Vermont Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022)

Interagency Committee

Steering Committee Proposal

Purpose

This document was created by the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit (CREJU) to support the Interagency Committee (IAC) in the creation of a Steering Committee. This document outlines the purpose of a Steering Committee in support of the implementation of the Vermont (VT) Environmental Justice (EJ) Law. This document also outlines the roles and responsibilities of individuals appointed to the Steering Committee.

Introduction

Also known as Act 154 of 2022, the Vermont (VT) Environmental Justice (EJ) Law is the state's first law specifically meant to address environmental health disparities and improve the health and well-being of all Vermont residents. The VT EJ Law establishes Vermont's Environmental Justice State Policy.

The VT EJ Law established a committee comprising one representative from each of the covered agencies under the law, as well as one representative from the State Office of Racial Equity, for a total of eleven members. The IAC was created to guide and coordinate State implementation of VT EJ Law.

To support the IAC in fulfilling their responsibilities under the VT EJ Law and to create efficiencies in addressing the needs of covered agencies, CREJU would like to propose the creation of a Steering Committee within the IAC. The Steering Committee would provide guidance and support to the IAC by working on initiatives such as:

- Strategy and direction
- Collaboration and communication
- Information gaps in decision-making
- Monitoring and improving performance
- Capacity-building
- Organizing around deliverables
- Workplans and deadlines
- Problem-solving

Appointment Process

The Steering Committee shall be made up of 3-4 members. These members shall be appointed through the following process:

1. During a public meeting of the IAC where all IAC members are present, IAC members shall nominate themselves or a fellow member for a position on the Steering Committee.
2. Nominated members will be offered the opportunity to accept or decline the nomination.
3. Each nomination shall be put to a vote.
4. Nominees must receive a majority vote to be appointed to the Steering Committee.
5. Steering Committee members may resign from their position at any time by informing their fellow Steering Committee members and CREJU. CREJU will ensure vacant positions are filled during public meetings. Vacant positions will be filled in the same manner as the original appointments.
6. Steering Committee seats will turnover after two consecutive years of service. Members whose seats have turned over may seek reappointment through the same manner as the original appointment.

Roles and Responsibilities

1. **Attend and participate in public meetings for the VT EJ Law and, as needed, the IAC Steering Committee.**

IAC Steering Committee members are expected to maintain their responsibilities as an IAC member by attending and participating in VT EJ Law public meetings where their attendance is requested (IAC-only meetings and Joint meetings of the IAC and the Advisory Council). Attending and participating in meetings includes:

- Responding to EJ Coordinator scheduling outreach by the deadline set by the EJ Coordinators,
- Indicating to EJ Coordinators two weeks in advance of a public meeting if you intend to attend remotely or in-person, or partially,
- Preparing for agenda topics in advance by reading supplementary materials and considering important prompts provided by the EJ Coordinators,
- Listening actively to the thoughts of your fellow IAC and Advisory Council (AC) members,
- Completing post-meeting assignments, when applicable,
- Communicating with EJ Coordinators in between meetings regarding implementation of deliverables and any issues as needed.

IAC Steering Committee members may support in agenda-building for public meetings. Steering Committee members are expected, as their capacity allows, to collaborate with the EJ Coordinators to do this work.

In addition to regular VT EJ Law public meetings, the IAC Steering Committee may establish a regular meeting recurrence to support their work. If such a recurrence is established, IAC Steering Committee members are expected to attend as their capacity allows.

2. **Advocate for the needs and perspectives of fellow IAC members and covered agencies at large.**

Members of the Steering Committee represent the needs of the IAC as a coalition in addition to the needs of their respective agencies. The work of the Steering Committee is to the benefit of the IAC and covered agencies at large. Advocacy in this respect could include:

- Weighing the feasibility of legislative requests in support of the implementation of the VT EJ Law.
- Identifying IAC knowledge and information gaps to support EJ Coordinators in developing technical assistance materials.
- Providing feedback to the EJ Coordinators regarding the progress and performance of the IAC to improve technical assistance materials, facilitation, and long-term planning.

3. **Promote collaboration and internal communication across the IAC.**

The covered agencies under the VT EJ Law are diverse in size, structure, and services. While there are many differences between the ten agencies, there are also some similarities across agencies. The Steering Committee can improve efficiency by identifying agencies that face similar challenges and have comparable strengths in implementing deliverables. They can also promote collaboration between these agencies and facilitate internal communication within the IAC. In this way, the Steering Committee functions as another way the bodies under the VT EJ Law can eliminate siloes and build stronger networks of information sharing.

4. **Maintain communication with the EJ Coordinators.**

IAC Steering Committee members are expected to maintain their responsibilities as an IAC member by maintaining regular communication with the EJ Coordinators. EJ Coordinators regularly contact IAC members to schedule upcoming meetings and solicit feedback on important items under the VT EJ Law. It is important that IAC members provide timely responses to the communications of EJ Coordinators to ensure efficient implementation of the VT EJ Law.

Similarly, IAC Steering Committee members are expected to maintain even closer contact with the EJ Coordinators to support in information sharing and strategizing.

5. **Provide strategic oversight for initiatives in support of implementation of the VT EJ Law.**

IAC Steering Committee members are individuals who have the vantage point necessary to strategize around structural supports for the VT EJ Law. Steering Committee members will provide strategic oversight to ensure that a project, program, or initiative aligns with the overarching goals and priorities of Committee. This could include strategizing around recommendations to the General Assembly or legislative asks to increase capacity and resources, or internal strategy around tackling a particular deliverable. This role involves a combination of high-level planning, goal-setting, and ongoing evaluation to maintain focus and adapt to changing circumstances. Steering Committee members will provide strategic oversight of this nature to CREJU and to the IAC.

6. **Provide solutions-oriented guidance or recommendations.**

IAC Steering Committee members are expected to provide guidance and recommendations to CREJU and to the IAC regarding initiatives under the VT EJ Law. An example of where the Steering Committee may provide recommendations to CREJU is around long-term workplan development to complete a deliverable under the Law. The Steering Committee may provide recommendations to the IAC regarding a prospective legislative ask to support capacity-building for EJ work across the covered agencies. Steering Committee members are expected to provide these recommendations in a solutions-oriented manner as they have the expertise and vantage point needed to provide recommendations that improve the overall functioning and organization of the bodies under the Law.

7. **Ensure IAC consultation and collaboration with AC members.**

The Steering Committee shall ensure that the Interagency Committee consults and collaborates effectively with the AC. This collaboration is critical to integrating the expertise, lived experiences, and feedback of AC members into the IAC's efforts to implement the Vermont EJ Law.

To achieve this, the Steering Committee will work closely with the Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit (CREJU) and other IAC members to ensure that consultation and collaboration responsibilities are carried out appropriately and efficiently. This may include assisting in the management of working groups or subcommittees tasked with engaging the AC.

For example, the Steering Committee could help these groups define clear objectives and establish timelines to guide their work, ensuring that consultation and collaboration are purposeful and productive.

Expectations

To fulfill the responsibilities outlined in the previous section, IAC Steering Committee members are expected to dedicate an average of 2–4 hours per month to Steering Committee work. This time commitment is in addition to participation in public meetings and/or meetings of Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Law Task Groups.

This estimate represents a good-faith approximation of the time required for Steering Committee activities. However, the actual number of hours may fluctuate depending on the Steering Committee's needs and the complexity of upcoming deliverables related to the Vermont EJ Law.