

# GOVERNOR'S ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Final Report



© October 15, 2024

## DEAR GOVERNOR COOPER,

We are honored to serve as co-chairs of the Governor's Environmental Justice Advisory Council. Along with the other 20 members of the Environmental Justice Advisory Council established to address environmental justice issues in our state, we are pleased to submit this report for your consideration. The report describes our activities over the past 12 months and the recommendations we developed pursuant to the charge outlined in Executive Order 292.

Comprised of 22 members—11 community stakeholders and 11 designated representatives of cabinet agencies—the Governor's EJ Advisory Council's was charged to:

- Build upon and expand the work of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board.
- Work with state agencies to develop and track goals and measurable outcomes to improve environmental justice in North Carolina.
- Recommend a comprehensive training plan for state agencies.
- Create an EJ Hub and Mapping Tool that provides information on environmental justice issues and data-driven insights into the cumulative impacts of exposures to life-threatening environmental contaminants from noxious facilities and locally unwanted land uses in historically marginalized communities.
- Develop recommendations for creating a framework and methodology to assess the cumulative impacts on communities from environmental justice issues.

The EJ Council opted to pursue our work through a subcommittee structure given the broad scope of our charge and council members' breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding of EJ issues. We first created review groups to give state agencies feedback on their draft agency EJ goals and outcomes. We also created subcommittees to provide leadership on key Council activities:

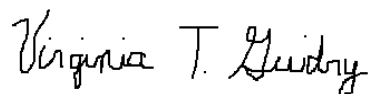
- EJ Hub and Mapping Tool led by Dr. Courtney Woods, to review and recommend improvements to the tool in development.
- Cumulative impacts led by Ms. Sherri White-Williamson, to develop a framework and methodology to assess the cumulative impacts of EJ issues in North Carolina.

- Community engagement led by Ms. Ebony Pittman, to collect input from community members across the state on Council activities and EJ concerns.
- Training led by Dr. Marian Johnson-Thompson, to develop EJ training recommendations for state agencies and local governments.
- Report led by Ms. Jennifer Mundt, to coordinate the design and development of this report.

Our final report is based on our deliberations and the public input we received at six EJ Council meetings. We held three of our full Council meetings in Raleigh and three community-based meetings in Wayne County, Halifax County and Stanly County. In addition, we hosted three virtual and three in-person public forums in Asheville, Warrenton and Clinton to solicit public input, guidance and feedback on activities and projects of the various EJ Council subcommittees. Finally, we solicited public input via voice mail, text message and an [Public Input Website](#).

Over the past year, we believe the Governor's EJ Council made substantive progress on advancing environmental justice in North Carolina. However, much remains to be done. Accordingly, we look forward to continuing the work with state agencies to implement their EJ goals; ensure state agency staff receive proper training per the guidelines outlined in our report; further develop the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool; and pursue other promising practices that will advance environmental justice in North Carolina.

Sincerely,



Virginia Guidry, PhD



James H. Johnson, Jr., PhD





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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On Oct. 24, 2023, Governor Cooper issued Executive Order 292, aimed at advancing environmental justice (EJ) in North Carolina. This order re-establishes the Secretary of Environmental Quality's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board as the Governor's Environmental Justice Advisory Council, with a directive to enhance the state's commitment to addressing EJ concerns.

The 22-member EJ Council unanimously approved 14 recommendations based on the work it completed. The full text of the recommendations can be found on pages 3-4 of this report. Highlights of the recommendations include:

- 1 **Creating an Office of Environmental Justice within the Governor's Office of Public Engagement.**
- 2 **Collaborating with EJ leaders to ensure the EJ Mapping Tool accurately reflects areas impacted by EJ issues.**
- 3 **Creating a North Carolina-specific EJ index.**
- 4 **Reviewing the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool for accessibility.**
- 5 **Developing a process to review, respond to and implement input received on the EJ Hub.**
- 6 **Recommending cabinet agencies engage with community members around data collection and review.**
- 7 **Developing a cumulative impacts guidance document.**
- 8 **Recommending cabinet agencies review information gaps identified by the EJ Hub & Mapping Subcommittee and within their agency and provide a list of additional data they can supply; develop legislative language that authorizes such data collection and analysis, as needed.**
- 9 **Engaging community leaders and EJ organizations in meeting planning.**
- 10 **Seeking advice from tribal organizations and other relevant entities on the needs and best processes for engaging with these communities.**
- 11 **Documenting and sharing public feedback and responses on public engagement events; evaluating and addressing barriers to engagement.**
- 12 **Requiring EJ training for all state and local government employees.**
- 13 **Cataloging and sharing EJ-relevant state resources to prevent duplication of efforts.**
- 14 **Clarifying the definition of EJ to increase familiarity and ease of use.**

To develop these recommendations, the EJ Council established four subcommittees to address and make recommendations on key EJ topics. Highlights of the subcommittee work include:

**EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee:** The EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee guided the development of a comprehensive EJ Hub website, designed in conjunction with the Department of Information Technology, to include vital EJ information and a user-friendly EJ Mapping Tool. The first version of the EJ Mapping Tool was released in October 2024. The subcommittee also offered recommendations, including how to incorporate new data layers and indexing, making the tool easy to access and use, and engaging the public.

**Cumulative Impacts Subcommittee:** The Cumulative Impacts Subcommittee engaged academia and other research institutions to conduct research on cumulative impacts in the state and create a framework and methodology to assess those impacts. The subcommittee made recommendations around establishing a community-engaged process for identifying and weighting indicators, how the EJ Mapping Tool can be used for data collection and analysis, and suggestions for both executive and legislative action to address cumulative impacts. The subcommittee also identified additional indicators for a state-specific environmental justice Index.

**Community Engagement Subcommittee:** The Community Engagement Subcommittee introduced a public involvement initiative and collected feedback to inform the development of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool, develop potential mitigation strategies, and guide policy and procedural revisions. The subcommittee's recommendations included a collaborative approach, involving early outreach to community leaders; convening regular gatherings, including in EJ communities; documenting public engagement events; and maintaining ongoing communication about successes and challenges.

**Training Subcommittee:** The Training Subcommittee recommended a comprehensive EJ training plan for state employees and had to consider whether such training should be extended to local governments and local planning boards. The subcommittee recommended creating a training program tailored to employee engagement levels, with a focus on aligning content with agency missions and providing training opportunities beyond permanent state employees to include contract workers and external legislative organizations.

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Cabinet agencies have also been engaged in EJ work. This report outlines relevant programs in each agency, highlighting several specific programs through an EJ angle. Although there is additional work to be done in the EJ space, this section details important efforts already underway and provides an opportunity to showcase these accomplishments.

Finally, this report provides an overview of each cabinet agency's implementation of their public participation plan. Under Governor Cooper's Executive Order 246, each cabinet agency is required to develop an agency public participation plan informed by stakeholder input. These participation plans include best practices for community engagement, meaningful dialogue and efficient mechanisms to receive and incorporate public input into agency decision-making.

# EJ COUNCIL MEMBERS



**Virginia Guidry, Co-Chair**

Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology Head, Department of Health and Human Services



**James H. Johnson Jr., Co-Chair**

William R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor of Strategy and Entrepreneurship, UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School



**Cara Bridges**

Policy and Strategic Planning Director, Department of Public Safety



**Tamara Brothers**

Program Outreach and Engagement Director, Department of Natural and Cultural Resources



**Tommy Cabe**

Tribal Forest Resource Liaison, Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians



**Justin L. Duncan**

Director of Partnership, Engagement, and Inclusion, Department of Adult Correction



**Justin Flores**

Director of the Workers and Jobs Program, Private Equity Stakeholder Project



**Evin Grant**

Director of Policy, Strategy & External Relations, Department of Administration



**Demico Guy**

Biological Engineering, NCA&T University Alumni





**Torre Jessup**

Chief Deputy & Deputy State Chief Information Officer, Department of Information Technology



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**Naeema Muhammad**

Co-Director, North Carolina Environmental Justice Network



**Jennifer Mundt**

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Deputy Secretary for Business Administration, Department of Transportation



**Douglas Taggart**

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**Daisha Wall**

Community Science Manager, CleanAIRE NC



**Sherri White-Williamson**

Executive Director, Environmental Justice Community Action Network



**Rebecca Witter**

Associate Professor of Sustainable Development, Appalachian State University



**Courtney Woods**

Associate Professor of Environmental Sciences and Engineering, UNC-Chapel Hill



**McKinley Wooten**

Assistant Secretary, North Carolina Department of Revenue



## THE PATH TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE IN NORTH CAROLINA

The EJ movement began more than 40 years ago in Warren County, N.C. In 1982, Warren County, a predominantly African American community, was designated to house a hazardous waste landfill near Warrenton. At the time, Warren County was 64 percent black and ranked 97th in per capita income (\$6,984) out of North Carolina's 100 counties. The unincorporated Shocco Township, the designated landfill site, was 75 percent Black. The landfill would accept 400,000 cubic yards of polychlorinated biphenyl contaminated soil. As a result, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the community organized a protest against the state's decision to locate the landfill in Warren County.

The Warren County protest failed to prevent the landfill's siting, but sparked the beginning of the national EJ movement, including the 1987 United Church of Christ study *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*.<sup>1</sup> The study found that race was the most significant factor in siting hazardous waste facilities. In 1991, the first People of Color Environmental Summit organized people of color

around environmental and economic justice and health, and led to the establishment of 17 *Principles of Environmental Justice*.<sup>2</sup>

The beginning of the EJ movement led to federal action to address environmental injustice across the United States. In 1994, President Bill Clinton issued Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations*.<sup>3</sup> E.O. 12898 directed federal agencies to consider EJ in their programs and policy decisions and established the Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice. More recently, President Biden signed Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*,<sup>4</sup> and E.O. 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*.<sup>5</sup> E.O. 14008 established the *Justice 40 Initiative*, which requires at least 40 percent of relevant federal investments benefit disadvantaged communities. It also created the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council.

