</p>	<p>“Covered agencies” include “the following State agencies, departments, and bodies: the Agencies of Natural Resources, of Transportation, of Commerce and Community Development, of Agriculture, Food and Markets, and of Education; the Public Utility Commission; the Natural Resources Board; and the Departments of Health, of Public Safety, and of Public Service.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law</p>
<p>Deliverable</p>	<p>Generally, a deliverable is an element of output within the scope of a project. It is the result of objective-focused work completed within the project process. Within the context of the VT EJ Law, a deliverable is the final work product created through the implementation process of the VT EJ Law. Examples of deliverables in the VT EJ Law include the Core Principles of Community Engagement or the VT State EJ Map.</p>
<p>Environmental Justice</p>	<p>“Environmental justice means all individuals are afforded equitable access to and distribution of environmental benefits; equitable distribution of environmental burdens; and fair and equitable treatment and meaningful participation in decision-making processes, including the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice recognizes the particular needs of individuals of every race, color, income, class, ability status, gender identity, sexual orientation, national origin, ethnicity or ancestry, religious belief, or English language proficiency level. Environmental justice redresses structural and institutional racism, colonialism, and other systems of oppression that result in the marginalization, degradation, disinvestment, and neglect of Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color. Environmental justice requires providing a proportional amount of resources for community revitalization, ecological restoration, resilience planning, and a just recovery to</p>



	communities most affected by environmental burdens and natural disasters.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law
Environmental Justice Advisory Council	“The Environmental Justice Advisory Council (Advisory Council) provides independent advice and recommendations to State agencies and the General Assembly on matters relating to environmental justice, including the integration of environmental justice principles into State programs, policies, regulations, legislation, and activities.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law
Environmental Justice Focus Population	“Environmental justice focus population means any census block group in which: (A) the annual median household income is not more than 80 percent of the State median household income; (B) Persons of Color and Indigenous Peoples comprise at least six percent or more of the population; or (C) at least one percent or more of households have limited English proficiency.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law
Interagency Environmental Justice Committee	“The Interagency Environmental Justice Committee (Interagency Committee) shall guide and coordinate State agency implementation of the Environmental Justice State Policy and provide recommendations to the General Assembly for amending the definitions and protections.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law
Meaningful participation	“Meaningful participation means that all individuals have the opportunity to participate in energy, climate change, and environmental decision making. Examples include needs assessments, planning, implementation, permitting, compliance and enforcement, and evaluation. Meaningful participation also integrates diverse knowledge systems, histories, traditions, languages, and cultures of Indigenous communities in decision-making processes. It requires that communities are enabled and administratively assisted to participate fully through education and training. Meaningful participation requires the State to operate in a transparent manner with regard to opportunities for community input and also encourages the development of environmental, energy, and climate change stewardship.” Source of definition: VT EJ Law



Glossary of acronyms

Acronym	What does the acronym stand for?
AC	Advisory Council
ANR	Agency of Natural Resources
CA	Covered Agency
CR	Civil Rights
DEC	Department of Environmental Conservation
EJ	Environmental Justice
EJFP	Environmental Justice Focus Populations
IAC	Interagency Committee
VT	Vermont



The covered agencies under the VT EJ Law

Covered Agency	Acronym
Agency of Agriculture, Food and Markets	VAAFM
Agency of Commerce and Community Development	ACCD
Agency of Education	AOE
Agency of Natural Resources	ANR
Agency of Transportation	AOT
Department of Health	VDH
Department of Public Safety	DPS
Department of Public Service	PSD
Natural Resources Board	NRB
Office of Racial Equity*	ORE
Public Utility Commission	PUC

*The Office of Racial Equity (ORE) is not technically a “covered agency.” However, the Office of Racial Equity has one representative on both the Environmental Justice Advisory Council and Interagency Environmental Justice Committee.