Justice Isn’t Just Us
Pursuing an Equitable Environment

Desira Blanchard, NVCOG
Community Engagement Manager
Audience Trivia

Which of the following is the most potent predictor of an individual’s health?

A. Race
B. Zip code
C. Income
D. Education level
“Today, **zip code** is still the most potent predictor of an individual’s health and well-being.”

– Dr. Robert Bullard, Father of Environmental Justice
Let’s Talk “Environmental Justice.”

- Environmental Justice: ensuring that no one faces disproportionate consequences of environmental pollution or is denied access to environmental benefits.
- The spaces we work, live, and play should be healthy for everyone.
- EJ issues may center around...

Brownfields – Climate Change – Access to Green Spaces – Food Deserts – Water Quality/Access – Industrial Land Uses (Air Pollution) – Landfills & Trash
EJ is a Real Problem

Compared to their white peers, Black Connecticut children and teens are nearly 5½ times more likely to go to the ER because of asthma, while Hispanic children and teens are 4½ times as likely.

“Infinite Hope” Mural, Bristol
Artist: Micaela Levesque
Justice 40 Initiative

- Executive Order (E.O.) 14008
- Directs 40% of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments to flow to disadvantaged communities
- Emphasis area in federal grants
- Effective Stakeholder Consultation

The **Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST)** is a mapping tool that identifies disadvantaged communities based on multiple factors.
So how do we achieve justice?

- Historically disadvantaged populations must be central to decision-making.
- EJ requires significant and meaningful community-driven partnerships.
What do these maps say to you?

Population Percentage Living in Poverty

Population Percentage Minority
EJ Analysis

• Review NVCOG programs and projects
• Identify disproportionate burdens or disparate Impacts
• Ensure equitable distribution of benefits of transportation investments
• Ensure greater public participation

NVCOG EJ Communities
Our Community Involvement Strategies

- **Consult**: Seek help and consult with community leaders and organizations that represent traditionally underserved populations.

- **Engage**: Use identified population groups to enhance engagement and outreach efforts in order to reach beyond traditional stakeholders to hear from all parties and groups.

- **Host**: Host public meetings in locations that are accessible by public transit and are in geographic areas identified as having a large minority or low-income population.

- **Attend**: Attend community events to conduct public outreach activities such as surveying social activity centers, community centers, and libraries.

- **Translate**: Utilize language translation services as needed and as requested to communicate with individuals with low English Proficiency.
909 Bank Street Park Waterbury

- .4-acre lot in the Brooklyn Neighborhood of Waterbury
- Onsight building burned (2012)
- Community leaders advocated for neighborhood park
- Public input meeting held
- Lot was transformed into neighborhood park with new amenities
Panel Discussion
Justice Isn't "Just Us": Pursuing an Equitable Environment

Brent Peterkin
Executive Director
Gather New Haven

Jayson Velazquez
MES Candidate
Yale School of the Environment

Charlotte Gray
Community Involvement Coordinator
Environmental Protection Agency
Q1. What are ways that we can increase levels of community involvement, trust and communication to better plan for/ create places that are healthy and vibrant for all?
Q2.

Where have we as a community, region, or state failed when addressing environmental justice? What can we learn from these shortcomings?
Q3.

What is at stake if decision-makers fail to reach all demographics and meaningfully incorporate their input?
Q4. What is a misconception about environmental justice that you would like to dispel?
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Audience Q&A