Reference Material

Suggestions for the Core Principles of Community Engagement received from the Interagency EJ Committee, EJ Advisory Council, and members of the public.

This document includes suggestions from the Interagency EJ Committee members, as well as notes from EJ Advisory Council members and the public during the July 18, 2023 listening session. It shows where each of these ideas was incorporated into Draft 1 of the core principles of community engagement, put together by the EJ Coordinators.

Principles Suggested by the Interagency EJ Committee

Sabina Haskell – Natural Resource Board

- Create external guidance/communications in plain language; avoid the jargon.
  - *Principle 11: Accessible and inclusive outreach*
- Pursue changes in rules and statutes in how we notice permit applications to better reach all Vermonters.
  - *Principle 7: Address systemic barriers to reaching particular communities*
- Create notice templates that can be posted so that tenants and other non-property owners will be notified of permit applications.
  - *Principle 7: Address systemic barriers to reaching particular communities*

Elizabeth Schilling – Public Utility Commission

- State agency staff should receive appropriate training and support to enable them to effectively implement community engagement requirements and goals. Community engagement plans are only effective if they are well implemented.
  - *Principle 3: Build your agency's internal capacity for meaningful engagement*
- Written materials meant for community engagement should avoid legalese and use plain and concise language that is accessible to readers that may be unfamiliar with the technical information being presented.
  - *Principle 11: Accessible and inclusive outreach*
- When possible, community engagement should be required before entities apply to the state for permits, approvals, etc.

- o *Principle 3: Build your agency's internal capacity for meaningful engagement*

Claire McIlvennie – Public Service Department

- (*language directly from the Guiding Principles for a Just Transition*): "**MOVING AT THE SPEED OF TRUST** ● Candor and honesty are essential for public trust and to prepare business, industry, labor, communities and families for transition to a sustainable climate future. ● Planning and implementation must balance being time bound and honoring the varied ways of learning, understanding and agreement that exist in different cultures and communities."
    - o <u>Note from Claire:</u> I've heard a lot of people question what "moving at the speed of trust" means. I think it means a lot of things but includes knowing when to move faster or slower to honor the time necessary to do the work while holding ourselves accountable to urgent systems change to better serve our most impacted communities. I think it also involves acknowledging that more equitable engagement takes more time than our timelines / deadlines account for currently and we need to learn to build that time into our planning processes (ex. for more iterative engagement, being flexible in our processes as unexpected needs arise, for advertising, for language access, etc)
    - o Also, since these principles were worded for the Climate Action Plan, I would modify the second bullet to say "*Community engagement* must balance being time bound and honoring the varied ways of learning, understanding and agreement that exists in different cultures and communities", instead of "planning and implementation must…."
        - ▪ *Principle 4: Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships*
        - ▪ *Principle 16: Commit enough time to do engagement well*

- People and communities are experts of their own experience, and that expertise should be compensated and recognized as core to our decision-making processes.
    - o Modified from this principle in the Guiding Principles "The Council's process and public engagement must recognize that people are experts of their own climate and energy experience", included under "Inclusive, Transparent, & Innovative Engagement."
    - o <u>Note from Claire</u> (possibly outside the scope of this effort, but for what it's worth): Meaningful public/community engagement is equally (if not more) important as technical inputs and assessments to our decision-making processes and should be treated as such. In my opinion,

public/community engagement and technical analyses should work and be advanced synergistically when possible (i.e. they should not be done in siloed processes, in my view one feeds into the other in an iterative and cyclical process)

- *Principle 10: Compensate community members for their expertise and efforts*
- *Principle 1: Value and integrate community input at all stages of program and policy development and decision-making*

- Interagency coordination will be key in effectively engaging and centering communities without overburdening those who are already on the frontlines or most impacted by environmental injustices. Our individual community engagement plans should reflect that.
  - Note from Claire: in my opinion, I feel like it is critical we as agencies figure out how to collaborate on community engagement efforts where possible and appropriate so that we are not overburdening communities (ex. could we have joint state agency quarterly updates with core community-based organizations where we highlight opportunities to engage or listen to critical issues facing communities or conduct holistic needs assessments to identify areas where state programming / policies are needed instead of each doing this type of work within our own agencies). I definitely see where there will be times for agencies to engage with communities on their own (ex. on agency specific program development). Generally it seems like people don't experience environmental injustice in the silos that government often operates in (although there are certainly some ongoing efforts that try to break down these silos) and collaborating on engagement at the interagency level seems to both acknowledge this to the communities we seek to support AND also help us as agencies better collaborate on solutions where synergies in our areas of focus exist. I imagine this might also help us at the state be efficient with the often-limited resources we have to conduct this work.
    - *Principle 8: Coordinate with other agencies (de-silo policy conversations & share resources)*

Karla Raimundi – Agency of Natural Resources

- Avoid extractive nature of community engagement
  - How to ensure engagement is not based on extracting knowledge. Needs to be more of a relationship that is built and then an equitable exchange of knowledge and information.

