

REJOICE Pandemic  
Recovery Project:  
Preliminary Findings and  
Recommendations

Rural Environmental  
Justice Opportunities  
Informed by Community  
Expertise

June through December 2020



# REJOICE Project:

## Rural Environmental Justice Opportunities Informed by Community Expertise

**2018-2022**

Watch a live recording and Q&A [here](#).



R.E.J.O.I.C.E. Project 2020 - Please share slides with attribution

# Who Are We?

---

Center for Whole Communities

Community Action Works

University of Vermont

Vermont Law School

CVOEO Mobile Home Project



CENTER  
FOR **WHOLE**  
COMMUNITIES

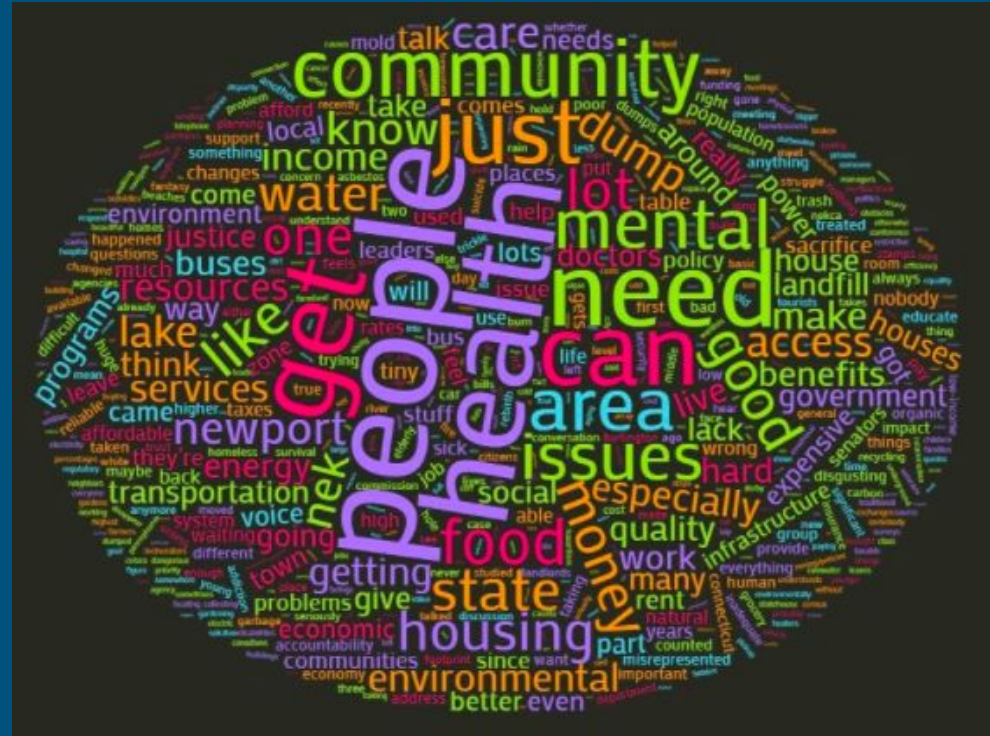
**ENVIRONMENTAL  
JUSTICE CLINIC**

Vermont Law School



# Scope of Work

- Community-Led Research & Conversations
- Community Surveys
- Spatial & Data Analysis
- State Interagency Forums and Trainings
- Environmental Justice Policy Recommendations
- EJ Network / Return to Community with Recommendations



Word cloud from REJOICE in-person community conversation, Newport, VT, Fall 2019

# Methodology

- Engaged community leaders, liaisons, and interpreters to co-design and co-facilitate focus groups via Zoom and by phone
- Compensated partners and participants
- Provided targeted health and economic information
- Asked open-ended environmental and quality-of-life questions
- Committed to checking our findings with partners and communities



A pre-COVID community conversation in Newport, Vermont.

