

Draft of Washington's Environmental Justice Definition

During the May 18th meeting, the EJ Task Force will continue the discussion on creating a State definition for environmental justice; this conversation may last beyond a single meeting. In order to prepare for this discussion, Task Force staff and Co-Chairs have prepared a draft definition for Task Force member review and feedback.

Guiding Feedback Questions

1. Would this definition impede your current obligations under the federal definition of EJ? If so, how?
2. What is missing from this definition?
3. What doesn't make sense?
4. Do you have other general comments or concerns? If so, please elaborate.

Draft Definition:

"The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies; with a focus on the equitable distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens in a manner that prioritizes communities that experience the greatest inequities, disproportionate impacts, and have the greatest unmet needs."

Explanation of Draft Definition:

- This definition is meant to guide institutions, including Washington State agencies, with identifying environmental justice issues in addition to the EPA's definition that has a procedural equity focus.
- In an effort to avoid contradicting the EPA and to keep important EJ considerations intact, the full EJ definition from the EPA is embedded within this proposed definition for EJ in Washington.
- This enhanced definition adds a distributional equity component in the second sentence.
- This enhanced definition adds a reference to past harms to communities by explicitly naming the distribution of "burdens".
- This definition does not replace the purposes that an EJ mission statement, EJ goals, or EJ principles serve.

Explanation of the process we used to draft the WA definition of EJ:

STEP 1. We looked at the EPA's definition on EJ and identified strengths & gaps in that definition.

EPA Definition: *"The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies."*

EPA Definition Strengths:

- Includes underlying structural and institutional systems
- Addresses procedural equity

EPA Definition Gaps:

- The EPA’s definition lacks the acknowledgement of disproportionate impacts on communities with high levels of pollution.
- The EPA’s definition does a good job addressing procedural and structural equity, but lacked language on distributional equity.

STEP 2. We used the language in these [Equity Objectives](#) from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network’s “Guide to Equitable Community-Driven Climate Preparedness Planning” document to address these gaps:

Figure 4: Equity Objectives

PROCEDURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Create processes that are transparent, fair, and inclusive in developing and implementing any program, plan, or policy• Ensure that all people are treated openly and fairly• Increase the civic engagement opportunities of communities that are disproportionately impacted by climate change
DISTRIBUTIONAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fairly distribute resources, benefits, and burdens• Prioritize resources for communities that experience the greatest inequities, disproportionate impacts, and have the greatest unmet needs
STRUCTURAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a commitment to correct past harms and prevent future unintended consequences• Address the underlying structural and institutional systems that are the root causes of social and racial inequities

Source: https://www.usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/usdn_guide_to_equitable_community-driven_climate_preparedness_high_res.pdf

STEP 3. We created a draft definition of EJ for Washington

“The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin or income with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies; with a focus on the equitable distribution of resources, benefits, and burdens in a manner that prioritizes communities that experience the greatest inequities, disproportionate impacts, and have the greatest unmet needs.”