- - Principle 4: Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships
- Careful planning including community leaders
  - Identify ways to promote co-creation
  - Previous engagement assessment to identify the on the ground reality to avoid over tapping communities
    - Principle 6: Consider the local and historical context of communities you seek to engage
    - Principle 9: Collaborate with local, trusted community-based organizations
- Engagement should be adaptive and iterative and contemplate adapting to changing community realities
  - Principle 17: Iterative and adaptive approach to community engagement
- Ensure engagement is accessible and culturally sound
  - Principle 11: Accessible and inclusive outreach
- Community Engagement should be based on the Core Principles for Community Engagement but may differ in implementation due to factors like cultural appropriateness, assessment of needs and efficacy of certain outreach methods, among others.
  - Principle 17: Iterative and adaptive approach to community engagement

Shalini Suryanarayana – Office of Racial Equity

I found this set of touchstones from WholeHeart LLC to be a beautiful approach to describe a way of being when reaching out to others.

See what you think (I love them!):

- Be Present as fully as possible. Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.
- Listen Generously to your own and one another's experience and discoveries. Trust we all hold a piece of the puzzle and we need each other's pieces to understand the whole picture.
- Respect each other's ways of knowing and learning. We are each responsible for our own journeys and cannot presume to know anyone else's answers.
- Speak from Your Heart. Pause, listen with your whole body. Speak in your narrative, using "I" statements and letting words arrive from within.
- Turn to wonder. Ask yourself, "I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?" Set aside judgment or critique to listen to others—and to yourself— more deeply.

- Practice asking questions that open. We tend to offer each other counsel and corrections. When we offer open, generous questions, deeper knowing is possible.
- Respect Confidentiality. Safety is built in when we can trust that our words and stories will remain with the people with whom we choose to share.

Learned in practice with WholeHeart, LLC – Based on the Center for Courage & Renewal; 100 Million Healthier Lives Touchstones for Collaboration; Wholeheart communities of practice.

- *Principle 13: communicate with respect and care*

Amy Redman – Vermont Department of Health

Below are three core principles from Washington State's [Community Engagement Guide (wa.gov)](#) and one idea from VDH.

- Ensure communication is ongoing: collaboration requires continual opportunities for conversation and sharing. Use two-way communication methods that partners or community members are familiar with using.
  - *Principle 4: Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships*
- Be Transparent: Be honest and forthcoming about the purpose of your project and how you will use the input you receive. Only make promises you can keep and make sure to follow through on your commitments. Not following through can erode the trust you have worked hard to build
  - *Principle 14: transparency from inception*
- Meet people where they are: Be flexible in your approach. Go to the community—where members gather—and work to build relationships and trust. Look for opportunities to immerse yourself in the community you are trying to reach by attending community events and groups.
  - *Principle 12: meet community members where they are*
  - *Principle 4: Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships*

Also, here's one idea that the health equity team at VDH has been talking about:

- Departmental/Agency Mapping of Community Partners: Be sure to have a list or map of all of the community partnerships within a department/agency with two points of contact or lead relationship holder for that partnership.
  - *Principle 3: Build your agency's internal capacity for meaningful engagement*

Neuvic Kalmar Malembanie – Agency of Education

1-Diversity and inclusion:

Act 154 explores opportunities to extend environmental justice benefits to the public while putting an emphasis on the most affected communities, it is necessary to promote diversity and inclusion as the core values of community engagement within and outside the Environmental Justice Committee. Promoting these values reduces cultural biases and encourages a wide range of people, including marginalized communities to engage fully in decision-making that may affect their environment.

> *Principle 11: accessible and inclusive outreach*

2-Equity:

Equity is another important community Engagement that needs to be promoted within and outside the Environmental Justice Committee. Equity implies the promotion of equitable resources within the Environmental Committee but most importantly to the community we serve. The Environmental Justice Committee is the voice of the people within the community they serve, it is crucial that they maintain transparency regarding the availability of resources to the public so that the most affected populations can benefit from them.

> *Principle 5: Prioritize voices most impacted by environmental injustices*

3-Leadership:

Members of the Environmental Justice Committee should lead their respective communities by being a model to the community. They should lead through examples by examples by maintaining straight cooperation, open debates, and mutual respect with the people they deal with and the community they serve. Honesty, truthfulness, and attention to what matters the most to the community are all part of the characteristics of good leadership.

> *Principle 13: communicate with respect and care*

Grace Vinson and Gretel St. Lawrence (on behalf of Josh Hanford) -- Agency of Commerce and Community Development

- All meetings should be accessible to all populations regardless of income, access to transportation, primary language spoken, etc.
  - *Principle 11: accessible and inclusive outreach*
- Community engagement strategies should vary based on the communities, population, and the focus of that specific meeting or discussion, rather than broad strategies that are used uniformly statewide (for example, engaging people in Chittenden County will be different from engaging people in Orleans County)

- o *Principle 6: Consider the local and historical context of communities you seek to engage*
- In forming community engagement plans, the Advisory Council/Interagency Committee should collaborate with groups currently working with EJ focus populations (for example, VT Human Rights Commission and VT Legal Aid who work on housing discrimination complaints and issues and provide Fair Housing training to municipalities and developers) to seek input on community engagement strategies that have been successful in the past
  - o *Principle 9: Collaborate with local, trusted community-based organizations*