1 Payne, D. G., & Newman, R. S. (2005). United Church of Christ commission for racial justice. In *The Palgrave Environmental Reader* (pp. 259-264). New York: Palgrave Macmillan US. Retrieved October 17, 2024, from [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-73299-9\\_30](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-1-349-73299-9_30)

2 Alston, D. (2010). The summit: Transforming a movement. *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, 2(3/4), 14-17. Retrieved October 17, 2024 from [https://friendsofrpe.org/files/Alston\\_20th.17-1.pdf](https://friendsofrpe.org/files/Alston_20th.17-1.pdf)

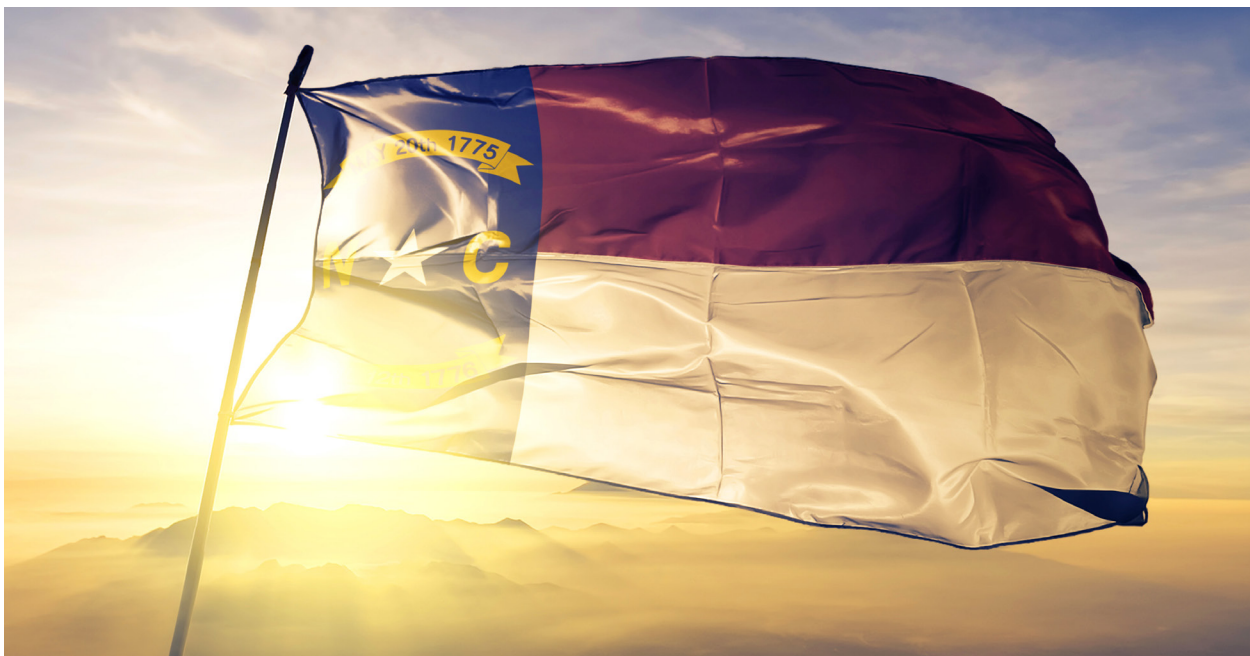
3 (n.d.). Federal Actions To Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations. National Archives. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://www.archives.gov/files/federal-register/executive-orders/pdf/12898.pdf>

4 Biden-Harris Administration (2021, January 27). Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad. The White House. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/>

5 Biden-Harris Administration (2023, April 21). Executive Order on Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All. The White House. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/04/21/executive-order-on-revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all/>

North Carolinians have disproportionately experienced environmental pollution from animal waste, industrial facilities, landfills and coal ash among others. These legacy pollutants have caused adverse health impacts for generations due to contaminated air and drinking water in nearby communities. In 2018, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Secretary Michael Regan established the Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board to address North Carolina's environmental injustices.<sup>6</sup> The board assisted DEQ in achieving and maintaining fair and equal treatment and meaningful involvement. Additionally, Governor Cooper signed various executive orders to address EJ, including E.O. 143, establishing the Andrea Harris Social, Economic, Environmental and Health Equity Task Force to address long-term disparities.<sup>7</sup> Governor Cooper also signed E.O. 246, directing cabinet agencies to consider EJ when taking actions related to climate change, resilience and clean energy, and identify an individual to serve as the lead point person for agency EJ efforts.<sup>8</sup>

Building on E.O. 246, Governor Cooper issued E.O. 292 on Oct. 24, 2023, directing bold action to advance EJ in North Carolina.<sup>9</sup> E.O. 292 defines EJ as the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin or tribal affiliation, in state-level policymaking and programming that affect human health, well-being and quality of life, as well as the environment. This executive order prioritizes equitable access to healthy, viable, sustainable and resilient communities as places to live, work, play and do business in North Carolina. E.O. 292 specifically seeks to protect all North Carolinians from exposures to environmental hazards stemming from climate change and the indiscriminate spread via air, land and/or water of life-threatening contaminants from noxious facilities and other locally unwanted land-uses, which tend to be concentrated disproportionately in historically marginalized communities. The work of E.O. 292 is off to a promising start, but is only just beginning.



6 North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (n.d.). Secretary's Environmental Justice and Equity Advisory Board (Archive). North Carolina Environmental Quality. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://www.deq.nc.gov/outreach-education/environmental-justice/secretarys-environmental-justice-and-equity-advisory-board-archive>

7 Office of North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper (2020, June 4). Addressing The Disproportionate Impact Of COVID-19 on Communities of Color. Governor.NC. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://governor.nc.gov/documents/files/eo143-addressing-disproportionate-impact-covid-19/open>

8 Office of North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper (2022, January 7). North Carolina's Transformation To A Clean Equitable Economy. Governor.NC. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://governor.nc.gov/executive-order-no-246/open>

9 Office of North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper (2023, January 2). Advancing Environmental Justice In North Carolina. Governor.NC. Retrieved October 2, 2024, from <https://governor.nc.gov/executive-order-no-292/open>



# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVANCING ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

**The full EJ Council unanimously approved the following 14 recommendations at its Sept. 24, 2024 meeting.**

**Recommendation 1.** The EJ Council recommends the creation of an Office of Environmental Justice within the Governor’s Office of Public Engagement.

**Recommendation 2.** The EJ Council and DIT should work directly with EJ leaders to ensure that the EJ Mapping Tool shows areas that are affected by well-documented, historical and contemporary EJ issues/communities in the state. These may be incorporated as qualitative and/or quantitative data with links to reference/source information.

**Recommendation 3.** The EJ Council should work with DIT to create a North Carolina-specific EJ index. Currently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) Environmental Justice Index (EJI) provides some context for cumulative impacts and where environmental, health and social burdens are concentrated in the state. However, this index does not include several environmental conditions that are unique to North Carolina. Some of these include industrial animal production and other agricultural-related environmental exposures and private well use.

**Recommendation 4.** The EJ Hub and Mapping Tool should undergo additional review and/or enhancements for accessibility. This includes:

- Digital accessibility for individuals who may have visual impairments.
- Language accessibility—beyond the page-translation feature in browsers—to ensure accessible information for Spanish-speaking populations.
- Mobile accessibility for rural communities with limited broadband access.

**Recommendation 5.** The Governor’s Office of Public Engagement should work with appropriate agencies to develop a process outlining how input received via the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool will be reviewed, responded to and sent to the appropriate body for action, if necessary. The tool has the potential for providing a mechanism for hearing directly from EJ community members. Acknowledging questions and comments in a timely manner is important for building trust and opening a pathway for access to decision-making that affects their communities.

**Recommendation 6.** Cabinet agencies should engage community members early and often to ensure that data collected is informed by impacted communities, aids in understanding the issues they raise and is shared back in appropriate formats following ethics of prior and informed consent and confidentiality. Data should go through a process of community peer review where people residing in impacted communities have an opportunity to provide feedback on the research approach and a “groundtruthing” process where they can provide personal experience and direct observations to inform data collection, data analysis and results returning.

**Recommendation 7.** The next entity, such as the Office of Environmental Justice, should develop a cumulative impact guidance document to facilitate conversations and guarantee conformity in the manner cumulative impact is defined and assessed.

**Recommendation 8.** Each agency should review information gaps identified by the EJ Council’s EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee; assess any gaps in their agency and provide a list of additional data they will be able to provide. If legislative action is necessary to improve the agency’s ability to collect and analyze data, then agency staff should work with the Governor’s Office to develop legislative language providing such authority.

**Recommendation 9.** The next entity, such as the Office of Environmental Justice, should engage community-based leaders and the state’s established EJ organizations to plan meeting dates, times and locations and to the extent practicable, develop meeting agendas. The office should consider a variety of formats and outreach to provide opportunities for dialogue, feedback and relationship building.

**Recommendation 10.** Indigenous and immigrant communities may have unique circumstances that influence their relationships with the environment and local, state and federal government. As such, the EJ Council and state agencies should seek advice from and work with the state’s federally-recognized tribe, seven state-recognized tribes and four state-regional American Indian Urban

Organizations and existing entities, like the Commission of Indian Affairs, community, labor and language justice leaders to better understand the need and process for engaging with these and other potentially vulnerable communities.

**Recommendation 11.** The EJ Council and agencies should document and share public feedback and responses, and provide opportunities to address feedback on future engagements. This will help increase accountability and transparency. The EJ Council and agencies also should evaluate and address engagement barriers and provide ways to stay in contact with the public following events.

