



Community Engagement and the Vermont Environmental Justice Law

Municipal Day

**Civil Rights and Environmental Justice Unit, Agency of
Natural Resources**

November 1, 2024

November 6, 2024 | 1



Why is community engagement important?

Note on Terminology

- **Community Engagement:** are opportunities to connect and interface with community members.
- **Meaningful Engagement:** ensures that community members have opportunities to inform and participate in decision-making. These opportunities must not be burdensome or cause harm.
- **Systemic Barriers:** are built into the structures, policies, or practices of institutions and organizations. They are perpetuated by all of us.

When done right, community engagement...

- **Empowers** community members to engage in decisions that impact their **quality of life**
- **Creates** new relationships and **builds trust** between communities and government
- **Identifies** gaps in our services and addresses **unmet needs**
- **Improves** the **quality** and level of **satisfaction** with our work

Agenda

- 1. Systemic Barriers to Meaningful Engagement.**
- 2. Overcoming Barriers: The Core Principles of Community Engagement.**
- 3. Applying the Principles.**

1. Systemic Barriers to Meaningful Engagement.

Discussion

Talk it out:

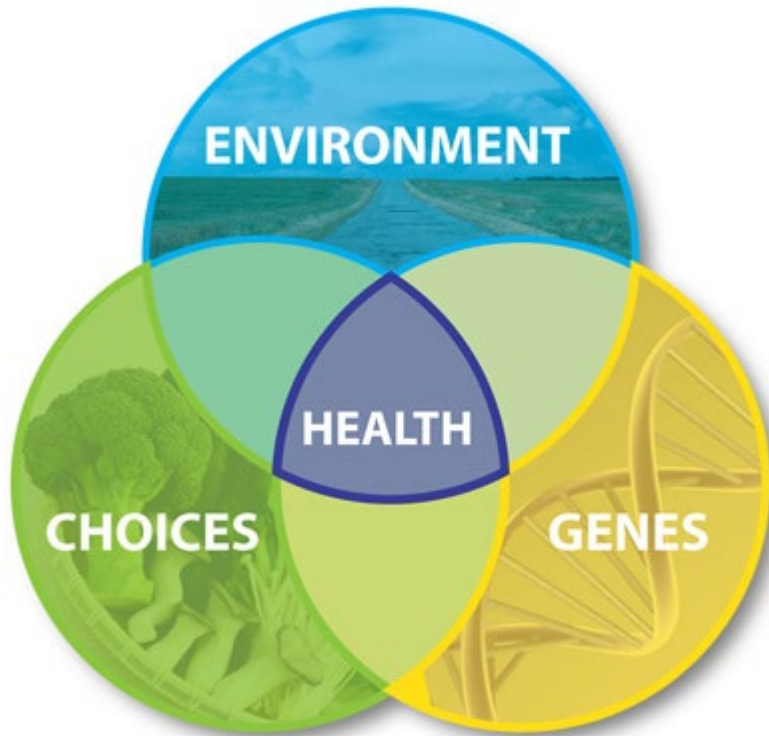
- What systemic barriers do the communities in your municipality face?
- How do these systemic barriers impact engagement with these communities?

Barriers to Community Engagement

- **Historical Trauma:** the present-day consequences of past inequities
- **Power dynamics:** feeling intimidated or disempowered
- **Lack of trust:** feeling distrust in government to use their information properly
- **Lack of confidence:** feeling unsure if their input will have an impact
- **Lack of awareness:** not knowing the engagement was happening
- **Communication:** lacking support necessary to communicate in a way that feels comfortable (language and communication access)
- **Limited resources:** unable to call out of work, get childcare, get transportation, etc.
- **Lack of accessibility:** feeling unable to access the engagement (transportation, physical access, digital access)

Environmental Justice

Environmental Health



Environmental Racism

- BIPOC are disproportionately exposed to environmental issues and hazards
- Past and present-day discrimination rooted in anti-Blackness.
- Institutional rules, regulations, and policies that cause systemic targeting of marginalized communities
- Geographic concentration of air quality and water contamination issues

