

**Joint Meeting of Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC) &
Interagency EJ Committee (IAC)**

Draft Meeting Minutes

August 19, 2024

Note to reader: These draft minutes were compiled by staff from the Agency of Natural Resources. If you would like to see any changes to these draft minutes, please reach out to anr.ejcoordinator@vermont.gov

Meeting Information:

Date: August 19, 2024

Meeting Time: 1 PM to 4 PM

Location: Hybrid (Dill Building, Berlin, VT, and Virtual via Microsoft Teams)

Meeting Details and Materials:

<https://outside.vermont.gov/agency/anr/EnvironmentalJustice/layouts/15/start.aspx#/Shared%20Documents/Forms/AllItems.aspx?RootFolder=%2Fagency%2Fanr%2FEnvironmentalJustice%2FShared%20Documents%2FPublic%20Meetings%2F08%2E19%2E2024%20%2D%20Joint%20Meeting&FolderCTID=0x012000F6ACBE5F0143FF4BB3FB A8EA5F9B8C8C&View=%7BF275142C%2DA6CC%2D4D95%2D8D69%2D82643BE8339A%7D>

Attendees:

Interagency Committee: Steph Hoffman, Jenny Ronis, Xusana Davis, Michele Boomhower, Claire McIlvennie, Grace Vinson, Amy Redman, Karla Raimundi, Abbey Willard, Bob Donohue

Advisory Council: Trey Martin, Walter Brownridge, Rich Holschuh, Zoraya Hightower, Jennifer Byrne

SOV: Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Gabrielle Wray, Dave Pelletier, Sophi Veltrop

Public: Kira Mok, Lauren Sadowski

Notes:

Group reading of Community Agreements

Icebreaker

VT EJ Law Updates

Kim B.

- Reflect and share out. What does “doing the work” mean to you? What’s involved in “doing the work” well?

Karla R.

- Intentional collaboration around shared principles and values of environmental justice. Making sure that the voices that need to be present are present and heard.

Rich H.

- Showing up in the best way you can

Trey M.

- Building bridges between the people who make public process, structures, and frameworks and those that are served by them

Michele B.

- Creating space and making sure that the services we deliver are accessible. Identifying the needs of the constituency. Effective communication

Juliet B.

- VT EJ Law Updates: Act 181 was passed into law, extending Act 154 deadlines by 2 years. Allows more time for important work like intentional collaboration, making connections, building bridges, and finding out the needs of the constituency we represent.

Kim B.

- Discussion: What ways could this new timelines accommodate resource needs? Allow you to deepen your leadership? Influence your legislative asks? Inform strategy-building and development of guidance?

Grace V.

- Allow for more training and competency building within the covered agency staff

Walter B.

- New timeline accommodates resource needs. Enables us to do further outreach.

Zoraya H.

- Allows more time to develop relationships between AC and IAC so they can become thought partners

Kim B.

- How can we support you in relationship building?

Zoraya H.

- Pair AC members with IAC members (buddy system approach)

Karla R.

- Referencing Grace's comment, notes that the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit provided a workshop or training to the Public Utility Commission about Environmental Justice and Community Engagement
- Notes that the new timeline allows for covered agencies to do foundational work like creating a language access plan to advance community engagement

Claire M.

- Need a joint legislative ask for more capacity and resources

Michele B.

- Can we communicate with AOA or central body about how we should be framing our legislative ask?

Topic: Core Principles of Community Engagement

Kim B.

- Summarized the things that the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit did surrounding the Core Principles public comment period: held two public meetings and accepted written comment, analyze the comments and proposed edits to the documents accordingly, held office hours for the AC and IAC to review the comments and edits, developing guidance for future public comment periods
- Lessons learned from this past public comment period: Foundation matters, trust is essential, leadership training is necessary, practical examples drive change

Jennifer B.

- How many people were in attendance at public comment meetings

Juliet B.

- Estimates that the first meeting had about 10 participants and the second had about 10-15. Notes that there was only one written comment and that is a place for improvement in the future.

Juliet B.

