

ILLINOIS COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE
MEETING NOTES
Tuesday, November 14, 2023 (1:00 pm – 3:00 pm)

Welcome/Introduction

- Paulina Lopez-Santos, EJ Policy Administrator, Illinois EPA Office of EJ
 - Opening remarks, introduction, and facilitation going forward

Roll Call

- Ex-officio members
 - Illinois Department Human Services – Housing office, Not present
 - Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity, Not present
 - Illinois Department of Natural Resources, Not present
 - Illinois Department of Public Health, Not present
 - Illinois Department of Transportation, Not present
 - Illinois Environmental Protection Agency, Present – Chris Pressnall, Manager, Office of EJ
- Elected Officials
 - Representative Du Buclet (D), 5th District, appointed to the Commission recently
- Brief Introductions & Additional Roll Call
 - Dean Alonis – Chief of Staff for Representative Du Buclet
 - Tonyisha Harris – Commissioner with Action for the Climate Emergency, Associate Director of Youth Media and Partnerships
 - Victoria Wilson – Cook County Environmental Sustainability Commissioner for the Southland Triad, EJ Commission since 2019, President & CEO of Naturally Urban Environmental, Inc.
 - Andrew Armstrong – Chief of Springfield Bureau for Illinois Attorney General’s Office, with other attorneys joining: Steve Sylvester, Arlene Haas, Caitlin Kelly
 - Stephanie Bilenko –board member of Nuclear Energy Information Service
 - Donovan Griffith – Illinois Manufacturer’s Association
 - Kelly Thompson – Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group
 - Delia Barajas – EJ Community, Cicero Illinois
 - Dulce Ortiz – Clean Power for Lake County
 - Kim Wasserman – Commission on EJ Chair, Executive Director of Little Village Environmental Justice Organization
- Additional Participants
 - Kathy Triantafillou – U.S. EPA Region 5, EJ Program
 - Alexa Burnett – U.S. EPA Region 5, EJ Program
 - Olivia Davidson – U.S. EPA Region 5, EJ Program
 - Luis Lopez – Illinois EPA Office of EJ
 - James Mensah – Illinois EPA Office of EJ
 - Alane Herr – Illinois EPA Associate Director’s Office
 - Deborah Williams – City Water, Light, and Power
 - Wyatt Ellis

Presentations

U.S. EPA Region 5, Tribal & Multi-media Programs Office, Environmental Justice Program

- Kathy Triantafillou, Olivia Davidson, and Alexa Burnett
 - Overview and Structure of Office of EJ & External Civil Rights (Washington DC) and Region 5 EJ Program (Chicago)
 - U.S. EPA Grants Awarded in Illinois
 - EJ Academy in East St. Louis
 - U.S. EPA's Cumulative Impact Framework
 - U.S. EPA Region 5 Draft Community Action Roadmap
- U.S. EPA EJ office 2022 -2026 Strategic Plan
 - Added foundational principle; to advance justice and equity
 - Under Goal 2: Take Decisive Action to Advance EJ and Civil Rights (CR)
 - Three objectives to this goal
 - Promote EJ and CR at the Federal, Tribal, State, and local levels
 - Embed EJ and CR into EPA's Programs, Policies, and Activities
 - Strengthen CR Enforcement in Communities with EJ Concerns
- Organizational chart – one year of getting its own division, Office of EJ and External Civil Rights
 - Based in Washington, D.C., U.S. EPA Headquarters
 - Main offices: Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center, Office of Resource Management and Communications, Office of Community Support, Office of Policy, Partnerships and Program Development, Office of External Civil Rights Complaints
- Office of the Regional Administrator - Tribal and Multimedia Programs office, three branches
 - EJ program roles and responsibilities
 - Direct community support and engagement
 - Internal integration of EJ across EPA programs
 - External integration of EJ across partners
 - Direct community support and engagement
 - Administration of grants, cooperative agreements, co-sponsorships, and/or interagency agreements – Inflation Reduction Act funds + IRA grants specifically.
 - Targeted to provide direct support to communities
 - Community outreach and engagement with EJ concerns
 - Serve as liaison with key individuals/organizations to support EJ communities with technical/financial assistance, trainings, and connections
- Region 5's Heathy Communities team – children's health program resources
 - General audience: Training / Capacity Building
 - Specialized Audiences: Training / Capacity Building
 - Consultation
 - PEHSU Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units
 - Great Lakes Center for Children's Environmental Health cofounded by EPA and ATSDR (Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry)
 - Environmental education program teaches individuals how to weigh various sides of an issue with critical thinking
 - Competitive grant

