

# **Environmental Justice Questionnaire for Illinois Department of Transportation**

*When answering the questions below please note if your answers are agency or program specific*

1. Do you consider environmental implications when working on an issue in your agency? For example, air, noise, and/or water pollution; soil contamination; nuisance odors; greenhouse gases; etc. If yes, please explain.

Yes. IDOT's Bureau of Design and Environment (BDE) provides guidance on a range of environmental issues that must be addressed during transportation project development. In order to ensure that transportation projects are in compliance with state and federal environmental laws and regulations, BDE conducts surveys, provides special technical expertise, reviews or prepares portions of environmental documents and coordinates projects with state and federal resource agencies.

With any transportation project undertaken by IDOT, the agency closely follows the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) process. The NEPA process helps public officials make decisions that are based on an understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. Accurate scientific analysis, expert agency comments, and public scrutiny are essential to implementing NEPA.

2. How do you determine or define the extent of environmental impacts on the community? Please provide examples.

IDOT conducts community impact assessments to evaluate the effects of transportation projects on community residents and their quality of life. Typically these effects may include changes in access, business and residential relocations, environmental justice issues, cohesion impacts, effects on public facilities and services, development and growth patterns, land use changes and other potential results associated with improvements in infrastructure. The assessment process is an integral part of project planning and development.

IDOT also utilizes Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) when developing projects. CSS is an interdisciplinary approach that is designed to work with stakeholders to develop projects or transportation facilities that fit into and reflect the project's surroundings. Through early, frequent, and meaningful communication with stakeholders, and a flexible and creative approach to design, the resulting projects result in improved safety and mobility for the traveling public, the preservation and enhancement of the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which the project is located.

3. Do you have an environmental justice mandate for your agency? Yes/No. If yes, please explain.

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all Illinoisans with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies is integral to IDOT's mission of providing "safe, cost-effective transportation for Illinois in ways that enhance quality of life, promote economic prosperity, and demonstrate respect for our environment." Even though the department does not have a specific mandate the implementation of all its projects addresses all issues of human rights and related environmental issues at all levels of project development. Communities are informed of any major developments prior to construction and all comments are addressed and made compliant if applicable with the NEPA process.

Do you assess the impact of projects on low-income and minority communities? If so, how?

As a state Department of Transportation, that partners with its federal partners the Federal Highway Administration on projects (FHWA) and state DOTs are directed by Executive Order 12898, "Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations." Under this order, federal agencies and states are required to identify and address, as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority and low-income populations. In general, IDOT must ensure greater public participation, improve research and data collection relating to the health of and environment of minority and low income populations, determine whether an adverse effect has a "disproportionately high" impact on minority or low income populations, and identify minimization or mitigation strategies to reduce impacts on minority and/or low income communities.

4. Does your agency have programs that address the issues of handicapped and/or elderly populations?

All projects have to address issues of handicapped and/ or elderly populations based on the issues of Safety. As part of the safety focus there is a targeted area of emphasis on vulnerable users and through an integrated process in the decision making process these client groups are included to ensure that they do have a high level of safety on any part of the transportation system. A specific project would be the Illinois Complete Streets law was enacted in October 2007. A "complete street" is one that can accommodate all users safely, including the most vulnerable, identified as youths, persons with disabilities and the elderly. The legislation requires IDOT to give full consideration to bicycle and pedestrian facilities in the planning, design and construction of state transportation facilities,

5. Identify staff positions that work with low-income; minority; elderly and/or handicapped populations and communities.

The Office for Workforce and Diversity work specifically with minority groups on procurement and contractual issues. There are also specific training programs within IDOT that work with handicapped populations.

6. Does your agency have a community involvement/community engagement plan? If yes, explain the plan and specify whether it is general or project specific.

IDOT participates in several community engagement processes. The NEPA process requires meaningful community involvement, IDOT's community impact assessments evaluate transportation projects on community residents and their quality of life, and IDOT's utilization of Context Sensitive Solutions (CSS) through early, frequent, and meaningful communication with stakeholders, and a flexible and creative approach to design, resulting in projects that should improve safety and mobility for the traveling public, while seeking to preserve and enhance the scenic, economic, historic, and natural qualities of the settings through which they pass.

7. How does your agency accommodate communities that are non-native English speakers? For example, providing an interpreter at a community meeting, translating documents, etc.

There are no mandatory rules however If required the agency will get an interpreter to meetings and translate documents if required. In addition there is staff across the board that is bi-lingual and assist upon request

8. Does your agency partner with community interest groups, if so who are they?

Meaningful and frequent communication with stakeholders and community interest groups is a cornerstone of IDOT's project development process. These partnerships are often related to a specific project or plan. For example, during the development of the Illinois Bike Transportation Plan, the Long range transportation plan and the development of major projects, IDOT works with various community interest groups. The Transportation Secretary also has quarterly meetings with the Gamaliel Group of Illinois which is a grassroots network of non-partisan, faith-based organizations in 17 U.S. states that organizes to empower ordinary people to effectively participate in the political, environmental, social and economic decisions affecting their lives. .Gamaliel is the only national community organizing network that marries broad-based grassroots organizing campaigns with state-of-the-art regional opportunity research and policy development.

9. The Mud-to Garden project is an example of how state agencies can work together to address an environmental justice concern. Can you give an example of an opportunity where your agency could partner with one or more agencies on the EJ Commission to address an environmental justice concern?

The department participated in this project by transferring soil to the site.