

## **Collaborative on Health & the Environment – Washington Environmental Justice Working Group**

---

### Meeting Notes

Tuesday, November 8, 2005

2:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Antioch University Seattle

### ***In Attendance***

Morgan Barry, Public Health – Seattle and King County

Madeline Berry, Washington State Department of Health

Nanda Blazej, Antioch University Seattle and Cascadia Consulting Group

Kate Davies, Antioch University Seattle

Ticiang Diangson, Seattle Public Utilities

Linn Gould, Erda Environmental Consulting

Lee Mattingly, Master Home Environmentalist Volunteer

Maria Victoria Peeler, Washington State Department of Ecology

Janna Rolland, board member, Institute for Children's Environmental Health

Vanessa Shaw, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

Yalonda Sinde, Community Coalition for Environmental Justice

---

### **Introductions and goals of the meeting**

Meeting participants went around the room and briefly introduced themselves.

Yalonda Sinde, executive director of the Community Coalition of Environmental Justice (CCEJ), first recapped what happened in the previous EJ meeting (held on August 30, 2005), and then reviewed the goals of today's meeting. She explained that, at the last meeting, there was a lot of excitement and support around the idea of an assessment of state health and environmental agencies regarding their understanding and commitment to EJ. The assessment builds off of the questionnaire that the CCEJ conducted in 2004 asking agencies if they had an EJ program. At the August meeting, the working group gave feedback on Yalonda's proposed project of creating a toolkit to help state agencies address EJ.

Yalonda proposed that the next step for the working group, prior to creating an EJ toolkit, would be to conduct a more in-depth survey of agencies' understanding and application of EJ. For today's meeting, Yalonda asked the working group to discuss the idea of a pre-toolkit survey that would help CCEJ, etc. better understand what systems are currently in place within agencies and where there are opportunities for agencies to work towards the implementation of EJ into their daily procedures and programs. Yalonda ultimately wants to find out what criteria agencies use to decide where to go with their projects and how they decide on their focus. The toolkit would come after the survey and would help agencies plan out what they need to do to ensure EJ, such as conduct a demographic profile before working in a certain area, etc.

Yalonda brought draft survey questions to the working group and asked that they review each question and decide what should be changed and/or added.

---

## **Survey discussion & recommendations**

The working group reviewed the eight pre-toolkit survey questions drafted by Yalonda and had the following discussions and recommendations:

### **Question 1: Who lives works, plays or goes to school in the area/s where your agency conducts its work? (Provide demographic profile).**

Group members commented that this could be an overwhelming question and that the answers will vary greatly depending on who responds to the survey. Someone suggested that question one be narrowed down to the “top 5 projects,” or reworded to ask, “In your last biennium’s project plan, how much of your budget was identified for top 5 (or so) projects that had EJ impacts?” This new question tries to address if agencies base their decisions on where there’s the most need.

Linn Gould mentioned that she surveyed agencies a couple of years ago to see if they knew what EJ was, and she said that for the most part, no one really knew about EJ. Since there is not widespread knowledge of or familiarity with EJ terms, she recommended that anyone conducting a survey needs to define disproportionate impact on human and environmental health.

Group members discussed how it will be very important who the survey is aimed towards, i.e. the operations manager or the field staff. Yalonda stated that she envisions the survey going to environmental department heads.

Another member suggested rephrasing question one to read, “How do you prioritize your projects?”

Group members suggested including a continuum of satisfaction regarding an agency’s compliance in the area of EJ into the survey. Members also discussed a continuum based on the cultural competency model. The continuum model would give an internal baseline for agencies to measure themselves against and perhaps recognize areas for improvement. Members also discussed the importance of having respondents answer both quantitative (i.e. checkboxes) as well as qualitative (i.e. open-ended) questions. In addition to the questions, the survey should provide examples of what EJ looks like so that respondents can learn through the survey process.

Another member commented that she is interested in finding out what the barriers are to implementing EJ in a department.

Yalonda mentioned that it’s important to keep the focus of the project manageable and that her intentions are to focus on agencies that work with exposures to toxins in the environment.