**Recommendation 12.** All state agency and local government employees should be required to complete EJ training, with the length, content and community site visits determined by the extent of EJ engagement. EJ may not be as pronounced in certain agency programs. It is imperative that training specifically focus on how EJ relates to the agency’s or program’s mission and/or goals. The training should include concepts of climate justice, ongoing EJ seminars, and employ a “train-the-trainer” approach.

**Recommendation 13.** State resources that have EJ relevance should be catalogued and come together with community representation to promote sharing of intellectual and physical resources. This will prevent duplication of efforts. Examples of state resources include ongoing research studies, the DEQ Statewide Learning Management System and UNC Department of City and Regional Planning.

**Recommendation 14.** The definition of “environmental justice” should be clarified and contextualized so all community, academy, government and private sector parties can discuss and address EJ with increased familiarity and ease.



# ACTIVITIES OF THE GOVERNOR'S ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ADVISORY COUNCIL

## Council Meeting Minutes

**Dec. 14, 2023**

The Governor's Environmental Justice Advisory Council held its inaugural meeting in the North Carolina Community College System building's Gregory Poole Conference Room in Raleigh on Thursday, Dec. 14, 2023. Governor Roy Cooper and DEQ Secretary Elizabeth Biser welcomed the members. Supreme Court Justice Anita Earls

performed the swearing-in of members followed by an introduction to public records requirements. Governor's Office staff gave a presentation on E.O. 292, which created the EJ Council, its directives and expectations. Co-chair, Dr. Virginia Guidry, shared greetings and set expectations for the EJ Council's work going forward.

**Jan. 30, 2024**

The EJ Council's second meeting convened in the Ross Conference Room of the Nature Research Center in Raleigh. Led by Co-chairs Dr. Virginia Guidry and Dr. Jim Johnson, the EJ Council discussed its priorities and activities, and agreed to meet every other month in locations across the state, as appropriate. In addition, the EJ Council began discussing the development of and content to be included in the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool, as required by E.O. 292. Several members volunteered to serve on the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee.

Two presentations were made to the EJ Council following these discussions. Jenni Owen, Executive

Director of the Office of Strategic Partnerships (OSP), presented first. Owen shared information about OSP and how it could work with the EJ Council to partner with researchers and philanthropic organizations to advance its EJ goals and objectives. EJ Council member Sherri White-Williamson presented second, providing an overview of the DEQ EJ and Equity Advisory Board's prior work and recommendations on cumulative impacts.

At the end of the meeting-in-chief, the co-chairs invited comments from the public before adjourning the meeting.

## March 26, 2024

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The EJ Council's third meeting convened in the Ross Conference Room of the Nature Research Center in Raleigh. The EJ Council received a comprehensive update from Emad Khatib and David Giordano, project managers for the development of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool, in the Department of Information Technology. Matthew McLamb, Khatib and Giordano discussed a scoping document previously shared with the members of the EJ Council and the proposed timeline for developing content and obtaining approval from the EJ Council for their work. Based on the discussions, the EJ Council decided that support from the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee could enhance DIT's development of the tool and facilitate its implementation.

The EJ Council then discussed the need for the creation of additional subcommittees to meet the

objectives set out in E.O. 292. The EJ Council voted to establish subcommittees for cumulative impacts and to add the EJ Mapping Tool to the work of the EJ Hub Subcommittee. The co-chairs committed to review the executive order to determine if additional subcommittees were necessary.

The EJ Council also discussed having future meetings in communities across North Carolina and set in place plans to host them in Duplin, Halifax and Stanly counties. Lastly, the EJ Council discussed the process for its review of agency EJ goals and established timelines to complete the review.

At the end of the meeting-in-chief, the co-chairs invited comments from the public before adjourning the meeting.

## May 28, 2024

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In keeping with the commitment to host meetings in communities across the state, the EJ Council's fourth meeting convened in the Walnut Building at Wayne County Community College in Goldsboro. Like the previous meeting, the EJ Council received an overview of the work on the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool from Khatib, McLamb and Giordano from DIT. The EJ Council learned that a demonstration of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool were slated for the summer to solicit feedback and advice from both the EJ Council and stakeholders. The team is on track to finalize the two products by October 2024, which will incorporate feedback from the EJ Council and community members. A robust

conversation occurred during the meeting about content to include on both the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool, datasets, information regarding technical assistance, and methods to obtain feedback from the community. The EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee together with the community engagement subcommittee would collaborate on ways to share information about the tool while allowing enough time for feedback to inform its final development.

Following reports from the chairs of each subcommittee, the co-chairs invited comments from the public before adjourning the meeting.



## July 23, 2024

In keeping with the commitment to host meetings in communities across the state, the EJ Council's fifth meeting convened in building 400 at Halifax County Community College in Weldon. EJ Council subcommittees convened before the official meeting was called to order. Like the previous meeting, the EJ Council received an overview of the work on the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool from Khatib and McLamb from DIT. The team gave an updated

demonstration of the tool after incorporating EJ Council feedback and are on track to finalize the two products by October 2024. Subcommittee chairs then gave updates on the progress of the work of their subcommittees.

Following reports from the chairs of each subcommittee, the co-chairs invited comments from the public before adjourning the meeting.

## Sept. 24, 2024

In keeping with the commitment to host meetings in communities across the state, the EJ Council's sixth meeting convened in the Webb Student Center at Stanly County Community College in Albemarle. Prior to the meeting, EJ Council members went on a tour highlighting the environmental injustices felt by the West Badin community. The tour included stops at a former Alcoa factory, boat landing and ball field in Badin, the Grant Street Landfill Overlook in Albemarle, and the road through the former factory.

recommendations to the Governor. Like the previous meeting, the Council received an overview of the work on the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool from Khatib and McLamb from DIT. They gave an updated demonstration of the Tool after incorporating Council feedback and the Council approved the minimal viable product of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool.

Following the end of the Council meeting, the Co-chairs invited comments from the public before adjourning the meeting.

The EJ Council reviewed the EJ Council's Final Report to the Governor and voted to adopt



# SUBCOMMITTEE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee

### Summary of charge

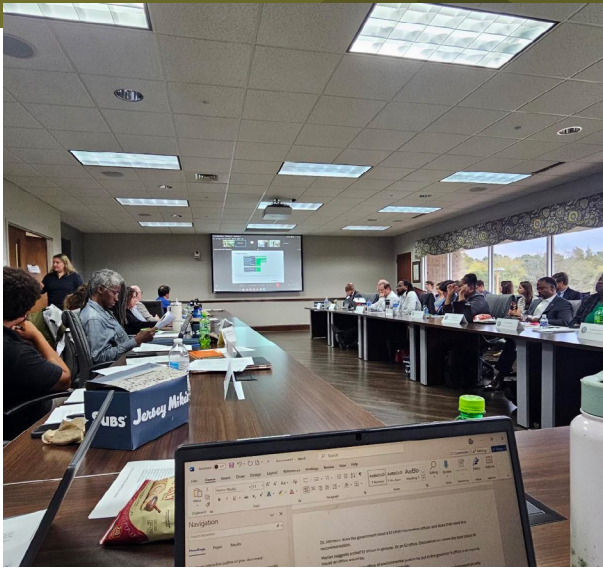
As noted in E.O. 292, North Carolina, specifically Warren County, is widely recognized as the birthplace of the EJ movement. For the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool to live up to its name, it must be able to, at minimum, show areas where known historical and contemporary EJ issues occur and predict where future EJ issues may arise. The EJ Council’s EJ Hub and Mapping Tool Subcommittee works to support this broad goal. Comprised of five EJ Council members,<sup>10</sup> the subcommittee was charged with directing the development of a “whole of government EJ Hub and Mapping Tool webpage,” including EJ information and activities, grant information and a EJ Mapping Tool, which would be designed by DIT. E.O. 292 stipulates that the EJ Mapping Tool should be “easily accessible and usable by the public” and incorporate data from DEQ’s Community Mapping System, the DHHS Environmental Health Data Dashboard and the DOT Transportation Disadvantage Index.

### Subcommittee activities

The subcommittee met every other week and attended monthly DIT stakeholder meetings. Staff from collaborating agencies, including the Governor’s Office, also attended these meetings with select DIT staff. During these meetings, DIT provided status updates on the development of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool. At critical junctures in the webpage and tool design phase, members of this subcommittee stressed to DIT the importance of obtaining public input on various design features and encouraged the design team to make a prototype available with sufficient time to receive feedback before the release of their “minimally viable product” (MVP) in October 2024.

**Early feedback:** DIT’s focus, and thus the subcommittee’s guidance, was directed primarily towards the EJ Mapping Tool because it required more work and coordination in comparison to the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool website. Before the EJ Mapping Tool became available to the public, the subcommittee sought feedback from key EJ interest holders on existing North Carolina mapping tools and early versions of the new EJ Mapping Tool. The subcommittee attended a community science fair hosted by the Environmental Justice Community Action Network (EJCAN) in Clinton on April 27, 2024 where laptops with existing mapping tools were displayed. This included DEQ’s Community Mapping Tool, DHHS’ Environmental Health Data Dashboard and California’s Health Places Index. Attendees navigated the tools and provided survey feedback on features and data layers that they wanted to be included in the new EJ Mapping Tool. EJ Council members reviewed the tool and provided extensive feedback following the May Council meeting in Wayne County, where DIT presented the tool with most layers incorporated, except several health layers. The subcommittee condensed the feedback into 37 recommendations, which were approved by the EJ Council and sent to DIT on June 7, 2024. All but two of those recommendations were subsequently incorporated into the EJ Mapping Tool. Additionally, the subcommittee sought feedback on a preliminary version of the mapping tool from a group of EJ leaders who participated in a virtual meeting facilitated by the North Carolina Conservation Network on June 26, 2024.

