

Rural Environmental Justice Opportunities Informed by Community Experts (R.E.J.O.I.C.E.)

*Convening impacted communities to identify issues, set strategic goals, and create policy vision
at the intersection of pollution, power, and policy.*

A joint initiative between Vermonters, Center for Whole Communities, CVOEO's Mobile Home Program, Toxics Action Center, University of Vermont, and Vermont Law School

Environmental Justice is a term seldom used in Vermont. The demographics and rural setting of this state can hide environmental injustices in our communities, yet issues of water quality, indoor air quality, energy affordability, transportation access, food insecurity, and associated health risks may still disproportionately affect low-income and minority populations in the state. We seek to hear directly from these communities to identify shared experiences with unseen environmental injustice issues in Vermont.



RESEARCH CORE

Identify underserved communities in Vermont

- Spatial analysis of ecosystem assets, deficits, demographics, and health
- Participatory mapping sessions
- Develop Rural Environmental Justice mapping tool



COMMUNITY CORE

Produce evidence-based accounts of environmental injustices

- Conduct Surveys and Interviews with community members
- Connect and maintain network of community leaders and organizations
- Host 12 Community Listening Sessions around the state



POLICY CORE

Address existing gaps in state policy

- Identify legal/policy links to community issues
- Create policy recommendations for VT agencies based on community feedback
- Draft Environmental Justice Legislation for Vermont



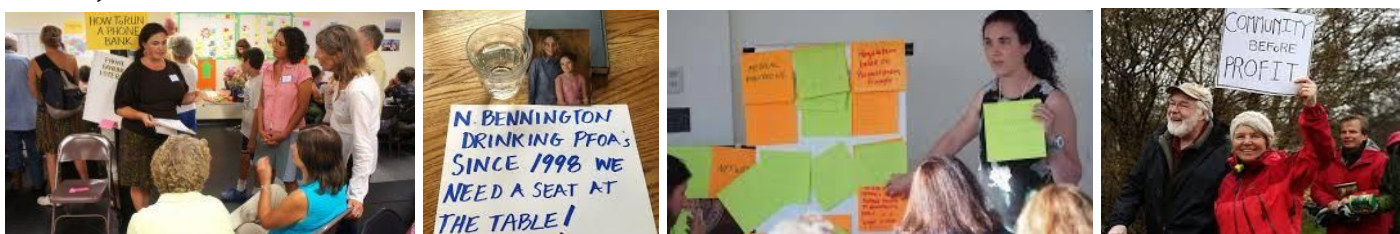
R.E.J.O.I.C.E. Project Scope & Timeline

We believe the environmental movement should be led by the communities who have the most at stake.

We support and rely on community knowledge and expertise to co-construct interventions, policies, and transformative approaches toward building sustainable, just, and resilient futures for overburdened communities in Vermont.

We seek to answer the following questions through conversations with Vermont residents:

- What are the key environmental and health issues of concern to frontline communities? How do ethnoculturally diverse and low-income communities identify, prioritize, and integrate health and ecological concerns?
- What are the challenges to access, inclusion, and participation in state environmental and land use policy? How do these challenges contribute to existing environmental health issues?
- What factors contribute to structural racism in Vermont, and thus contribute to environmental justice issues?



Project Phase Schedule		
Phase 1: Data Collection and Relationship Building		May - Aug 2019
Objective 1	Identify target communities for community panels, begin exploratory conversations and process design	May 2019
Objective 2	Conduct legal review of environmental health and land use policies in Vermont and best practices in other states	August 2019
Phase 2: Community Engagement, Part I		Sept - Nov 2019
Objective 1	Convene the first state interagency EJ forum	Sept 2019
Objective 2	Complete first round of community panels, surveys, interviews, participatory mapping	Nov 2019
Phase 3: Community Engagement, Part II		Jan - May 2020
Objective 1	Complete transcription and compilation of listening sessions, interviews, and survey data and summarize for partners	Jan 2020
Objective 2	Publish draft project report and findings, circulate to stakeholders	May 2020
Phase 4: Craft EJ Policy Recommendations		June - Dec 2020
Objective 1	Convene 3-5 meetings with stakeholders to discuss policy options	June - Aug 2020
Objective 2	Draft EJ policy recommendations for official interagency review, in preparation for advancing legislative recommendations	Sept - Dec 2020

How you can help: We are seeking powerful partners for this project. Support this work by contacting Kesha Ram (Community PI) at Center for Whole Communities kesha@wholecommunities.org or 802-881-4433; Jenny Rushlow (Policy PI) at Vermont Law School's Environmental Justice Law Clinic jrushlow@vermontlaw.edu or 802-831-1136; or Bindu Panikkar (Research PI) at UVM's Rubenstein School of Environmental and Natural Resources bindu.panikkar@uvm.edu or 617-776-3153.