- Examples: Chicago Horticultural Society
 - West Central Planning Commission – Putting Clean Water Back in the Eau Claire River.
 - Trout Unlimited Stream Girls
 - Healthy Schools Program
 - Vision: sustainable, healthy, and productive learning environments for all children
 - School Assistance Center – Healthy Communities Team
 - Partnership to provide compliance assurance and technical assistance to enable schools to establish and maintain healthy learning environments
 - Slide – Visual Summary of Region 5’s Healthy Communities Team
- EJ Academy - Overview
 - 10-month long program – Mission is to educate grassroots leaders aged 16 and older from communities facing EJ concerns by providing skills to advocate and communicate with their communities
 - Metro East EJ Academy to kick-off in 2024
 - Hosts: Kappa House and SIUE with U.S. EPA Region 5 at Kappa House
 - EJ Academy main topics include:
 - Setting goals
 - Advocating for your community
 - Dealing with differences
 - Partnering and leveraging resources
 - Identifying financial sources
 - Sustaining organizational efforts
 - Assessing progress
 - Takeaways from EJ Academy
 - Basic understanding of EJ
 - Identifying community and or public health concerns
 - Learn the links between equity, community planning, and EJ outcomes
 - Learn how to make long-term progress by building their capacity to address challenges
 - Benefits
 - Assistance with creating final project that outlines tactics addressing a local issue and includes plans for securing funding and identifying partners
 - Complete plan t guide organizational activities
 - Interact with technical experts
 - Network with other community leaders
- Grants awarded to Illinois for EJ
 - United Congregations of Metro East - Collaborative Problem-Solving Grant to complete Air Monitoring
 - Ecology Action Center – non-profit in Normal, IL
 - Metropolitan Water Reclamation District Chicago-Grant for Greening of a Brownfield (G2G)
- Grants & TCTACS – Thriving Community Technical Assistance Centers

- Services include training and assistance on grant proposals, managing grant funds, community engagement
- 2 in Region 5
- Each EJ TCTAC will receive \$10 million funded incrementally
 - Blacks in Green (BIG)
 - Grassroot orgs with the goal to uplift other goals
 - University of Minnesota
 - Plan to leverage existing university extension networks and technical service to provide....
- Community Change Grant
 - Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)
 - Designed to provide environmental and climate justice activities that benefit disadvantaged communities, reduce pollution, increase community climate resilience, build community capacity to respond to EJ and climate justice challenges
 - Most awards will be between \$10 - \$20 million spent within 3-years to \$1-3 million spent within 3-years
 - Community change grant technical assistance
 - Contractor-led technical assistance to support eligible entities to apply for Community Change Grants
 - Assistance on planning, project developing, etc.
 - More info in the community change NOFO
- EJ “Grantmakers” or formally: EJ Thriving Communities Grant Making Program in collaboration with OEJECR (Office of EJ and External Civil Rights)
 - Provides assistance to grant application processes
 - Simplify federal grant app process
 - EJ thriving communities subgrants
 - Phase 1 – assessment projects of environmental and public health concerns, gather information, etc.
 - One- year project period up to \$150,000 each
 - Phase 2 – planning – community-based organization with strong understanding of issues
 - Projects up to \$250,000 for 1-2 years
 - Planning, partnership building, training for community organizations or members, cleanup of vacant lots or smaller land purchases, etc.
 - Phase 3 – project development
 - Up to \$350,000 for 2-year project period
 - Example - blueprints for constructions of cleanup products, work to get permits, implementations of plans
 - Eligible applicants
 - Incorporated non-profit, community-based organizations
 - Federally recognized tribal governments
 - Tribal Organizations

- Local Governments
 - Higher Education Institutions
 - Also all applicants must be:
 - Located within same state, territory, commonwealth, tribe, for project location
 - Able to demonstrate it has worked directly with affected community
- Cumulative Impacts
 - “Cumulative Impacts”—The totality of exposures to combinations of chemical and nonchemical stressors and their effects on health, well-being, and quality of life outcomes
 - “Cumulative Impacts Assessment” – A process of evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data representing cumulative impacts to inform a decision
 - EJ collaborative problem solving model
 - 7 step model
- Community Action Roadmap
 - Systematic approach to assess and address cumulative impacts
 - Identify needs/concerns of overburdened communities through collaborative engagement with community
 - Identify actions
 - Comprised of phases benchmarked to the Health Impact Assessment Model and elements of EPA’s collaborative problem-solving model
 - Engage w/ community -> screening and scoping phase -> needs assessment -> actions/recommendations -> reporting and monitoring
 - Cyclical/iterative, meant to build capacity, draw more partners in, sustainable partnerships
 - Screening & scoping phase
 - Screening
 - Action: Identify locations where EPA cross program and community focused approach could address disproportionate and cumulative impacts.
 - Outputs: draft preliminary evaluation of an area and a decision on how to proceed with scoping, after scoping an assessment workplan and collaboration and engagement strategy