<sup>10</sup> Demico Guy, Jennifer Mundt, Torre Jessup, Daisha Wall and Courtney Woods



**Formal feedback period:** The subcommittee launched a more formal feedback process once the EJ Mapping Tool was closer to completion with all required layers described in E.O. 292. This included hosting one-hour virtual demonstrations of the tool each Tuesday in August 2024. These sessions were held in the evening and mid-day to ensure that participants had options that worked best for their schedules. The council’s Community Engagement Subcommittee and DOT staff supported this effort by creating [publicinput.com/ncej](https://publicinput.com/ncej), a community engagement website where the public could access links to the sessions, the EJ Mapping Tool and a short survey.

Staff from DIT attended three of the four sessions and facilitated the tool demo for two of the four sessions. Sixty-six people, excluding Council members and DIT staff, participated in the four workshops. Structured to maximize opportunities for public input, the sessions opened with a description of the subcommittee’s charge followed by a brief description and demo of the EJ Mapping Tool. Participants were given time to navigate the tool on their own. Time also was allotted for open discussion and questions about the EJ Mapping Tool.

During the last 10 minutes of each session, the subcommittee provided a short walk through of the community engagement website and encouraged participants to use the remaining time to complete the survey. Each week, survey results were forwarded to the subcommittee and shared with DIT, along with a summary of comments received during the sessions and any other observations about the EJ Mapping Tool that the subcommittee observed during each virtual session.

**Summary of feedback shared during the virtual sessions:** Key suggestions for EJ Mapping Tool modifications included:

- Improving the organization of the layers.
- More comprehensible layer titles and/or metrics, as shown in the map legend.
- Improving the visibility of overlapping layers with greater color contrast, addition of layers or reference data.
- Improving some interactive components of the tool.

Notably, one participant encouraged EJ Mapping Tool integration with other state and federal tools, such as the blueprint tool used for grant applications and the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Equitable Transportation Community tool, asserting that such integration could enhance the tools’ utility for grant seekers and other users.

**Summary of survey results:** Survey respondents represented various roles, including researchers (23%, n =13), advocates (23%), impacted residents (15%), local or state government (15%), and business (15%). Most respondents (76%, n =16) described the tool as being easily or somewhat easy to use. Slightly fewer respondents (60%, n =15) described the data/information in the tool as easy or somewhat easy to understand. Almost half (47%, n=15) described the data as being relevant to questions they would hope to answer by using an EJ tool.

In the survey or via follow up emails, respondents offered open-ended commentaries on the tool with bulleted recommendations on data availability and comprehension,<sup>11</sup> data interpretability,<sup>12</sup> data ease of use<sup>13</sup> and data accessibility.<sup>14</sup>

## Recommendations

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The subcommittee offers several recommendations for maintenance and continued enhancement of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool beyond the October 2024 MVP release date.

### Incorporate new data layers and indexing in the EJ Mapping Tool.

1. Show areas/communities that are affected by well-documented, historical and contemporary EJ issues in the state. These may be incorporated as qualitative and/or quantitative data with links to reference/source information. The EJ Council and DIT should work directly with EJ leaders to compile these data.
2. Include data on poultry operations in the state. Currently, the state does not have any comprehensive record of where poultry operations are located. However, the Environmental Working Group has recently released a study and corresponding map that estimates more than 357 million chickens and turkeys were produced in 2022, according to data generated using machine learning from aerial images provided by the [US Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#). Machine learning is a subfield of artificial intelligence that gives computers the ability to learn without explicitly being programmed.

3. Add sacred sites, cemeteries and villages associated with federal and state tribes.<sup>15</sup>
4. Incorporate North Carolina-relevant environmental and health data, including information about water quality and agriculturally relevant exposures. Researchers at North Carolina universities and partnering organizations have developed such datasets as well as others on exposures that are known EJ issues. While the EJ Mapping Tool provides the option for users to upload their own data, incorporating these layers directly into the tool will ensure that all users are able to access these data.
5. Integrate layers that highlight structural racism and inequities. These should include, but not be limited to, historic redlining patterns, contemporary exclusionary zoning ordinances, controversial siting of locally unwanted land uses and other social determinants of health, including the age and structural condition of housing, schools, daycare centers and other community facilities. (surrogate measures of potential environmental exposures to mold, mildew, lead, radon, asbestos, and other life-threatening contaminants). This would significantly enhance the mapping tool's ability to identify the structural factors and conditions that contribute to disparate environmental exposures and health inequities across the state. It also would distinguish North Carolina in the EJ space, as few states incorporate these types of indicators into their mapping tools.

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11 Many respondents made specific requests to include new layers of data in the EJ Mapping Tool, such as 303(d) impaired streams and landfill categories ranked by their environmental impact, which align more closely with their interests. Other expressed interest in data presented on a finer scale—for example, state averages as opposed to national averages for health outcomes.

12 To enhance data comprehension, tool reviewers offered a range of functional adjustments including: allowing the 'help me understand' button on the platform to display information only for data layers that are currently active; clarifying descriptions of legends and symbols, especially for data points like "community access to broadband funded locations," to help users easily interpret the maps' visual elements; and diversifying symbology and shading so that users can view multiple datasets simultaneously without confusion (e.g., hazardous waste sites, permitted solid waste landfills, underground storage tank incidents, and above ground take incidents).

13 Tool evaluators requested the addition of a "clear all selections" button; more concise and easier to interpret layer names; a "how to use" information in the pop-up (along with a how-to video); and a search feature to easily find specific indicators, given the large number of available layers organized across 7 categories.

14 Tool evaluators recommended improve the translucence and brightness of layers to improve visible displays of overlapping data.

15 Currently, areas that are associated with federally recognized tribes are included as one layer on the map.

6. Create a North Carolina-specific EJI. Currently the CDC's EJI provides some context for cumulative impacts and where environmental, health and social burdens are concentrated in the state. However, their index does not include several environmental conditions that are unique to North Carolina. Some of these include industrial animal production and other agricultural-related environmental exposures, and private well use.

### **Make the EJ Mapping Tool easy to access and use by the public**

1. Include a feature that will allow users to turn off all layers. Adding a turn off feature will significantly enhance tool usability as users will no longer have to remember which category a layer was listed under to turn it off. In addition to this "clear all layers" button, users should have an option to turn off selected layers without having to return to the category where that layer is listed. The map's legend section is a suitable place to locate both features, considering the legend is where a user would see the list of all active layers.

2. Assess digital accessibility of the tool. In addition to incorporating high contrast color choices, ensuring that screen readers can access information from the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool is imperative.
3. Translate the tool into Spanish. This is a strategic imperative because many Spanish-speaking populations and communities across the state are impacted by environmental, climate and health stressors the tool is designed to assess. Relying on the translation feature within a web browser can provide some language accessibility to second-language English populations; however, these features are known to generate inaccurate and/or incomplete translations.<sup>16</sup>
4. Develop a mobile version of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool or enhance mobile access to key features of the site. With more than half of website traffic being generated by mobile devices, it is very likely that mobile devices will be the primary way that users access the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool. This is especially true for users in rural areas with limited broadband service.

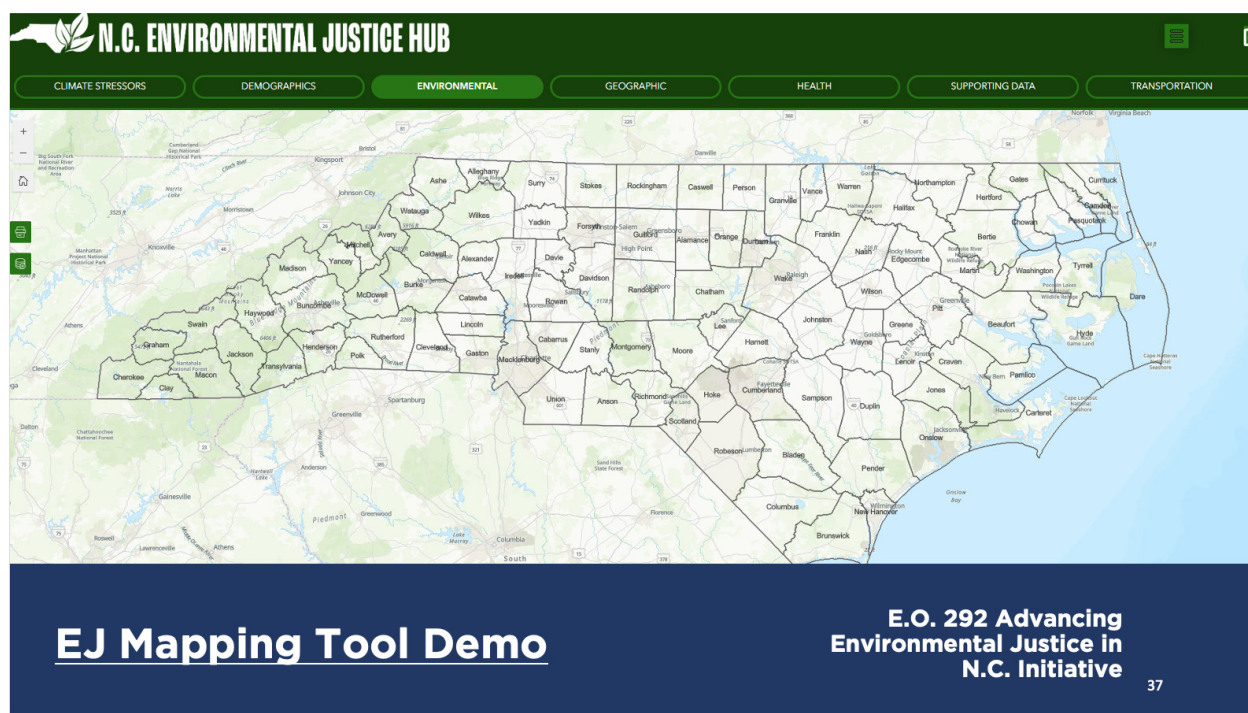
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<sup>16</sup> The EJ Council should explore whether translating the tool into other languages in addition to Spanish is appropriate.

