

Environmental Justice Council

2027-2029 DRAFT Biennial Budget Recommendations

DRAFT for discussion during Tribal & Community Forums – this document has not been approved by the Environmental Justice Council

I. Background

The Environmental Justice Council (Council) recognizes the following:

- The amount of Climate Commitment Act (CCA) revenue available for the 2027-2029 biennial operating budget (about \$155 million) will not be enough to support the carryforward base CCA budget (about \$271 million).
- As required by law ([RCW 70A.65.230](#)), a minimum of 10% of total CCA revenue must be used for projects supported by Tribes and a minimum of 35%, with a goal of 40% of total CCA revenue must provide direct and meaningful benefits to “vulnerable populations within the boundaries of overburdened communities” as defined in the law.
- The Council has authority under the CCA, [RCW 70A.65.040](#), to make recommendations to the Governor and Legislature for how CCA revenue should be spent to provide environmental benefits and reduce environmental health disparities.
- The Council has authority under the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act, [RCW 70A.02.110](#), to “recommend funding strategies and allocations to build capacity in vulnerable populations and overburdened communities to address environmental justice.”

The Council’s Budget Workgroup discussed the approach they wanted to recommend the Council take with its budget recommendations for the 2027 legislative session.

Understanding that the Governor and Legislature were going to need to reduce the funding

for programs supported by CCA revenue in the base operating budget by about half (or find alternate fund sources for those programs), the Budget Workgroup determined it was vital to focus recommendations on protecting existing investments in Tribes and Communities and environmental justice and equity programming rather than making recommendations to fund new programs.

Additionally, the Budget Workgroup considered whether the Council should make recommendations for which specific programs to maintain (i.e., to develop a prioritized list of programs that the Council would recommend not receive any funding cuts.) The Budget Workgroup opted not to recommend that approach, as doing so could signal that the programs they did not prioritize were less important or should be considered for reductions. The Budget Workgroup did not have the capacity to collect the necessary information to understand which programs are priorities for Tribes and Communities or to review the impacts of all programs, so they felt creating a prioritized list would not be a responsible approach.

In the end, the Budget Workgroup is recommending the following to the full Council for its consideration: (1) elevating funding for HEAL Act implementation as the top priority and (2) providing guidance to the Governor and Legislature about centering programs specifically investing in Tribes and communities or aimed at promoting equity and justice in budget decisions.

II. DRAFT Budget Recommendations

1. The Environmental Justice Council's (Council) **top priority** for the 2027-2029 biennial operating budget is to ensure **sustainable funding for HEAL Act implementation**. This includes:

- Establishing the HEAL Community and Tribal Capacity Grants (administered through the Department of Health) as an ongoing program and restoring funding to the level in the 2023-2025 biennial operating budget.
- Maintaining all carryforward base funding in the operating budget for staffing and operations for the following: agency implementation of the HEAL Act, the Environmental Justice Council, the HEAL Interagency Workgroup, and the Environmental Health Disparities Map. Several agencies have already received significant cuts to their HEAL implementation funding during the 2025-2027 biennium, which has deeply impacted the work.ⁱ
- Identifying sustainable funding (a source of revenue for **ongoing** programmatic funding) for HEAL Act implementation.

2. The Council recommends **to maintain funding for programs specifically aimed at promoting equity and justice—this includes but is not limited to programs that promote environmental justice, support Tribal and community engagement, and directly invest in Tribes and communities.** In the [Office of Financial Management's \(OFM\) budget instructions](#) to agencies, Governor Ferguson requested that as agencies consider where to propose reductions, that they specifically consider “programs created or expanded after January 1, 2019.” The Governor also stated his commitment to equity and requested that agencies “be mindful and carefully consider disproportionate impacts reductions may have on communities underserved by state services.”

These two separate instructions may be contradictory in many cases, as programs created to intentionally promote equity and justice are more likely to have been created after 2019. For instance, in the 2025-2027 biennial operating budget, there was a \$2 million reduction that eliminated grants for emergency drinking water programs in frontline communities. The program (funded in the 2024 supplemental budget) was a recent investment that resulted from community advocacy to address urgent

environmental justice water issues in their communities. The program was defunded using the criterion to focus reductions on recently funded programs, potentially without consideration of the disproportionate impacts that the reduction would have on communities underserved by state services.

Therefore, the Council recommends the following:

- **To Governor Ferguson:** As you review agency cost saving proposals, **we ask that you deny requests** to reduce funding for equity and justice centered programs. These include but are not limited to programs that promote environmental justice, support Tribal and community engagement, and directly invest in Tribes and communities, even if they were created after 2019. We ask you and state agencies to also engage with Tribes and communities to understand the impacts of reductions already made to equity and justice centered programs. Tribes and Communities know best how these reductions impact them.
- **To the Legislature:** **We request that you maintain funding for programs** specifically aimed at promoting equity and justice, including but not limited to programs that promote environmental justice, support Tribal and Community engagement, and directly invest in Tribes and communities. Programs focused on equity and justice have already received disproportionate budget reductions in the last biennium. We ask you to also engage with Tribes and Communities to understand the impacts of reductions already made to equity and justice centered programs. Tribes and communities know best how these reductions impact them.

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HEAL Agency	2025-2027 Funding Change	Impact of Funding Change
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Department of Commerce (Commerce)	Commerce received \$1.5M biennial funding for HEAL implementation. Commerce did not have any ongoing funding for HEAL; therefore, this represented a reduction in funding for Commerce from \$3M to \$1.5M per biennium.	This resulted in a significant decrease in staffing and decreased engagement with Tribes and communities (including in Environmental Justice Assessment processes).
Department of Natural Resources (DNR)	DNR's HEAL funding was reduced by \$580,000 per biennium	This reduction required the agency to eliminate two positions who work on Environmental Justice Assessments.
Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA)	WSDA's funding was reduced by \$258,000	This reduction prevented the agency from hiring an Equity Advisor. While this position was focused on broader equity work at the agency, it also supported HEAL implementation. Even before this reduction, WSDA had minimal funding to implement the HEAL Act.