- Scoping
 - Action: Engage all relevant internal & External partners to develop plans for further assessment, consider what outcomes could be achieved, establish collaboration and engagement strategy with partners
 - Outputs: An assessment workplan and collaboration and engagement strategy
 - Assessment phase – what else do we need to know in order to take action:
 - Action: execute assessment workplan with partners, identify if additional assessments are needed, make updates to workplan
 - Output: collaboratively approved cumulative assessment of existing conditions to inform next steps and recommendations
 - Recommendations phase [Decisions & Actions]
 - Action: Collaboratively develop feasible, evidence-based, and prioritized actions that mitigate negative outcomes and/or improve conditions. Define partner commitments to take relevant recommended actions.
 - Output: A set of achievable recommended actions that are endorsed by internal and external partners.
 - Reporting and Monitoring phases:
 - Reporting
 - Action: developing management strategy for executing, evaluating, and sustaining recommendations and relationships; Compile and disseminate outputs from the Screening, Scoping, Assessment and Recommendations Phases.
 - Output: Provide updates to partners and the community using management strategy
 - Monitoring phase
 - Action: Execute an agreed upon process to track/report on the progress and completion of commitments made in the community action plan (CAP), Evaluate the execution and implementation processes and document lessons learned and best practices
 - Output: Culminate feedback received from evaluation mechanisms to support the Roadmap process and incorporate into the CAP
 - Community Action Road (CAR) process: evaluates nature and extent of disproportionate and cumulative impacts using a fit-for-purpose approach, involves communities in decision-making-process

Q&A/Discussion

- Andrew: United Congregations of Metro East grant, asked if there had been specific locations identified and if the monitoring data from those monitors can be used for enforcement purposes
 - Response from Kathy: Grants in the early phases, no answers at the moment, still in the process of meeting with the grantees regarding work plans. Grantees are initially asked about plans for data they collect. Monitors are not of the Quality Assurance and Quality Control for enforcement actions.

- Victoria: thanking for the presentation, wants to make sure that communities are involved, want the commission to be involved.
- Dean: Would love to be involved
- Arlene: how you're planning on working on Cumulative Impacts with state partners
 - Response from Olivia: CAR means state and local governments to be a shared resource between everyone, everyone is at the table and can provide feedback. CAP should be shared resource to review and provide feedback.
- Arlene: state and federal government are different places with respect to cumulative impacts and resources
 - Response from Olivia: it's a part of collaboration and engagement strategy, state can help us find certain type of data.
 - Response from Kathy: we are still working on Cumulative Impact Framework. States are being looked at and the questions are what can be done and how can we work collaboratively.
 - Response from Paulina: Illinois EPA met with U.S. EPA Region 5 to discuss these efforts and beginning stages. This is a big reason why we invited you today, this commission is a forum to invite these conversations
- Donovan: angst around qualitative data, keep business and regulated communities are involved as well
- Stephanie Bilenko: referring to question about Monitoring Data. Equipment for air and water? Are you doing anything with soil testing?
 - Response from Olivia: question came from a preliminary grant provided to a community group in East St. Louis. Focused on Air monitoring, but still working on that plan
- Delia Barajas: have you consulted EJ frontline workers with communities to see what they need? Also, Cicero as an EJ community was flooded because of a storm in July. Because of the wastewater treatment plant raw sewage flooded the area. Nobody came out to assess the damage. No public health institution nor the EPA came to assess the damage. Also the Coal Tar facility, Koppers, is in violation since 2020. There is no noticeable improvement despite all the plans that were just discussed. Also, Biden waived some environmental protection laws so how can these things be implemented when he has done these things
 - Kathy's response: EJ academy is only behind the scenes, but the community is in charge of what they want to see, and we work closely with the community. Civil rights is under OEJECR umbrella. But any enforcement is located in headquarters. After we can connect to get you in contact because our team doesn't know why it takes so long, etc., with regards to civil rights complaints. EJ doesn't have regulations with regards to your final comment about Biden and waiving protections.
- Comment from Stephanie Bilenko to Delia: Is your state rep Rashid, did he help with restitutions?
 - Delia's response: Yes. But Biden has waived the rights that are supposed to be protecting us.
- Victoria Wilson: Thank you again EPA Region 5. We get stuck with goals of Federal EPA and how it trickles down the regions. How do we make sure grassroots organizations get the support they need. Also how do we address the concerns of community members to be more effective. How

can we as a commission make sure we support goals when the TCTACS organizations are not in East St. Louis or Peoria, etc.