## Enhance public engagement and facilitate use

1. Work with the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs to develop communication and outreach strategies to proactively engage Indigenous communities/tribal governments across the state. This is essential for the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool to effectively serve them as well as better reflect impacts and concerns of their communities.
2. Seek feedback from marginalized populations. Public engagement efforts should go beyond mere inclusion of second-language English speakers and individuals with physical disabilities. These efforts should actively seek their involvement in virtual and in-person meetings to ensure that the website and EJ Mapping Tool serve them well.
3. Engage in a validation process called ground truthing with communities to determine how closely the EJ Mapping Tool data align with their lived experiences. The National Academy of Sciences highly recommends using a local validation process, as detailed in a recent committee evaluation of a federal climate and economic screening tool.<sup>17</sup>
4. Develop a systematic process by outlining how input received via the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool feedback form will be reviewed, responded to and sent to the appropriate body for action, if necessary. Potentially, the EJ Mapping Tool is a mechanism for hearing directly from EJ community members. Therefore, acknowledging questions and comments in a timely manner is important for both building trust and creating a pathway for the public's input into decision-making that affects their communities.
5. Establish guidelines for how the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool should be used by cabinet agencies, state and local agencies and other authorities for decision-making in matters related to zoning, permitting, enforcement, business recruitment, investment and resource allocation, among others.

<sup>17</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. 2024. Constructing Valid Geospatial Tools for Environmental Justice. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/27317>.



# Cumulative Impacts Subcommittee

## Summary of charge

*The EJ Council, in consultation with the Office of Strategic Partnerships, shall engage with academia, prioritizing Historically Black Colleges and Universities and other Minority Serving Institutions, and other research institutions to conduct research on cumulative impacts in North Carolina and develop recommendations for creating a framework and methodology to assess cumulative impacts. (E.O. 292, §11)*

The EJ Council created a Cumulative Impacts Subcommittee to lead this charge. State and federal agencies have established the need for cumulative impact assessments (CIA) based on increased recognition that, in their day-to-day lives, people may be exposed to numerous sources, pathways, and mixtures of chemical stressors (e.g., from contamination in air, water, or soil) and non-chemical stressors (e.g., related to health outcomes, extreme weather events, and structural inequities). “Cumulative impacts” refers to the total effect and accumulation of these exposures.

In North Carolina, EJ communities have been variously exposed to a multitude of chemical, biological, physical and social stressors. One of the confounding problems for EJ has been the location of industries that pollute and otherwise degrade the environment in marginalized and underserved communities. These enterprises might include but are not limited to:

- Industrialized agricultural and energy operations—from concentrated animal feeding operations to forestland management to power plants.
- Chemical, construction and textiles manufacturing.
- Waste disposal and management facilities.

Adding to the contamination and degradation are non-chemical stressors influenced by climate change and extreme weather events, poverty, health, loss of safety from violence and drug use, loss of cultural resources and lack of access to and representation in democratic decision-making.

Multiple research studies have confirmed that each of these impacts, individually, can contribute to poor health and quality of life in EJ communities. Research also underscores that the combination of these various stressors can accumulate and exacerbate harm in EJ communities. While widely discussed for decades, until recently, little action has been taken to mitigate or prevent disproportionate cumulative impacts.

EJ Council members proceed with this work understanding the need both for caution and leadership. No clear guidelines from federal agencies exist, neither on methods for conducting CIA nor on frameworks for using CIA in environmental decision-making. The lack of guidance has not prevented other states and municipalities, such as Massachusetts, New Jersey, California and Chicago from developing guidelines and implementing laws for CIA use in permitting, enforcement, land use/zoning decisions, transportation planning and other decisions.<sup>18</sup> North Carolina recognizes that the development of a robust methodology and framework will be an iterative process. The subcommittee proposes a process of adaptive management, whereby it starts with the tools available, but also allows room for change and improvement as the EJ Mapping Tool becomes increasingly tested through research, advocacy and implementation.

<sup>18</sup> California, Department of Toxic Substances Control, available at <https://dtsc.ca.gov/sb-673-permit-criteria-community-protection/>. New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, available at <https://dep.nj.gov/ej/law/>. Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/cumulative-impact-analysis-in-air-quality-permitting>. Chicago Department of Public Health, available at [https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/supp\\_info/Environment/cumulative-impact-assessment.html](https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/depts/cdph/supp_info/Environment/cumulative-impact-assessment.html).

## Definitions

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The subcommittee used the following definitions to guide development of its recommendations.

**Environmental justice communities** means communities of color, low-income communities or Indigenous communities experiencing or are at risk of disparate impacts due to the agency action under consideration.

**Communities of color** means communities in which the share of nonwhites and Hispanic or Latino (of any race) residents is 40% or higher, or at least 10% higher than the residing county or state share.

**Indigenous communities** means communities where “American Indian Tribes,” as defined by 01 N.C. Admin Code 15 .0202, reside or where the share of American Indian and Alaskan Native populations is 5% higher than the residing county or state share.

**Low-income communities** means communities in which the share of population experiencing poverty is more than 20% or the share of households in poverty is at least 5% higher than the residing county or state share.

**Disparate impact** means disproportionately higher adverse health or environmental effects on communities of color, low-income communities or Indigenous communities at statistically significant levels.

Whereas E.O. 292 does not define CIA, it does define disparate impacts and cumulative impacts. CIA can help identify EJ communities in North Carolina and prevent disparate impacts in these communities.

**Cumulative impact**, as defined in E.O. 292, means the totality of exposure to combinations of chemical and non-chemical stressors and their effects on human health, well-being and quality of life.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency defines chemical stressors in environmental media—air, water and land—and non-chemical stressors—social determinants of health and extreme weather events—aggregate and accumulate over time from one or more sources in the built, natural and social environments. This affects individuals and communities in both positive and negative ways—referred to as cumulative impacts. In communities, particularly those already overburdened, disproportionate impacts can arise from unequal environmental conditions and exposure to multiple stressors. Additionally, climate change can exacerbate many of these disproportionate impacts.<sup>19</sup>

**Cumulative impact assessment (CIA)**, not defined in E.O. 292, is the process of evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data representing cumulative impacts to inform a decision. Combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative assessment should serve as guiding principles when considering cumulative impacts during the decision-making process.

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<sup>19</sup> U.S. EPA. Cumulative Impacts Research. <https://www.epa.gov/healthresearch/cumulative-impacts-research>. Accessed on September 17, 2024.



## Recommendations overview

The Cumulative Impacts Subcommittee developed the following recommendations for creating a framework and methodology to assess cumulative impacts:

- Issue a request for proposal (RFP) to establish a North Carolina Environmental Justice Learning Laboratory and provide seed capital to support its successful launch. Ideally, the lab should be located on a HBCU campus in the UNC system; however, it should be staffed by affiliated researchers with EJ expertise from a broad array of higher education institutions, nonprofit research organizations, government laboratories, and corporate research and development entities. As currently envisioned, the lab would collect the requisite quantitative and qualitative data to further develop the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool to create a state-adapted EJI, and develop the analytical models required to rigorously assess the cumulative impacts of environmental injustices in North Carolina. The lab should also be a repository for evidenced-based, “best” or “promising” practices that successfully address pressing EJ issues.
- Promote/advocate for legislation requiring the allocation of financial and staff resources for the multiple sources of data that are currently unavailable but needed to create a robust EJ Mapping Tool, and properly model and rigorously assess the cumulative impacts of environmental injustices in the state. Reliable data on air and surface water quality in rural areas, homes reliant on private wells and septic systems,<sup>20</sup> private well water quality,<sup>21</sup> farm worker pesticide exposure and dry litter poultry facilities are currently missing.<sup>22</sup>
- Continue to engage EJ communities to identify both quantitative and qualitative data needs and gaps related to the existence of and interactions between chemical and non-chemical stressors.

- Develop a cumulative impact guidance document to facilitate conversation and guarantee conformity in the manner that these impacts are defined, assessed and applied for decision-making.
- Identify legislative changes necessary to inform EJ decision-making within cabinet-level agencies.
- Direct DEQ to enforce the Solid Waste Management Act of 2007. The act stipulates that a solid waste permit should be denied if the “cumulative impact of the proposed facility, when considered in relation to other similar impacts of facilities located or proposed in the community, would have a disproportionate adverse impact on a minority or low-income community protected by Title VI of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964.”

The subcommittee made recommendations with the understanding that this is a difficult subject area with no uniform methodology for calculating impacts to reach the best answer possible.

The subcommittee underscores that the most important components of research development for CIA include establishing a community-engaged process for identifying and weighting indicators that are relevant for that specific community. Research analytics should focus on developing metrics for how multiple chemical and non-chemical stressors combine, interact and accumulate.

As part of E.O. 292, the EJ Council worked with DIT to develop an EJ Mapping Tool. While the subcommittee anticipates that this tool will be useful in CIA, it cautions against relying solely on the EJ Mapping Tool or awaiting its completion and implementation to advance CIA.

20 Gathering these data will require collaboration with local jurisdictions and financial resources to address potential legal challenges.

21 A comprehensive well water quality database should incorporate data from the North Carolina State Lab of Public Health, county labs, private labs, and other sources.