Abbey Willard, Agency of Agriculture, Food, and Markets

- Aim to go to underserved and marginalized populations to hear their ideas, needs, and recommendations. Preference is to go directly to our community as opposed to ask that they come to our meetings. This requires cataloguing meetings, events, organizations that are already gathering to ask to join their agenda.
  - o *Principle 12: Meet community members where they are*
- Public engagement needs to be done with sufficient time for the public to be made aware of opportunities for engagement, prepare to engage, and attend. This process should not be an 'add on' but an intentionally planned part of our process and decision-making process.
  - o *Principle 16: Commit enough time to do engagement well*
- Transparently and clearly communicate purpose of community engagement efforts (what are we looking for, what is the timeline, how will the suggestions/ideas be used, what is the larger plan/strategy for developing final decisions).
  - o *Principle 14: Transparency from inception*

Minutes from the listening session at the July 18th joint meeting:

Question #1 posed by Maryam Shabbir Abbasi: What are some best practices for community engagement in your opinion / observation?

Zoraya Hightower: Communities should be thought of as partners. Communities know what their needs are. They do not know all the possible roadmaps to get these needs met. We need to be partners with communities when creating these roadmaps to get their needs met. A common misstep for community engagement is front loading community engagement. Instead create a draft and give people lots of time to respond. Easier to have opinions when holding a draft.

> *Principle 1: Value and integrate community input at all stages of program and policy development and decision-making*

Hayley Jones: They were involved in original drafting of EJ Law. Advise that we do not reinvent the wheel. Look back and know the prior history of engagement with the communities.

> *Principle 6: Consider the local and historical context of communities you seek to engage*

Michael Fernandez: We need to show up on the ground for people. As a conservation district manager, the people he works with laugh in his face when he says agency staff will show up in person. Agency staff need to drive and show up.

> *Principle 12: meet community members where they are*

Jennifer Byrne: Use what we already have. Read the Just Transition Principles. Read the DEC Community Pilot Report. Recognition that it is worth it needs to permeate agency cultures (it being meaningful community engagement). Interagency Committee members are ambassadors of this message. Need to pay community members. Paid liaisons model worked well (see DEC Community Pilot Report). Build reviewing community engagement plan into your timelines. Need to change the culture of how agencies respond to public comments. We need a dialogue not one offs. Comments that she has not seen final version of plan from Climate Council – when was there community engagement? Agency has expertise and community members have expertise. Need to have two-way dialogue ongoing.

> *Principle 2: Utilize existing guidance for equitable community engagement*

> *Principle 10: Compensate community members for their expertise and effort*

> *Principle 9: Collaborate with local, trusted community-based organizations*

> *Principle 4: Build resilience and trust by building ongoing, reciprocal relationships*

Kiah Morris: Work toward a yes. Do not be an automatic no. Hear asks and suggestions from the community with curiosity and treat their ideas as possibilities. Yes, and! •

Principle 15: Work toward a yes

Question #2 posed by Maryam Shabbir Abbasi: What Vermont State agencies are involved in community engagement in your area?

Zoraya Hightower: Speak about EJ Network. Upcoming event August 18-19 (Vermont Environmental Just Summit: Community Wellness). Will discuss the network's vision of EJ. Listening opportunity for state agencies.

Comment in chat from Anne D'Olivo: Draft documents as much as possible ahead of time for public to read and have input at next public meeting. Guide for Core Principles of Community Engagement for example is very helpful and can be shared. Reflection on Climate Council public input meeting: Not enough to time digest and comment on the documents they presented at the meeting.

Principle 16: Commit enough time to do engagement well

Maryam Shabbir Abbasi: We need to figure out platforms where we are engaging communities. Go to existing platforms. Thinking of engaging Muslim communities and AALV by meeting them in pre-existing gathering spaces. Wants to engage with them and hear what their environmental concerns are. Ask then specific questions and use plain language.

Principle 12: Meet community members where they are

Question #3 posed by Maryam Shabbir Abbasi: During State agency community engagement, what are common missteps?

Jennifer Byrne: Community engagement experiences from working at the Conservation District. Shared a story about a farmer impacted by flood who she works with through the Conservation District. Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) charged the farmer $250 for an inspection for a diesel leak. How can the Advisory Council support communication in situations like this?

Kyle Landis-Marinello: Big misstep for agencies is getting input but then ignoring it.

Principle 18: Be accountable

Karla Raimundí: Important to build into community engagement plans accountability processes to integrate feedback meaningfully. Need to deliver something concrete. Need this to build trust. Importance of providing meaningful language access. The state should commit to doing a better job around language access.

Principle 18: Be accountable

Comment in chat from Anne D'Olivo: At Climate Council public input meeting, it was too controlled by the facilitator (ANR) for public to have to answer the questions presented; not enough leeway for people to make their own suggestions.

Principle 1: Value and integrate community input at all stages of program and policy development and decision-making