- Summarizes review and approval process. Two types of edits: superficial and substantive. Superficial edits can be applied with approval, substantive edits will require further revision to put the language into IAC and AC's words before the edits can be finalized

Kim B.

- Introduces first edit: Adding the EJFP definition to page 3 for clarity and strength

Jennifer B.

- Not necessarily in favor of this change as the EJFP definition is still something up for revision

Karla R.

- Concerned the document may become obsolete or will require regular maintenance if the definition is included in this way, as the definition needs to be revised. How can we capture the commenter's concerns without making the document obsolete?

Abbey W.

- Directs us to Footnote 3

Zoraya H.

- Can we just put a simplified version of the EJFP definition in the text as opposed to the statutory definition? Provides more detail but not a level of detail that would require revision over time

Juliet B.

- Proposed solution: Have a plain language definition in the text and the statutory definition in the footnote. Asks for visual consent on this edit. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later

Kim B.

- Edit 2. Adding the Jemez Principles to the introduction of the Principles for clarity and directness

Juliet B.

- Asks for visual consent on this edit. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later

Kim B.

- Edit 3. Incorporating community into public processes in Principle 2 – example of potentially including members of the public in budgeting processes.

Karla R.

- Concerned about using budgeting as an example as this could be an area where there may be limited ability to apply community input in budgeting

Michele B.

- Echoes concern about using budgeting as an example

Kim B.

- Emphasizes that the ultimate purpose of this edit is adding more concrete examples of how to include community in public processes. Budgeting does not have to be the example used.

Claire M.

- Budgeting is a complex process, but there may be education that can be done about the budgeting process and there may be room for being more intentional when it comes to listening to and responding to communities as it pertains to priorities.

Juliet B.

- Do we generally agree that specificity is needed for this edit but that budgeting is not a good example?

Jennifer B.

- Suggests “resource allocation” as a rephrasing as opposed to budgeting.

Juliet B.

- Asks for visual consent on this edit – changing budgeting to resource allocation. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later

Public Comment: No comments

Break

Topic: Core Principles of Community Engagement, cont.

Kim B.

- Edit 4. Adding specific example related to consultation in decision-making. Budgeting is the example used, but this doesn't have to be the example finalized based on the previous conversation

Claire M.

- Offers to help with these edits in a working meeting

Michele B.

- Concerned about using budgeting as an example

Juliet B.

- Asks for visual consent on this edit – changing budgeting to resource allocation. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later

Kim B.

- Edit 5. Emphasizing leadership training when it comes to investment in staff education and training.

Amy R.

- Can we explicitly state how we are defining “leadership”?

Karla R.

- Wants to broadly define leadership to include cabinet members, division directors, etc.

Juliet B.

- Asks for visual consent on this edit – explicitly defining “leadership”. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later

Kim B.

- Edit 6. Move Principle 12 to be Principle 7 for emphasis.

Michele B.

- Is there a hierarchy to the numbering of the principles?

Kim B.

- There is no hierarchy in the numbering of the principles. The commenter stated that the strongest language was at the end of the document so having that language be closer to the beginning could be helpful for framing the document

Michele B.

- We should explicitly state that the numbering of the principles is for organizational purposes, not for hierarchy.

Trey M.

- Is there a narrative order that makes sense for these principles?

Juliet B.

- Asks for visual consent on this edit. Consent received, meaning that this edit will be applied later. Will reconsider narrative order of principles in application of this edit.
- Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit will follow up with logistics on how to schedule a working meeting to apply these substantive edits

Topic: Environmental Justice Mapping Tool

Kim B.

- Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit is still working on the RFP for the mapping tool. This is a technical process and they are responding to real-time changes and questions. They are still in an information gathering phase and trying to utilize a dynamic approach to drafting the RFP. Notes that there are differing visions for the outcome of the mapping tool.

Juliet B.

- What outcomes do you envision for the mapping tool? How would you measure success once the mapping tool is complete?

Jennifer B.

- Envisions a community-facing tool that functions as a communication tool as well. Information sharing. Accept comments from community. Permit information and the ability to submit comments on open permits. Must have mobile capabilities.

Kim B.

- What does two-way communication look like in the context of a mapping tool?

Jennifer B.