- Response from Kathy – TCTACS organizations help not just in the area they are in, but for all 6 states in the region. They are equipped to handle requests to help orgs find funding. They can connect to other organizations that may help.

Presentation: Overview of Results from Commission on EJ Priorities Survey

- Question: What should commission accomplish in next 2-3 years?
 - Ensure no communities are neglected as to EJ policies and laws related to degradation, permits, education and accountability
 - Serve as liaison between local communities and industry throughout the state to provide a forum that allows open lines of communication to better serve the communities in need of environmental protections
 - Work together with industry and Environmental NGOs and activists to pass a well-defined EJ Law in the State that everyone agrees on and is fair
 - Support environmental justice policies and hosting listening sessions across the state to hear directly from residents about where the commission can intervene
 - Focus on the duties as specified in 145 ILCS 155/10
- Question: Air/water/land issues – Vote on top subcommittees for specific issues.
 - Only 4 responses to the survey
 - Air came in as a top priority
 - Victoria Wilson: comment about the interconnectivity of environmental issues regarding air, water, and land
 - Arlene Ruth Haas: questions about what is considered land
 - Response from Paulina: superfund and brownfield sites
 - Arlene: interests in redeveloping properties (brownfield sites) post-clean up
 - Victoria: When you're dealing with superfund and brownfield site redevelopment there are monitoring requirements in regard to water. We need to identify the intended use and match funding
 - Chris: adding to this, we are divided into Air Water and Land at the EPA. People mostly are concerned with Air because it spreads and affects people immediately. But it is all one thing as you were saying, Victoria
 - Stephanie: I'm glad you made that clear regarding land. But for example in little village (Chicago) there are toxic pollutants in the land and have to bring in dirt. It's important not to just have data for the air, but also land
 - Victoria: I agree with Stephanie. I don't know why native plants are not utilized more in land remediation
- Question: Specify the issues in detail
 - Water: Safe drinking water, Lead service line replacements, sewer overflows
 - Air: Pollution from fossil fuel sources, permitting
 - Land: Residents having a say in permit decisions
 - Victoria: Permitting, how do we support a subcommittee in regard to permit process (land, air, water)

- Chris: Pre-pandemic the OEJ at Illinois EPA worked on developing workshop materials at the request of organizations in Chicago on Permitting. The Illinois EPA is required to grant permits under the law so long as certain requirements are met. Often projects are far along due to local land use decisions and other local ordinances etc. We have EJ notification letters, but if there was a subcommittee, we could revisit these ideas regarding permitting. How to submit comments, etc. The process is complex. But we can address how we can help and make an impact.
- Question: Any additional suggestions for other subcommittees? We have some from respondents to the survey.
 - Climate crisis where communities can understand climate change issues
 - Dean – Commented that this is a good idea. Also Climate Adaptation for subcommittee work.
 - Victoria – Commented that she liked what Dean said. Adaptation and resiliency without the technical language is a good idea. Prepare for the worst. I do like the idea of the Illinois EPA staff expert as well as representatives of Region 5. Engagement with and at the state level is needed as well as Justice40 commission liaison. Intergovernmental and sister agencies should work together to be adaptive and supportive.
 - Paulina – we are cutting close to time, but I will share these slides, and you can contact me by email or phone.
- Question: Vote on top work-products
 - Web-based working site or portal for the latest information, inquiries, and downloads for EJ grants funds, newest legislation, etc.
 - Workshop/listening session
 - Flyer/brochure has been completed. Please share so we can reach quorum.
- Question: Any suggestions or ideas on additional work products?
 - Perhaps an annual EJ report. The commission is already tasked to do so. Once we reach quorum, we can work to achieve this.
- Next steps
 - Continued push to drive peers/networks to apply to join the Commission
 - Illinois EPA will finalize EJ Resources webpage content and send to Commissioners for review/input
 - Identify communities in which we want to provide listening sessions
 - Based on set priorities (Air, Water, etc.), Illinois EPA will work with commissions to develop future agendas and speakers

Additional Q&A/Discussion

- Victoria Wilson: when are we meeting in person?
 - Paulina responded: certainly can look into this and we can follow up via email to schedule our meetings for the upcoming year

Paulina: If there are no other questions, thank you. Happy holidays! Meeting adjourned.