22 Dry litter poultry facilities are not required to obtain a permit from the Division of Water Resources, but they are considered “deemed permitted” and therefore must follow specific regulations outlined in state statutes and rules, such as adhering to requirements like proper litter storage and land application practices, particularly regarding setbacks from water bodies and wells.

The subcommittee reviewed various methodologies currently in use at the state level, including [CalEnviroScreen](#), [NJ EJMAP](#) and [Washington Health Disparities Map](#), and federal level, including [EJScreen](#) and [CDC EJ Index](#). After careful consideration and consultation provided by experienced DHHS staff, the subcommittee has included a chart of recommended additional indicators for the NC-adapted EJI be added to the EJ Mapping Tool.

## Recommendations for community engagement

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1. Engage community members early and often to ensure that data collected is informed by impacted communities, aids in understanding the issues they raise and is shared back in appropriate formats following ethics of prior and informed consent and confidentiality. Data should go through a process of community peer review where people residing in impacted communities have an opportunity to provide feedback on the research approach and a “ground truthing” process where they can provide personal experience and direct observations to inform data collection, data analysis, and results returning. This engagement is also important to ensure that stressors used quantitatively in the CIA are prioritized based on the community’s understanding of what is affecting their health and well-being.
2. Agencies should also work with communities to identify problems and potential intervention decision points to improve community health and well-being.<sup>23</sup>

3. Identify academics investigating cumulative impact methods and frameworks to inform future improvements to data collection and analysis. A landscape analysis should be performed to identify colleges, universities, and research institutions working on cumulative impact methods in North Carolina. There should be an emphasis on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs).
4. Conduct intentional and targeted outreach to underrepresented populations to ensure their concerns are being captured, information exchanged, and resources distributed. Agencies must identify other organizations and potential partners, such as faith-based institutions or community colleges, which can help collect and convey information, as some areas may have limited access to broadband and other services.
5. Develop a specific process for outreach to and engagement with impacted communities. There should be an engagement and outreach plan for the state’s federally recognized tribe, seven state-recognized tribes, and the four state-regional American Indian Urban Organizations.
6. Work with local organizations and other groups to provide translation and interpretation services when conducting outreach and engagement in areas where the population has limited English proficiency. Agencies should share contacts that provide these services.

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<sup>23</sup> [Cumulative Impacts Recommendations for ORD Research. United States Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development. September 2022](#)

## Recommendations for the use of EJ Mapping Tool - data collection and analysis

1. Adopt the CDC Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) EJI as the basis for cumulative impacts assessment in North Carolina until a state-adapted EJI is developed. The CDC's EJI is "the first national, place-based tool designed to measure the cumulative impacts of environmental burdens through the lens of human health and health equity." The EJ Mapping Tool has adopted the CDC's EJI, which this subcommittee determined was the most easily modified for use of current and proposed data collection and analysis to inform decision-making.

The development of a North Carolina-adapted tool that employs the CDC EJI's scoring/ranking method addresses this subcommittee's charge to "develop recommendations for creating a framework and methodology to assess cumulative impacts." The CDC made the observation when releasing its EJI tool that the EJI may "serve as a framework to develop new tools in states where environmental justice mapping and screening tools have yet to be developed." The subcommittee's ultimate goal is to build on this framework and create that state-adapted tool for North Carolina.

2. To facilitate the development of a state-adapted EJI, DIT should include additional indicators of relevance to North Carolina and take steps to collect or generate additional relevant data necessary to more accurately assess cumulative and/or disparate impacts in North Carolina. (See Table 1). It is highly recommended that DHHS,

DEQ, and DIT work quickly to create the state-adapted EJI within six months of acceptance of this report.

3. Collect and add data on other sources of pollution in the state such as contamination exposure for agricultural workers, wood pellet production, poultry and cattle production, biogas/biomass emissions and landfill emissions.
4. Collect and add data on other processes that enable or exacerbate environmental injustice such as racial residential segregation, procedural injustice and lack of recognition for Indigenous rights.
5. Incorporate indicators that assess water quality and water infrastructure access. If this data does not exist, direct DEQ and DHHS to begin collecting and analyzing such data. This dataset is important because cumulative impact indexes are typically overrepresented by air emissions.
6. Identify and/or develop datasets that characterize structural racism and racial inequities in local and state investment, infrastructure, and compliance and enforcement that influence neighborhood quality and conditions.
7. Identify and/or develop datasets that characterize economic inequities in investment, infrastructure, compliance and enforcement.
8. Identify and/or develop datasets that characterize procedural and representation injustices in decision-making.

## Recommended additional indicators for the North Carolina-adapted EJ

Table 1

Indicator	Description	Data Source
Animal feeding operations- hog	Total steady state live weight in lbs. per square mile, by census tract	NCDEQ: <a href="http://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map">www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map</a>
Animal feeding operations- wet poultry	Total steady state live weight in lbs. per square mile, by census tract	NCDEQ: <a href="http://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map">www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map</a>
Animal feeding operations- cattle	Total steady state live weight in lbs. per square mile, by census tract	NCDEQ: <a href="http://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map">www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/permitting/animal-feeding-operations/animal-facility-map</a>
Extreme heat projections, 2036-2065 (high emissions scenario, RCP8.5 model)	Projected increase in extreme heat days by county	CDC National Environmental Public Health Tracking Network (Also on EJ Hub and Mapping Tool): <a href="https://ephtracking.cdc.gov/DataExplorer/">ephtracking.cdc.gov/DataExplorer/</a>
Modeled annual wildfire frequency	Modeled annualized frequency by census tract	North Carolina Resilience Exchange (also on EJ Hub and Mapping Tool): <a href="https://www.resilienceexchange.nc.gov/understand-your-vulnerabilities/vulnerability-maps">https://www.resilienceexchange.nc.gov/understand-your-vulnerabilities/vulnerability-maps</a>
Flooding: 100- and 500-year FEMA floodplain	These maps depict the 100- and 500-year floodplains for NC. Methods to relate this data to census-tract level need to be discussed.	North Carolina Resilience Exchange (also on EJ Hub and Mapping Tool): <a href="http://www.resilienceexchange.nc.gov/understand-your-vulnerabilities/vulnerability-maps">www.resilienceexchange.nc.gov/understand-your-vulnerabilities/vulnerability-maps</a>
Medically underserved areas	Identifies census tracts that are considered medically underserved areas (MUA). This could be a binary designation (yes/no) or ranking based on Index of Medical Underservice (IMU) score.	Health Resources and Services Administration: <a href="https://data.hrsa.gov/data/download?hmpgtitle=hmpg-hrsa-data">data.hrsa.gov/data/download?hmpgtitle=hmpg-hrsa-data</a>

# Community Engagement Subcommittee

## Summary of charge

As part of the E.O. 292 Advancing Environmental Justice Initiative, the EJ Council's Community Engagement Subcommittee implemented a comprehensive statewide public involvement strategy to ensure meaningful engagement between the EJ Council and communities, especially those affected by EJ issues. The goal was to introduce the initiative and seek public input on the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool's design and content, potential EJ mitigation strategies and required changes in policy, practices and procedures to successfully address EJ issues in the state. The DOT's Public Involvement Team provided leadership and assistance in both formulating and implementing the public involvement strategy.

## Statewide Virtual Meeting

The Governor's Council hosted a one-hour public meeting to introduce the E.O. 292 initiative on Thursday, Aug. 1, 2024. The meeting was held virtually via *GoToWebinar* with a dial-in option to maximize accessibility and engagement, providing residents with an opportunity to learn about the initiative and how to get involved. There were 123 registrants for the webinar and 76 attendees.

The Council provided webinar participants with an overview of the E.O. 292 initiative, a brief history of EJ in North Carolina, a status update on Council activities and examples of successful EJ engagement activities and practices the government might build on. During the meeting, attendees had the opportunity to complete an online survey, and dial-in and text surveys to provide feedback on the EJ Hub

and Mapping Tool, as well as potential mitigation strategies to address environmental concerns in their communities. To maximize public accessibility, the EJ Council digitally recorded the meeting and made the recording available on the EJ initiative's public engagement webpage.

## In-person forums

In addition to virtual engagement, EJ Council hosted a series of in-person forums to deepen the public dialogue on EJ issues in North Carolina. The meetings provided residents with additional opportunities to learn about the E.O. 292 initiative, participate in discussions about key environmental justice issues facing North Carolina communities and identify pressing EJ community needs and concerns.<sup>24</sup>

Each forum featured a formal presentation about E.O. 292 and Council activities, a panel discussion with community and EJ organization representatives,<sup>25</sup> and interactive demonstrations of the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool designed to solicit input and feedback.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> The in-person forums were held on Thursdays from 5 – 7p.m. on the following dates:  
Aug. 15, 2024 at A-B Tech Community College in Asheville; 19 attendees  
Aug. 22, 2024 at Armory Civic Center in Warrenton; 24 attendees  
Aug. 29, 2024 at Sampson Center Gymnasium Clinton; 45 attendees  
Each two-hour meeting was conducted in-person using a hybrid format of a forum followed by an open house.

<sup>25</sup> Participating panelists across the forums included representatives from the Environmental Justice Community Action Network (EJCAN), Southern Environmental Law Center (SELCL), Mountain True, North Carolina Black Alliance, The Impacted Communities Against Wood Pellets Coalition and the Warren County Environmental Action Team.

<sup>26</sup> The subcommittee used an open house format at each forum for the EJ Hub and Mapping Tool demonstrations. Substations were also set up that highlighted the council's work to date and to collect onsite feedback. Forum participants were given the opportunity to provide feedback via paper, online, dial-in and a text survey. They were also afforded the opportunity to share their thoughts directly with the Council during the open house.

