White River Natural Resources Conservation District

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The *Environmental Benefits Baseline Spending Report Guidance* (EBSG) is designed to **influence how Vermont state agencies think about, track, and make decisions around environmental spending**, especially to ensure fairness.

Public Comment is open for the EBSG from July 1 - August 11, 2025.

Here's how it might shape agency decision-making in practice:

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1. Shifts Focus to Equity and Justice

- Agencies are required to **think about *who* benefits** from their programs—not just what they fund.
- They'll need to **analyze whether environmental benefits are going to low-income, BIPOC, Indigenous, or limited English-speaking communities** (called Environmental Justice Focus Populations).
- This encourages **reallocation or redesign of programs** to ensure *proportional* benefit for historically underserved communities.

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2. Improves Tracking and Transparency

- Agencies must collect data on how, where, and on whom their environmental investments impact.
- This changes how agencies manage internal data systems—**pushing them to track impacts by geographic area and population characteristics.**
- Agencies that previously focused on dollars spent will now also need to **track outcomes** like clean water access, transportation improvements, or increased public health.

3. Leads to Program Evaluation and Adjustment

- Agencies will have to **evaluate which programs give "direct" or "indirect" environmental benefits**.
- Programs that don't currently track outcomes or serve EJ communities well may get rethought, paused, expanded, or adjusted to better meet equity goals.

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4. Influences Funding Priorities

- The guidance may push agencies to **prioritize funding for programs that serve environmental justice focus populations**.
- If an agency notices that a particular group or region is being left out, it may **direct more money or staff time** to those areas.

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5. Encourages Internal Collaboration and Planning

- To complete the report, agencies need cross-team collaboration between program staff, data analysts, communications, and finance.
- This encourages a **more holistic, systems-level approach** to decision-making, not siloed by department or grant.

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6. Strengthens Capacity Building and Future Planning

- Agencies will need to **build or improve data systems, public reporting tools, and evaluation strategies**.

- The guidance urges them to plan for **long-term improvements**, even if they can't report everything right now.

- It encourages a **phased approach** to improve capacity over time (e.g., reporting easy data now, complex metrics later).

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7. Institutionalizes Annual Review and Improvement

- This is not a one-time exercise. After the baseline report is due in 2026, **agencies must report annually**.

- This creates an ongoing **accountability loop**, where agencies are expected to show progress in reaching equitable outcomes.

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8. Increases Public Engagement and Accountability

- The guidance requires **public posting of data** and creates opportunities for **public comment and oversight**.

- Agencies will be more likely to **consider community feedback** when designing programs or allocating resources, especially in places that have historically been excluded.

Summary:

The EBSG pushes Vermont agencies to go beyond "business as usual" and instead:
✅ Center environmental justice
✅ Make data-informed, people-centered decisions
✅ Design programs that close equity gaps
✅ Use public money in ways that benefit everyone—fairly