- The ability to submit comments on rules or permits that impact your community. Geographic functionality associated with rules/permits. Information based on your zip code.

Jenny R.

- Tool could be helpful in the implementation of Act 250. Identifying where populations are and where they overlap with different tiers of regulation.

Claire M.

- Success looks like having stakeholders feel like it accurately represents where the most burden is. Accurately representing reality for a broad variety of perspectives.

Xusana D.

- Success measured by if the public is aware of it and cares about it and if it is doing something for them. Can we ask the public to share what they did with the data from the tool? How did they “style” it?

Karla R.

- Not all the communities that we know exist are captured by the federal tools that exist. Granularity is required to create a realistic landscape of Vermont populations.
- Hoping to have RFP ready by October depending on needs and process.

Abbey W.

- Concerns about if the data will be usable to help allocate resources considering demographic data is not associated with awards at Agency of Agriculture. What is state government allowed to do with personal identifying information?

Karla R.

- Concerns about confidentiality and privacy as it pertains to granularity of data. Summarizes RFP drafting and review process.

Michele B.

- Mapping tool as a way to understand where target populations are located in order to connect resources to them. Granting process may be adjusted to ensure that investments can be made that benefit the target population

Claire M.

- EJFP definition is geographically tied. There is a disconnect between saying that dollars went to a geographic area vs. a person

Public Comment: No comments

Break

Topic: Environmental Justice Focus Populations Definition

Juliet B.

- Review the current definition of EJFP. Revision of the definition is due to the general assembly by December 1, 2025. But we may consider revising earlier and having this discussion about what definition is more representative.

Kim B.

- What are the elements of an ideal EJFP definition? What should next steps be to get closer to decision-making? What needs do you have?

Trey M.

- What is a census block group?

Claire M.

- Census block group is between census blocks and census tracts

Zoraya H.

- Is a census block group small enough or specific enough to capture Vermont communities? The census block level was more appropriate to capture Burlington communities during redistricting

Jennifer B.

- Shares that the VT EJ Law EJFP definition is based off of the Massachusetts definition. The census block groups was chosen due to personally identifiable information around health, attempting to ensure confidentiality and privacy

Zoraya H.

- Hears the concern around confidentiality but recognizes that we need to use different data/need to use the data differently or we will continue to miss smaller communities

Kim B.

- Ideal element of definition: wanting to capture folks who are in smaller pockets of communities

Steph H.

- Can communities self-identify? Certain communities are resistant to participating in federal data collection like the Census. Can we collect different data and overcome this hurdle?

Jennifer B.

- Massachusetts allows for an opt-in data collection option for folks who fall within their definition

Karla R.

- Echoing Zoraya's concern about using the same data over and over. Concerns about privacy and confidentiality. Can we develop layers of privacy? How do we overcome these opposing challenges (granularity vs. privacy)?

Zoraya H.

- Layering qualifiers may be more likely to have privacy concerns. If we're going to make good decisions, we need to have granular data, at least at the census block level.

Claire M.

- Urban parts of the state may have more opportunity for granularity as compared to rural areas because of population size

Jennifer B.

- Agrees with Zoraya about the usefulness of granularity of data. How will the definition be used in decision-making?

Zoraya H.

- Can we go into different levels of granularity depending on the municipality. Thinks the "opt-in" option would add levels of bureaucracy for communities to navigate.

Xusana D.

- Sometimes the numbers are so small that our experience is considered not of "statistical significance." We need to balance privacy and accurate representation. Differential privacy – scrambling data to help with privacy – may not be feasible in Vermont because of how small the margins are

Kim B.

- Emphasizes prior point about properly representing small pockets of indigenous communities in Vermont

Next Steps

Kim B.

- Next steps: continued discussions about EJFP, discussions about the mapping tool, working meeting for Core Principles of Community Engagement. Next meeting September 20 from 12 pm – 3 pm.

Abbey W.

- Revisiting this buddy system conversation. How can we get AC and IAC members paired up.

Zoraya H.

- Happy to help with the buddy system pairing. Suggests AC members are paired with IAC members based on preference.

Wrap Up and Close Out