The Role of Task Groups in the Implementation of Vermont's Environmental Justice Law

This is a draft proposal for consideration by the EJ Advisory Council and Interagency EJ Committee, prepared by the EJ Coordinators (based in the Civil Rights & Environmental Justice Unit, Agency of Natural Resources. Contact at: anr.ejcoordinator@vermont.gov

General Parameters for Task Groups:

Task Groups are time-limited, task-specific work groups intended to advance the development of key requirements of the VT EJ Law. Task Group meetings are not considered public meetings subject to public meeting law.

Any EJ Law Deliverables and/or recommendations developed by these Task Groups must be brought to the EJ Advisory Council, Interagency EJ Committee, and/or Agency of Natural Resources for final adoption (as specifically required within the VT EJ Law for each deliverable).

Task Groups are empowered to:

1. Identify and adopt approaches for completing the work of the Task Group (i.e. decide internally how the Task Group will proceed with its charge, including engaging and updating other stakeholders).
2. Conduct research and develop recommendations on relevant implementation requirements of the VT EJ Law for consideration by the AC, IAC, ANR, and or/covered state agencies. Final adoption of any deliverables requires consensus of a quorum of IAC and AC (i.e. cannot be done within the Task Group alone).
3. Develop educational materials and resources, such as guidebooks, to aid the meaningful participation of stakeholders in developing recommendations

Task Groups are expected to:

1. Identify at least one chairperson for the group, ideally co-chairs, who are willing to take the lead on scheduling and setting agendas for meeting and reporting back to the full AC and IAC (or delegating that responsibility to someone else)
2. Publicly post, on the EJ Law Calendar page hosted on ANR's website, information about the Task Group's purpose, contact information for the Task Group, and instructions on how a member of the public may request to become involved in the work of the Task Group.
3. Provide regular updates on activities undertaken by the task group to the AC and IAC, and bring forward any substantive recommendations for input / consensus by the AC and IAC over the course of the Task Group's work.

Membership: Task Groups are to be composed of:

- No less than 1 and no more than 5 members from the Advisory Council. Per Diem may be submitted for the work done within Task Groups.
- No less than 1 and no more than 5 members from the Interagency Committee, and/or a delegate from the covered agency they represent
- No less than 1 and no more than 5 support staff from the Agency of Natural Resources

Individual task groups may further refine membership expectations for the group.

Additional Participants in Task Group Meetings:

- It is at the discretion of the Task Groups whether public participation and comment will be invited at Task Group meetings, and how that will be facilitated. If a member of the public comes forward seeking to share and/or access relevant information about the Task Groups' work, a mechanism for doing so shall be made available.
- In general, the Task Group is welcome to invite in non-members of the Group to advise / consult / support the group on an ad-hoc basis (may be one-time or ongoing). See Core Principles of Community Engagement for additional guidance, especially regarding compensation.

Technical Resources and Support:

- **ANR's EJ Coordinators** will be available to provide general support to the Task Groups, including assisting with access to needed information and technology, being on-call for co-chairs to request administrative support, and posting information to the website as needed. The EJ Coordinators can also facilitate access to legal support as needed. EJ Coordinators may, but are not required to, serve on all Task Groups.
- **The Vermont Law and Graduate School Environmental Justice Law Clinic** is developing a scope of work to provide pro-bono legal and policy research support to Advisory Council members via their student attorneys. This can include support for Task Groups, such as researching applicable environmental justice laws, drafting research memoranda, and assisting with the development of relevant educational materials.

Adding Task Groups:

IAC or AC members and/or ANR support staff may propose additional task groups at any time, but are advised to minimize administrative and meeting burdens by considering if a Task Group is the most efficient pathway for developing

recommendations, ensuring there are adequate members willing to actively participate, and avoiding duplicative scopes of work.

Specific Task Groups Active in 2024:

Task Group 1: EJ Advisory Council Support Team

Scope of Work:

This Task Group is charged with guiding the provision of "administrative, technical, and legal support" to the EJ Advisory Council, as required in the EJ Law. At least one EJ Coordinator must be an active member of this Task Group. The core mission of this task group is to ensure the proceedings of the Advisory Council, and related groups (Interagency EJ Committee, ANR, and covered state agencies), are conducted in ways that promote "procedural justice", as defined by advocates in their 2022 budget request to support the VT EJ Law, and letters from the Renews BIPOC Council from 2021 and 2022 regarding procedural justice concerns from similar implementation efforts.

Specifically, the task group will:

1. Provide direct support to Advisory Council members, including:
    a. A forum for Advisory Council members to share feedback regarding the proceedings of the Council and receive solution-oriented support and advocacy.
    b. Assistance with AC member transitions, including collecting feedback from members who are departing, providing orientation and support for new members, and working alongside the Legislature to identify new Councilors
2. Develop systems for Advisory Council members to advise covered state agencies as required under the VT EJ Law. This includes:
    a. Continued exploration of establishing an agency "buddy system", as proposed in prior meetings (a draft proposal is available here)
    b. Coordinating opportunities for Advisory Council members to receive professional development and training, and other opportunities (such as relationship-building) that facilitates their meaningful participation and ability to advise covered agencies effectively.
3. Inform the allocation of funds dedicated to supporting the EJ Advisory Council in their role and advocate for additional resources as needed, such as adequate compensation, and resources for training and professional development.

Task Group 2: Community Engagement

Scope of Work:

This Task Group is charged with identifying and advancing specific strategies to support the meaningful participation of Vermonters – in particular, EJ Focus Populations – in the planning and implementation of VT's EJ Law. This includes:

1. Developing specific recommendations on how to use the community engagement budget and other available resources (such as EJ Coordinator staff time) to support the meaningful participation of Vermonters from EJ Focus Populations (including Advisory Council members themselves), in implementation of VT's EJ Law, as informed by the core principles of community engagement.
2. Building an outreach network / approach and creating plain language and accessible communication methods (including translation) alongside the EJ Coordinator (includes managing the existing public list-serv).
3. Advising/supporting the EJ Coordinator / relevant Task Groups when public input or comment is being gathered on deliverables of the VT EJ Law, and in the planning of public AC and IAC meetings.
4. Building connections and coordinating with other similarly situated community engagement efforts / advisory groups (such as the Just Transition subcommittee of the Climate Action Office) to help reduce the burden of engagement on communities resulting from duplicative government efforts.

Task Group 3: Environmental Benefits

Scope of work:

This task group is charged with advancing the following:

1. 2024: Writing the guidance for covered agency environmental benefit spending reports and providing technical assistance / guidance to covered agencies as needed
2. 2025: Collecting agency reports and publishing summary findings of statewide spending on and distribution of environmental benefits based on those reports
3. 2026: Providing any needed updates to spending report guidance for annual environmental benefit reports due from covered agencies
4. 2024-2026: providing any relevant insights or research to the AC and IAC as these groups review definitions in the VT EJ Law to ensure those definitions are advancing the intent of VT's State EJ Policy (e.g. the EJFP definition, definition of environmental benefits, etc.).