Yalonda listed areas that CCEJ typically gets involved in:

- Community involvement
- Chemical exposure
- Land-use
- Risk to community
- Public hearings
- Health education/public outreach

She then reviewed what CCEJ *ideally* wants from agencies:

- Funding
- Meaningful involvement in policy decisions
- Make sure community-based organizations are on contractor lists
- Assessment of agency contracting procedures to make sure that they're culturally competent, antiracist, etc.
- Inclusiveness in public outreach
- Contract with community-based groups for education and outreach projects (not looked upon for free consulting)
- Agency staff and decisionmakers that reflect the communities in which they work

Some members offered to test a draft survey in their respective agencies.

### **Question 2: How was this area selected for regulatory action/research?**

This question is looking to understand how agencies came to the decision to address EJ.

A member suggested rewording this question to ask, "If parts of the agency's budget are dedicated to EJ?" She suggested that the answers would change if the survey used the language of health disparities.

Another member suggested that question #2 be moved down the list.

Members recommended changing all questions to "How" questions and also keeping in some "Yes/No" questions for quantitative assessment.

CCEJ is working on a grant proposal and is hoping to hire a fulltime person dedicated to this survey/toolkit project. Another idea the working group came up with is to find a firm that specializes in evaluation and ask them to create the survey on a pro-bono basis. While it may be a good idea to work with survey experts, it's important for CCEJ to be included in the process and build relationships. Implementation is part of CCEJ's work. Yalonda explained that there is no general timeline for this project at this time.

### **Question 3: Is there a Community Outreach Specialist/s on staff? Who is the agency contact for community outreach and education?**

Group members made no changes to this question.

**Question 4: What is the agency staff/diversity plan?**

Group members made no changes to this question.

**Question 5: Does the agency provide information to non-English or limited-English speakers? What languages/interpreting services does the agency provide? How is the information provided in other languages?**

Group members suggested adding “culturally appropriate” to the first part of this question.

**Question 6: What type of outreach does your agency provide? In other words, what types of information do you provide to communities on a regular basis (Circle from list)**

Group members added to the list:

- Health education
- Public education
- Community meetings
- Publications

They also added the following questions:

- Do you do other types of outreach?
- What is your model of communication?

**Question 7: Has outreach or other key staff gone through diversity and cultural competency training? Did it result in any changes.**

Group members added: “How are you evaluating the impact?”

**Question 8: How does the agency receive input/involvement from impacted communities and community-based organizations?**

Group members recommended changing this question into the following three-part question:

- What kind of on-going partnerships and relationships do you have with communities and community-based organizations?
- How does the agency encourage input?
- How does the agency sustain these relationships?

---

**Implementation and political support**

The group decided that they will need additional conversations about how to implement the survey and the toolkit. One member suggested that a good way to get people to respond to a survey is to have a high-profile person write the cover letter and print on official letterhead.

A member reiterated her recommendation from the previous meeting that people use disparities language, because that is what agencies most commonly speak, to help bring EJ to the forefront.

One member suggested that a way to gain political support and attention from Gov. Gregoire would be to incorporate EJ into annual performance reviews of state agencies. This could be an idea to put in CCEJ's proposal as a future project; it does not need to happen immediately.

Yalonda reiterated that this is a big project and there is no timeline as of yet. The political support component may have to come much further in the future.

---

### **Spring 2006 Events:**

The group talked about three relevant events that will be taking place in April 2006:

- **Washington State Environmental Health Association workshop** – April 26-28 in Vancouver, WA (<http://www.wseha.org/workshops.htm>)
  - **CCEJ's annual conference** – April 29 at Seattle University (<http://www.ccej.org/>)
  - **Health Disparities & Environmental Justice workshop** – April 28 at Antioch University (Nanda Blazej, graduate student at Antioch University Seattle, is coordinating this workshop as part of her graduate thesis work. More details to come soon...)
- 

### **Next steps:**

Yalonda will update the survey based on today's feedback and send a new draft to the working group as soon as possible.