

Public Meeting of the Vermont Environmental Justice (EJ) Advisory Council (AC)
Virtual Meeting Minutes
April 23, 2025

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: April 23, 2025

Meeting Time: 10:00 AM to 1:00 PM EST

Attendees:

Advisory Council: Rich Holschuh, Jennifer Byrne, Britaney Watson, Walter Brownridge, Xusana Davis, Victor Davila

State of Vermont: Juliet Birch, Kim Barrett, Karla Raimundi

10:00 AM

Welcome & Introductions

- Consent to [Community Agreements](#)
 - Agreements read and consent obtained. No comments.
- Approve [March 28th, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. To be revisited later in meeting.
- Approve [April 18th, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Quorum not achieved. To be revisited later in meeting.
- Approve [April 23rd, 2025 Agenda](#)
 - Agenda approved. No comments.

10:10 AM

Re-Introduction to the Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance (EBSG)

- Juliet B.: Summarizes some goals for this section of the agenda
- Kim B.: Explains how environmental justice defines the environment: “Where communities live, work, and play – Characteristics (physical, social, cultural) of where communities live, work, and play”
- Juliet B.: Defines environmental benefit (in the context of the guidance, not the statute): “Increases individual and community well-being in the spaces where

they live, work, and play” – this definition was devised by the EBSG Task Group which include AC, IAC and covered agency members

- Juliet B.: Summarizes the flow of information in the VT EJ Law – Vermont Legislature creates the act, IAC and AC are the advisors, ANR is the lead covered agency, covered agencies implement the Law.
- Rich H.: Definitions that have been presented are very narrow and centered in Western viewpoints.
- Kim B.: Thank you for reiterating this concern. Has been discussed in previous public meetings and in one-on-one sessions. Perhaps this can be discussed during the upcoming unfacilitated time – recommendations on how to make definitions more inclusive.
- Kim B.: Summarizes what the EBSG is:
 - Clarifies how agencies assess and report on environmental benefits
 - Recognizes the stated statutory need for EJ and proportionate benefits across the state
 - Provides flexible guidance — it’s not legally binding
 - Explains the law’s intent and offers minimum standards
 - Supports other EJ deliverables over time
- Juliet B.: Summarizes what the EBSG is not/what the limitations are:
 - It doesn’t decide where money should go
 - It does not direct how dollars are spent – some dollars are nondiscretionary
 - It doesn’t override agency budget processes
 - It’s not an exhaustive guide
 - It does not work in a vacuum
- Kim B.: Some covered agencies have more nondiscretionary funds than others
- Jennifer B.: Understands that states don’t always decide where federal money goes, but will it be included in the benefits spending reports?
- Kim B.: The EBSG Task Group has identified that some agencies have less capacity for reporting at this time than others. Because discretionary funds can be redistributed to achieve proportionality, the guidance prioritizes discretionary funds. To the extent that covered agencies can report on nondiscretionary funds, they are encouraged to do so but it is not required.
- Jennifer B.: Knowing how federal money is being spent would be helpful for organizing. Reiterating perspective that federal funding should be included in the reports
- Kim B.: Sharing this information with the IAC when there is an opportunity would be helpful to continue this dialogue. Also attending a task group meeting to continue this discussion would be helpful.