## In-person Council meetings

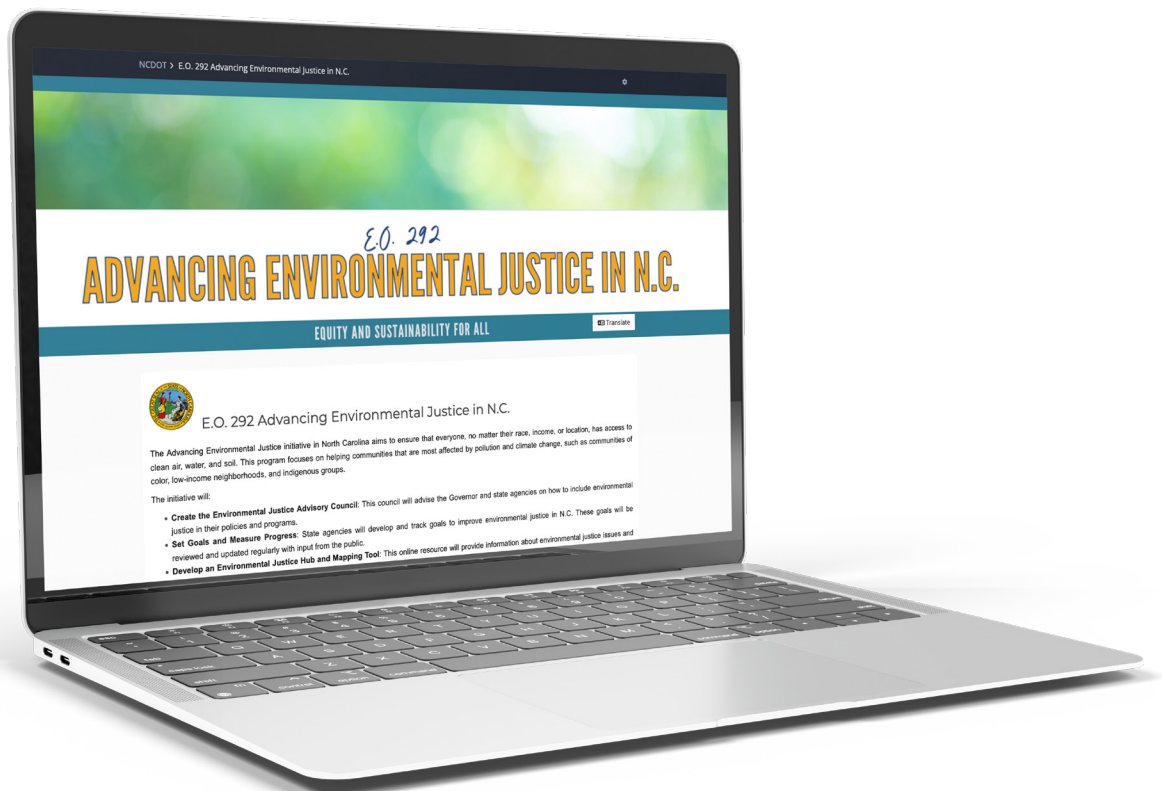
The EJ Council held three of its regularly scheduled meetings in designated EJ communities.<sup>27</sup> Each meeting's agenda included a dedicated public comment period, allowing attendees to share insights, concerns and suggestions directly with the EJ Council. The purpose of these community-based EJ meetings was to invite community involvement in Council activities and initiatives, as well as gather valuable public input on ongoing and future EJ issues.

## Communications plan

To support public engagement activities, the subcommittee employed a diverse set of communication tools and methods in advertising and promoting the EJ Council's public events and activities. Specifically, the subcommittee leveraged social media, email, text messages and a dedicated website, as well as strategic collaborations with communications staff from state agencies and community stakeholders to ensure wide distribution of information.

## Public engagement website

The subcommittee created [publicinput.com/ncej](https://publicinput.com/ncej), a dedicated website to facilitate online public engagement and information sharing. The website includes an overview of the initiative; [video overview](#) of the EJ Mapping Tool, list of EJ events and a form to sign up for EJ updates and future engagement efforts. The website also includes multiple feedback mechanisms, including a hotline, online and text survey, pin drop map to collect location specific comments, and email addresses. The website will remain active and accessible for the public.



<sup>27</sup> Council meetings were held on community college campuses in Wayne County (Tuesday, May 28, 2024), Halifax County (Tuesday, July 23, 2024) and Stanly County (Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2024).

## Recommendations

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The subcommittee recommends the following to achieve more meaningful public engagement, particularly with EJ communities:

1. Consider the outreach and engagement activities undertaken by the EJ Council and its Subcommittee on Community Engagement as marking the beginning of a longer-term process for and commitment to community outreach and engagement. Working to build trust and transparency takes time and no shortage of humility. The Office of Environmental Justice, recommended by this report, should ensure time and allocate resources for this important work.
2. Work to engender a more collaborative approach to community engagement. This should include early outreach to community-based leaders to discuss and co-plan meeting dates, times and locations, as well as co-develop meeting agendas. Co-development, in this context, means shared decision-making, not informing the community and then asking for approval.
3. Design an established frequency for both virtual statewide meetings and in person meetings hosted in EJ communities. Both types of meetings provide important opportunities for government agencies to hear from EJ communities and for the public to actively engage in participatory governing in our democracy.
4. Recognize that Indigenous communities may have unique circumstances that influence their relationships with the environment and with local, state and federal government. The Office of Environmental Justice should develop a process for engaging Indigenous communities that recognizes these unique circumstances and needs. This could include forming an advisory council on Indigenous EJ with representation from across Indigenous communities and working with existing entities, like the Commission of Indian Affairs, to develop guidance on Indigenous outreach.
5. Leverage public engagement events to increase accountability and transparency. To do this, The Office of Environmental Justice should document and share the information gathered and outcomes with EJ Council members and relevant government bodies, then work with them to develop a response to those who participated in public meetings.
6. Maintain contact with the public and let people know about small successes as well as when, where and why public requests were not followed up on.
7. Collaborate with representatives from EJ communities to develop a more conversational approach to community engagement meetings and forums. This may mean having a roundtable discussion or a question-and-answer session, rather than organizing meetings where public comment is at the end and there is no opportunity for response from EJ Council members/state agency representatives.
8. Ensure that technology platforms allow attendees at statewide virtual meetings to “see,” “hear,” and “connect” with one another. These meetings can be important opportunities to build connections across communities.
9. Consider cancelling Council events or changing the time when such meetings conflict with other scheduled EJ events. In situations where this is not possible, reach out to the organizers of the other EJ events to let them know, and invite input and feedback in lieu of their attendance.
10. Reach out to established EJ leaders across the state to invite their input and feedback.

# Training Subcommittee

## Summary of charge

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The Training Subcommittee was charged with:

- Recommending a comprehensive EJ training plan for state agencies that the Office of State Human Resources can make available to state employees.
- Considering whether there should be a recommendation for training to local governments and local planning boards.

## Rationale for subcommittee recommendations

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It is crucial that those who are responsible for fulfilling these responsibilities are properly trained in the principles and practices of EJ to ensure that all North Carolina state agencies and other relevant state legislative bodies incorporate EJ principles in their operations.

## Approach

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In developing these recommendations, the subcommittee:

- Reviewed the EJ training module previously used to train state employees.
- Addressed the effectiveness of the module.
- Provided minimal content topics.
- Ascertained the utility of requiring all state employees to take EJ training.
- Sought the input of the state learning and development manager after final deliberations.

Additionally, the subcommittee made EJ training recommendations that involve units external to state government operations and that may impact the ability of state EJ training recommendations to be

fully recognized. The latter were made based on the notion that state government might be influential in recommending that certain external groups take and/or conduct EJ training as part of their routinely mandated training requirement.

Finally, during EJ in-person meetings held Aug. 15 through Aug. 29, 2024 in various locations across the state, community members provided recommendations to be considered for the employee EJ training program. These recommendations were considered in the final recommendations from this subcommittee.

## Recommendations

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The subcommittee developed the following recommendations to ensure that government employees are fully aware of the environmental influences that disproportionately impact EJ communities. The recommendations also further ensure that employees are equipped with critical knowledge and resources to prevent and mitigate these influences. Adoption of these recommendations will help lead to a healthy citizenry and natural environment, and positively impact North Carolina's economic growth and attractiveness as a place to live, work, play and do business.

1. Mandate EJ training for all state employees. In agency programs where EJ may not be as pronounced, a beginner's level of training should suffice. Employees who have enhanced oversight and engagement in EJ issues, especially those in policy-making roles, should be required to take an advanced-level EJ training course. All employees should be required to take periodic refresher courses based on their level of engagement with EJ issues.
2. Require contract workers to take an introductory-level EJ training course with specific emphasis on the obligations specified within the contract.



3. Issue an RFP for a vendor with demonstrated expertise in EJ training who is capable of reviewing and evaluating the state’s prior EJ training program;<sup>28</sup> developing culturally responsive, custom training programs at both the beginner and advanced levels for state employees as well as “train-the-trainer” programs to reduce the long-term costs associated with EJ training. Given the intersectionality of climate justice (CJ) and EJ, the ideal training vendor also should be able to integrate CJ as an integral component of the EJ training.<sup>29</sup>
4. Ensure that information about EJ grants and educational opportunities are included in EJ employee training programs. In this way, state employees can share the information with EJ communities, and in the process, enhance their participation in state agency decision-making.
5. Encourage state agencies to launch an ongoing seminar series on EJ issues that leverage expertise of public, private and nonprofit sector investigators who are engaged in basic, clinical, behavioral and applied EJ research.
6. Mandate EJ community site visits for employees who have enhanced oversight and engagement in EJ issues, especially those in policy-making roles, to increase their knowledge of and sensitivity to how EJ impacts communities.
7. Use the statewide Learning Management System—North Carolina Learning Center—to track state employee EJ training program participation and completion rates.
8. Develop an evaluation protocol to assess the impact of the EJ training.
9. To align with state-level training, encourage city and county employees throughout the state, including city council members and county commissioners to engage in EJ training. This is especially important for those in jurisdictions where EJ issues are prevalent. County commissioners and city councilors should undergo training prior to assuming their duties and all employees should be required to receive basic EJ training with periodic refresher training.