# Focus Groups

17 focus groups, 77 participants

- Bhutanese Nepali Elders & Parents
- Deaf & Hard of Hearing Community
- Migrant Farmworkers
- Mobile Home Communities
- People With Disabilities
- Rural Communities
- Seniors
- Somali Bantu Elders & Parents

## YOUR VOICE MATTERS!

### JOIN REJOICE FOR A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR COVID-19 EXPERIENCE

**What:** an informal conversation about your experience with pandemic relief and recovery.

**When:** on Tuesday, 10/20, 6-7:30pm, by video and audio call.

**How:** the first eight people to sign up will participate and receive \$50 for their time. Sign up by calling the CVOEO Mobile Home Program at 802-660-3455 ext 204 by 12pm on Monday, October 19.

**Who:** The REJOICE Partnership is the group organizing this meeting. We are teachers, community leaders, and policy advisors who want to better understand how the pandemic has affected environmental and health problems across Vermont.

**Why:** We hope the information you share will be used to change how the government and nonprofit groups respond to emergencies and inequality in the future. You have the power to make decisions and fight injustice in your state!

The REJOICE Project: Rural Environmental Justice Opportunities Informed by Community Expertise



# **Our goal is to produce evidence-based accounts of environmental justice in Vermont.**

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?

# Focus Group Questions

- Environmental and health issues of concern in your community
- Pandemic response measures that have been helpful or unhelpful
- Challenges to accessing:
  - ◆ Information and resources about the pandemic, online or in your own language
  - ◆ Shelter and neighborhood safety
  - ◆ Adequate medical care
  - ◆ Health and safety at work
  - ◆ Nutritious food and necessary supplies
- Issues you are most worried about right now
- One thing you'd ask the government to change in the pandemic response

Read the REJOICE 2020 reports here:

[www.environmentaljusticevt.org](http://www.environmentaljusticevt.org)

# What is Environmental Justice Policy?

## Equal access to...

Clean Air

Clean Water

Outdoor Recreation

Healthy Homes

Health Care

Fresh Food

**SUBSTANTIVE**

## Enhancing...

Public Participation

Access to Information

Language Access

**PROCEDURAL**

## Ensuring...

No discrimination based on  
race, national origin,  
disability or income

Equal distribution of  
environmental burdens and  
benefits

**DISTRIBUTIVE**



# WHAT DOES S.148 DO?

## Sets an Environmental Justice Policy

- ❑ No segment of the population of the State should, because of its racial, cultural, or economic makeup, bear a disproportionate share of environmental benefits or burdens

## Defines “EJ Populations”

- ❑ Based on race, low income, and limited English proficiency
- ❑ Definitions for “Environmental Justice” and “Meaningful Participation” were developed through a participatory process led by VT Renews BIPOC Council

## Commits Targeted Spending in EJ Populations

- ❑ Sets a goal for the state to spend at least 55 percent of environmental, renewable energy, climate mitigation, transportation, and climate resilience funds in designated EJ populations

# WHAT DOES S.148 DO?

## **Establishes an EJ Advisory Council & Interagency Council**

- ❑ Advisory Council comprised of community members from EJ Populations

## **Commits State to Building an EJ Mapping Tool**

- ❑ Tool should be useful to communities and agencies to aid in information sharing

## **Establishes Date for Compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act**

- ❑ All State Agencies must develop meaningful Community Engagement Plans

# Title VI in the Environmental Context

---

Title VI provides:

No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or otherwise be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity administered by a recipient of federal funds.

- Civil Rights Act of 1964

Principles of Environmental Justice demand:

“The fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self determination of all peoples.”

“The right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation.”

- 17 Principles of EJ: First Nat’l People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991

[www.environmentaljusticevt.org](http://www.environmentaljusticevt.org)

Jennifer Byrne, MELP

Masters Fellow, Environmental Justice Clinic

Vermont Law School

[jbyrne@vermontlaw.edu](mailto:jbyrne@vermontlaw.edu)