- Xusana D.: Question for the AC: How do we highlight outstanding equity concerns? How do we organize to insist these outstanding equity concerns are addressed?
 - Karla R.: Making recommendations to the General Assembly regarding how to capture additional things not included in the Law would be an important role of the AC
 - Karla R.: Notes that federal funds can be discretionary or nondiscretionary funds. Discretionary funds are currently in the drafts guidance as the minimum requirement for reporting and nondiscretionary funds are considered enhancements. The goal of these deliverables in the law is to achieve proportionality. Since agencies cannot redistribute nondiscretionary funds, it would not be possible to redistribute those funds
 - Jennifer B.: Is the purpose of the reporting to support redistribution or to understand the landscape of how money is being spent to support future decision-making?
 - Juliet B.: Goal of the deliverables is for the covered agencies to establish a goal of proportionate distribution of spending towards environmental benefits. Some federal dollars are discretionary and so are relevant for redistribution. Nondiscretionary funds are not eligible for redistribution. Some federal dollars will definitely be reported on because they are discretionary. When it comes to nondiscretionary funds, the guidance draft currently allows covered agencies to determine if reporting on these funds is possible for them with their capacity
 - Karla R.: The guidance speaks to both transparency and flexibility. Guidance needs to be flexible enough for all ten covered agencies to use
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- Approve [March 28th, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Minutes approved. No comments.
 - Approve [April 18th, 2025 Meeting Minutes](#)
 - Not all Advisory Council members present were available to vote. To be revisited in next public meeting of Advisory Council.
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- Juliet B.: How does the AC contribute to the EBSG?
 - The VT EJ Law requires AC + IAC Consultation
 - Review drafts and communicate reflections
 - Tell us what parts are most relevant for the public
 - Provide examples of how you adjust or prioritize resources in their work
 - Join the EBSG Task Group
 - Kim B.: Considerations for AC members in reviewing the EBSG:

- Advising vs directing
 - Can: Offer suggestions
 - Can't: prescribe parts of the guidance, cannot provide directives, not all recommendations can be implemented
 - Cannot change specific investments or directly influence budgeting
 - Cannot prescribe when changes in investments will take place
- Consultation vs. Approval:
 - This is a formal consultation process that has many touchpoints- past, present and future
 - This consultation does not include formal votes, or a consensus process that will direct or require state action
 - They can vote or reach consensus on any recommendations they would like to make as a council but the VT EJ Law requires their consultation not approval of this document
 - AC members do not need to be an expert in state government. They can share if this makes sense and if it can relate to their communities.
- Kim B.: Would you like more information about the public comment period before your unfacilitated time?
- Rich H.: More information now works

11:20 AM

Public Comment

- No comments.

Break

11:25 AM

AC Review of the Draft Environmental Benefits Spending Guidance & Public Comment Period Planning

- Juliet B.: We will be having a 40-day public comment period for the EBSG. What is the public comment period?
 - VT EJ Law mandates that the public reviews the EBSG
 - Formal process to inform how the EBSG is improved
 - Provide guidance on how agencies can report
 - Opportunity to receive diverse feedback

- Juliet B.: What can't public comments do?
 - Can't rewrite the law
 - Can't decide how money is spent
 - Can't prescribe when or how investments might change
 - Can't guarantee change
- Kim B.: Helpful to make sure the public knows what their comments can do. How does the AC contribute to the public comment period?
 - Support the development of plain language materials
 - Identify and engage relevant constituents who may want to weigh in
 - Share materials and encourage participation in your networks
 - Help manage expectations
 - Provide comments
- Kim B.: Outcomes for unfacilitated time:
 - Establish SMART goals for the AC
 - Define action steps for each AC member
 - Identify support needs
 - Explore collaboration across the AC
- Rich H.: Observes that Law and this deliverable are very prescribed/limited
- Walter B.: How can the AC improve the draft so it has some real impact? Can the AC improve the reporting process to have a positive impact on the communities receiving environmental benefits? How can AC participation make a tangible difference in this?
- Xusana D.: The Law can be changed and improved, it just may take some time. Highlight the difference between can't and won't. One way to improve the public comment period is to provide the public with lots of warning and to improve the accessibility of the materials. Outreach, plain language, and translation would be impactful.
- Victor D.: Is the Task Group an opportunity to make changes to this draft?
- Walter B.: Who has been involved in the Task Group?
- Jennifer B.: Was involved in the past.
- Walter B.: Looking at the document, How can we make the reporting process more effective for the public?
- Xusana D.: Seems like we do have an opportunity to influence the EBSG. An aggressive public comment period could meaningfully influence it.
- Walter B.: Emphasizes the February 15, 2026 deadline for the Baseline Spending Reports. This seems like something the covered agencies will need to start working on very soon. Interested in attending an EBSG Task Group meeting. Are there things the AC can do to consult with the covered agencies about their Baseline Spending Reports development?
- Rich H.: Are the IAC members the folks making the Baseline Spending Reports?

