

Community Engagement Values and Guidance Adopted by the Environmental Justice Council on August 25, 2023

The Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act creates a coordinated approach to reducing environmental health disparities across Washington State. The HEAL Act established the Environmental Justice Council to provide guidance to state agencies on how to integrate environmental justice into different facets of their work. The Community Engagement Committee was created by the Council to lead the discussion on community engagement with the agencies. The committee and the Council believe that authentic community engagement is the heart of environmental justice. Community engagement is a two-way communication process between government and the public.ⁱ As such the following values are foundational to community engagement, and the guidance are reflective of these values. While the guidance is designed for state agencies, they can be useful for communities as they review and evaluate how agencies are engaging with communities. (Appendices are being prepared to accompany and support the values and guidance. These will be presented to the Council at a later date.)

1. **Community-Centered:** With a focus on those closest to the pain: Power, dialog, and knowledge production must be done with community as equal partners. The use of lived experience, story, participatory, qualitative, and arts-based methods that accurately convey community concerns must be prioritized as at least equal to western and quantitative methods for transformational change.
2. **Equity-Centered:** We work to make meaningful change with communities that have been historically oppressed, denied resources, and extracted from for the benefit of others. The goal is to eliminate racial hierarchies and advance collective liberation, where Black, Indigenous and People of Color, in particular, have the dignity, resources, power, and self-determination to fully thrive.
3. **Accessible:** Work should be done in locations where community is in partnership with community-based organizations and community leaders, in ways that utilize multiple ways of knowing, in ways that share power, and with results that are usable by

community. Translation services and disability inclusion through accommodations should be provided.

4. **Authentic:** Community is the expert of their lived reality. Engagement with community should be authentic, ongoing and non-extractive, and value community knowledge through reciprocity.
5. **Accountable (Reciprocal Trust):** Government must acknowledge their past and current missteps and take action to create a better relationship currently and in the future through Truth and Reconciliationⁱⁱ. At the same time, government often distrusts community knowledge and work if it is not based on quantitative data (even if the numbers are not accurate or real). Authentic partnership with community can lead to data that is a more accurate representation of their truth.
6. **Intersectional:** We coalition build by doing intersectional work to make a more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable movement that explores the nuance of how identities such as gender, race, disability, sexuality, religion, citizenship, age, and more have led to disproportionate burdens from environmental inequities.
7. **Interconnectedness:** We are interwoven with all people of the world, the environment, and the living and non-living world. Only through working together and seeing the humanity of us all can we replace individualism that leads to extractive relationships with people and the environment towards reciprocal relationships to address inequities and climate change.

Therefore, the Environmental Justice Council guidance is that outreach and community engagement shall:

1. Demonstrate respect and value for community cultural practices and expressions, ways of knowing, forms and sources of community leadership, and specific, local expertise.
(Reflective of Values #1: Community Centered and #4: Authentic)
2. Center, acknowledge, trust, and amplify voices of marginalized, vulnerable communities experiencing unaddressed environmental health disparities. Remember that community is the pre-eminent expert in their reality.

(Reflective of Values #4: Authentic and #7: Interconnectedness)

3. In planning and conducting community engagement, incorporate an understanding of the impacts of historical, contemporary and structural forms of racial and other oppressions. Incorporate this understanding into analytical methodologies agencies use when determining community impacts, mitigations, reparative benefits and the implementation of community engagement. The community engaged should be the primary beneficiary.

(Reflective of Values #3: Accessible, #4: Authentic, and #5: Accountable [Reciprocal Trust])

4. When planning and conducting community engagement, utilize multiple forms of culturally responsive research including quantitative, qualitative, and community driven methodologies and approaches to collaborative, and applied research that center community cultural values, voice, and agency. Ask the right questions, do the research in a non-extractive and anti-racist way to avoid disengagement, analyze the data in a non-deficit way, and the data/end product should be usable by community.

(Reflective of Values #1: Community Centered, #5: Accountable [Reciprocal Trust], #6: Intersectional, and #7: Interconnectedness)

5. Prioritize transparency in data collection by preserving raw data and creating opportunities for communities to re-analyze it. Recognize that publicly available data sometimes minimizes community-based data. Utilize community-based research methods including multiple qualitative and quantitative data sources to identify marginalized, vulnerable sub-populations within communities that might require unique approaches for engagement.

(Reflective of Values #1: Community Centered, #3: Accessible, and #6: Intersectional)

6. In collaboration with communities, identify and use culturally and linguistically responsive and effective outreach and community engagement methods and materials.

(Reflective of Values #1: Community Centered, #3: Accessible, and #4: Authentic)

7. Fully and concurrently utilize a wide variety of methods to conduct and engage communities in the ways and venues preferred by communities themselves. Make sure materials are accessible to community members without technology, prefer not to use technology, or have low literacy.

(Reflective of Values #1: Community-Centered, #2: Equity-Centered, #3: Accessible, and #4: Authentic)

8. Ensure that community meetings take place during times and locations when community members are available.

(Reflective of Value #3: Accessible)

9. Consider the impacts of community engagement on communities. Provide needed social supports such as funding for community-based resources that communities identify to help mitigate and process the trauma experienced from the engagement itself.

(Reflective of Values #1: Community-Centered, #2: Equity-Centered, and #3: Accessible)

10. Treat the valuable engagement with reciprocity in the form of gifts, food, and compensation which is a baseline of exchange for knowledge and experience communities are sharing with the state that they would otherwise not have access to.

(Reflective of Values #2: Equity-Centered and #3: Accessible)

11. Coordinate and collaborate among state agencies when engaging with communities.

(Reflective of value #1: Community Centered)

12. Provide a report on how the above guidance is integrated in community engagement, and lessons learned.

(Reflective of Value #5: Accountable [Reciprocal Trust])

ⁱ From Metropolitan Area Planning Council's (MAPC) Community Engagement Guide, [MAPC-Community-Engagement-Guide-2016.pdf](#).

ⁱⁱ Truth and Reconciliation: "Reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behavior" (Canada's TRC Report 2008).
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