Environmental Justice



- **Equitable treatment** of all people with regard to the environment
- Mitigation of **unjust barriers/systems**
- Ensuring **collaboration** between community members and decision makers
 - **Meaningful engagement, autonomy, participatory justice**

Principles of Environmental Justice



WE, THE PEOPLE OF COLOR, gathered together at this multinational People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, to begin to build a national and international movement of all peoples of color to fight the destruction and taking of our lands and communities, do hereby re-establish our spiritual interdependence to the sacredness of our Mother Earth; to respect and celebrate each of our cultures, languages and beliefs about the natural world and our roles in healing ourselves; to ensure environmental justice; to promote economic alternatives which would contribute to the development of environmentally safe livelihoods; and, to secure our political, economic and cultural liberation that has been denied for over 500 years of colonization and oppression, resulting in the poisoning of our communities and land and the genocide of our peoples, do affirm and adopt these Principles of Environmental Justice:

The Principles of Environmental Justice (EJ)

- 1) **Environmental Justice** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
 - 2) **Environmental Justice** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
 - 3) **Environmental Justice** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
 - 4) **Environmental Justice** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
 - 5) **Environmental Justice** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
 - 6) **Environmental Justice** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
 - 7) **Environmental Justice** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
 - 8) **Environmental Justice** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
 - 9) **Environmental Justice** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
 - 10) **Environmental Justice** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
 - 11) **Environmental Justice** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
 - 12) **Environmental Justice** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.
 - 13) **Environmental Justice** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
 - 14) **Environmental Justice** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
 - 15) **Environmental Justice** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
 - 16) **Environmental Justice** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
 - 17) **Environmental Justice** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.
- More info on environmental justice and environmental racism can be found online at www.einet.org/ej/**

Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit held on October 24-27, 1991, in Washington DC, drafted and adopted these 17 principles of Environmental Justice. Since then, the Principles have served as a defining document for the growing grassroots movement for environmental justice.

Principles of Environmental Justice

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Values of Environmental Justice

- Culture
- Accessibility & Inclusivity
- Transparency & Accountability
- Reciprocity & Continuity
- Autonomy & Safety
- Balance



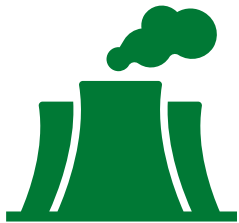
Modes of Influence – VT EJ Law



COMMUNITY
ENGAGEMENT



DISTRIBUTION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
BENEFITS



MITIGATION OF
ENVIRONMENTAL
BURDENS



ANNUAL AGENCY
REPORTING



LEGISLATIVE
ADAPTATION

2. Overcoming Barriers: The Core Principles of Community Engagement.

The Core Principles of Community Engagement

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Development Process

May 1, 2024 – June 14, 2024

Public Comment Period:
Ongoing written comments, two opportunities for oral comment

August 2023 – September 2023

Drafts 1-4 developed by the Interagency Committee in consultation with the Advisory Council

June 14, 2024 – August 18, 2024

CREJU developed revisions to Principles, a responsiveness summary, and lessons learned based on public comments

Development Process

September 10, 2024
CREJU hosted working meeting for AC and IAC members to apply edits to Principles

Sept. 20, 2024 – Oct. 25, 2024
CREJU applied final revisions to the Principles to ensure digital accessibility

August 19, 2024
Revisions reviewed, discussed, and voted upon during Joint public meeting

September 20, 2024
Final version voted upon and approved during Joint public meeting

October 25, 2024
Core Principles of Community Engagement (final) released to the public via the Environmental Justice Online Resource Library

3. Applying the Principles.

Lessons Learned

- 1. Foundation Matters.**
- 2. Trust is Essential.**
- 3. Leadership and Capacity Building is Important.**
- 4. Practical Examples and Specificity Drive Change.**

Discussion

Talk it out:

- What does community engagement currently look like in your work?
- How can you apply the Principles to your day-to-day operations?

How can we collaborate further?

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Closing – Thoughts? Questions?