- Walter B.: This reporting work will need to be done by people who have other functions and roles within their agencies. If we want a thorough report, they will need help in making this happen.
- Jennifer B.: Step 0, building capacity for the work. Interested in discussing the reporting period to capture a different period of time than what is listed in the draft
- Victor D.: Would folks want to meet to work on making this material accessible for the public comment period? Would folks want to meet under quorum regularly to do this kind of work?
- Jennifer B.: Environment definition in the draft is brief, may need clarifying
- Xusana D.: Has the sense that covered agencies are generally on board with doing their best for this reporting. Caution the possibility of making the definition too limited to make it inapplicable for covered agencies
- Jennifer B.: Concerned covered agencies won't be able to interpret the definition of environment and apply it to what they do. Also, it would be great for covered agencies to bring their list of identified environmental benefits to the AC
- Rich H.: Concerned about the direction of this work and "jumping around" in agenda topics
- Jennifer B.: Revisiting concern around the Community Engagement vendor that may be brought on to support the EJ Mapping Tool
- Xusana D.: What do you see as an alternative to the Community Engagement contract that would garner robust input?
- Jennifer B.: Could an Advisory Council like this one be responsible for funding to host events and engage with community?
- Xusana D.: State payment process is complicated. It may be difficult to do that work if you are not someone like a state employee who has been given the authority to approve or collect payments
- Jennifer B.: Is this only for payments over a certain amount?
- Xusana D.: Understanding is that it is irrespective of amount, but still remains open
- Jennifer B.: Wants to see people in the community get the money for this engagement effort to support the mapping tool. Is there a way to develop a contract that is different from the "same old, same old"?
- Xusana D.: There are ways to do improve contracts like having a scoring rubric that awards points for established community ties or demonstrated experience working with community. Subcontracting could be an option.

Debrief & Next Steps

- Karla R.: Any questions from the AC?
- Walter B.: Is there a role for AC members to give input or assist agencies in compiling their Baseline Spending Reports?
- Kim B.: There are several opportunities for AC members to be involved: EBSG Task Group meetings happen every Wednesday, but you can participate in the Task Group even if you don't attend the meetings. You can provide your input in writing. Covered agencies have questions they would like AC input on. Also whatever work you do together outside of public meetings, we can share this information with the task group to inform their work as well.
- Karla R.: Revisiting the buddy system conversation – pairing AC members with IAC members to create direct access for AC members. Office hours are a way that we can do business without hitting quorum
- Kim B.: EBSG Task Group was shared about in 2024. The invitation to join the task group is always open and doesn't necessarily have to be a long-term commitment. Come as your capacity allows.
- Kim B.: Addressing the question of if the IAC members are the only folks working on the Baseline Spending Reports. The answer is no, IAC members are, especially in larger agencies, not solely responsible for the reports. These efforts span across agencies. Part of what the CREJU does has been to meet with business offices to support collaboration. AC members are welcome to join those conversations as well. EJ Coordinators want advocate for and partner with AC members
- Karla R.: The guidance is a draft and is not final. Open to AC advice and recommendations. All AC input will be provided to the EBSG Task Group. Addressing question regarding future focus of the EJ work. There is a dense volume of work that needs to get done and so agenda topics are devised with this in mind, to ensure AC members are consulted as work continues to evolve.
- Kim B.: Reiterating the offer to be part of the mapping tool vendor selection committee. Hoping to get AC members on the committee by April 30. This has been communicated over email.
- Walter B.: Are AC members compensated for public meeting participation?
- Karla R.: Yes, submit your per diem reimbursement forms within a month of the meeting to ensure timely reimbursement

1:00 PM

Close Out