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<sup>28</sup> An evaluation of the prior training program was not available.

<sup>29</sup> To ensure proper customization, the training vendor selected, along with appropriate North Carolina government representatives, should be required to visit local EJ impacted residents in their community, their homes, and their working places (if appropriate) to better understand their EJ experiences, prior to establishing training programs and guidelines and regulations. Additionally, trainers should be well versed in all NC Government related EJ programs, guidelines and statutes such that trainees become appropriately informed and are able to respond to EJ community needs.

# EJ POLICIES AND PROGRAMS IN STATE AGENCIES

Cabinet agencies have EJ policies and programs in place. In accordance with Section 12 of E.O. 292, this section of the council’s report highlights and describes examples of the EJ policies and programs in Governor Cooper’s cabinet agencies. For additional information, contact the EJ Council member representing each agency.

## Department of Administration

**EJ Council member:** Evin Grant, Director of Policy, Strategy and External Relations

The Department of Administration (DOA) coordinates the business affairs for all state government agencies. Their activities include managing building construction, maintaining

facilities and state vehicles, coordinating purchasing and contracting, and selling state and federal surplus property.

### EJ Highlight: Zero Emission Motor Fleet



#### WHAT IT IS

DOA is transitioning state motor fleet combustion engine vehicles to fully electric or hybrid vehicles, where practical.



#### GOAL

The transition aims to reduce the state’s carbon footprint and lower traffic-related air pollution.



#### EJ ANGLE

Communities adjacent to highways and high-traffic areas experience elevated air pollution levels. Many also face other vulnerabilities due to patterns of injustice and economic development that have influenced the placement of major roads. The EV transition will make a small dent in that pollution. More significantly, the expansion of EV infrastructure to service state vehicles may increase the feasibility of EV usage, particularly in rural areas.



#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

DOA’s Zero Emission Vehicle Plan is available on its website.

## Additional EJ activities:

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### Meaningful community engagement

DOA's advocacy divisions include a Commission of Indian Affairs and a Historically Underutilized Businesses Office. These divisions collaborate with minority populations and individuals from rural areas, both of whom have been historically and unequally affected by the burdens of environmental impacts, to increase meaningful engagement with DOA and across state government. For example, through the Commission of Indian Affairs, DOA facilitates regular engagement between DOT and all eight American Indian communities. These meetings cover topics, including contracts, upcoming and proposed projects, state job opportunities and EJ.

### Helping other departments meet their EJ goals

DOA allocates resources to ensure that every state agency has the necessary tools to meet their EJ goals. They also help agencies meet their climate goals, including leasing hybrid and electric vehicles and improving buildings' efficiency.

# Department of Adult Correction

**EJ Council member:** Justin Duncan, Director of Partnerships and Outreach

The Department of Adult Correction (DAC) is responsible for the rehabilitation, care, custody and supervision of more than 31,000 individuals in prison and more than 75,000 people on probation, post-release or parole in North Carolina communities. DAC provides corrections supervision, justice reinvestment, re-entry planning, crime prevention and victim services. It is the state’s largest agency by number of employees with more than 19,000 full-time positions. The department protects the public by collaboratively focusing on rehabilitation, protection, innovation, accountability and professionalism.

Last year, DAC created its Sustainability, Efficiency & Resilience Services (SE&R) team. Two parallel and complementary organizations are in the process of being created, one within Central Engineering and the other within Facilities Management. The organization in Central Engineering establishes the standards of excellence and defines goals and objectives. The organization in Facilities Management will provide feedback to the goals and standards, and ensure the appropriate goals are put into action. The team will consist of 13 positions. In addition to the SE&R Services Manager, two positions have been hired since last year—the Building Automation Systems Manager and Sustainable Land Use Manager.

## EJ Highlight: Air-Conditioning in State Prisons



### WHAT IT IS

DAC aims to install air conditioning in all North Carolina prisons by early 2026.



### GOAL

Air conditioning will help avoid heat-related illness and improve the living and working conditions of incarcerated people and prison staff.



### EJ ANGLE

Sustained exposure to extreme heat poses significant health risks. With rising temperatures, the risk of unhealthy levels of heat exposure is increasing. Air conditioning is an essential tool in avoiding heat-related complications, illnesses and deaths.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Progress updates are posted regularly on DAC’s website under the Support Service Division.

Since the signing of E.O. 246 and E.O. 292, DAC has been dedicated and committed to advancing EJ. This stems from a recognition of the critical impact that environmental issues can have on public health, safety and equity, especially within vulnerable and marginalized communities. By addressing

environmental concerns, such as pollution, waste management and sustainability, DAC ensures that correctional facilities operate responsibly within their ecosystems, helping to reduce the negative effects that disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities.

This commitment aligns with broader state efforts to protect natural resources and promote social justice, as environmental hazards often exacerbate existing inequalities. This impacts quality of life, health outcomes and access to clean air, water and soil. In North Carolina, where environmental disparities have historically existed, the department's focus on EJ reflects a broader responsibility to protect all citizens, including incarcerated individuals, by reducing environmental harm and promoting a healthier environment for current and future generations.

### **Additional EJ activities:**

#### **Environmental resiliency and health risks in statewide facilities**

DAC conducts facility assessments to evaluate prison conditions and potential health risks, such as heat exposure. The department is working to include climate resiliency, such as flood risk, in these assessments. DAC is also working to install solar panels on all prisons and is transitioning all state prison vehicles to EVs as part of the facility improvement and to reduce its climate impact.

#### **Educational courses for offenders in sustainability and environmental resiliency**

These materials are offered to offenders on tablets through the Edovo platform.

Saving a Town with Renewable Energy by Zack Mikalski. It is a 4-page document describing efforts used to save a town as the title describes.

Renewable Energy: Renewing Communities is a video of a lecture about utilizing once discarded factories and brown sites for placement of renewable energy such as solar farms.

#### **Public participation plan**

DAC's Public Access and Participation Plan includes the commitment to:

- Develop staff capacity to represent DAC to the public and be responsive to citizens who contact the department seeking help. Continually review how the public accesses DAC services, resources and digital content to promote transparency and better enable meaningful participation.
- Strive for continuous improvement in the areas of public access, building community trust, participation and engagement.

The purpose of this plan is to ensure consistency across the department in both the understanding and implementation of public access, participation, outreach and engagement strategies. DAC recognizes public engagement is an active and intentional dialogue between the public and DAC.

#### **Language access plan**

DAC acknowledges the rich and diverse cultural and ethnic composition of North Carolina's population and recognizes that language barriers can hinder an offender's rehabilitation process. Notably, the Hispanic/Latino population represents the largest segment of the limited English proficiency (LEP) community. Therefore, various forms, such as the risk needs assessment offender self report, have been translated into Spanish.

This plan aims to provide staff with guidance, resources and a formal agency process for interacting with offenders and their families who speak languages other than English or are LEP. Furthermore, this initiative aims to provide all offenders and their families with meaningful access to services, programs and activities that will facilitate their successful re-entry into society. Additionally, this language access plan strives to further DAC's compliance with Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act and other pertinent federal and state laws, regulations and guidelines.

# Department of Commerce

**EJ Council member:** Jennifer Mundt, Assistant Secretary for Clean Energy Economic Development

The Department of Commerce (DOC) supports businesses and the workforce to encourage economic development in North Carolina. The department facilitates companies moving to North Carolina. This includes connecting new businesses with site locations,

workforce and infrastructure. DOC's workforce support divisions include the Employment Security Division, which distributes unemployment insurance, and the Workforce Solutions Division, which helps people find jobs and career development options.

## EJ Highlight: First in Talent Plan



### WHAT IT IS

The First in Talent Plan (FITP) is a set of recommendations for economic development in North Carolina. It guides all of DOC's work and is the lens through which DOC implements E.O. 292. This includes providing information about the North Carolina DEQ EJ Toolkit for Businesses to companies considering a North Carolina expansion or relocation, the digital inclusivity efforts and leadership advancing recommendations in the Climate Change Workforce Diversity report.



### GOAL

The FITP aims to provide guidance that includes EJ considerations to policymakers and economic developers both within and outside the department.



### EJ ANGLE

The FITP recognizes that people might face systemic barriers to getting a good-paying job, such as transportation and childcare, and provides recommendations to address those challenges.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

FITP is available on the Department's website.

## Additional EJ activities:

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### **DOC's Climate Change Workforce Diversity Report**

This report provides recommendations to increase knowledge of climate change and labor force engagement in clean energy and EJ sectors. To advance the recommendations, DOC collaborates on educational and outreach events with workforce leaders, policymakers and community-based organizations.

### **Rural and economic development**

The Rural and Economic Development Division of DOC connects small towns with grants to support infrastructure development, disaster recovery and

more. DOC also hosts the annual Main Street Conference, where people share and discuss small town support strategies. Many rural communities in North Carolina face EJ issues. Bernice Miller Travis, a pioneer in the EJ movement, was a keynote speaker at the 2024 conference,, where she highlighted how community development and revitalization efforts must consider EJ.

### **Digital inclusivity**

To ensure that online resources are inclusive and widely available, DOC is reviewing all materials on its website and translating many into additional languages beyond English.

# Department of Environmental Quality

**EJ Council member:** Sharon Martin, Deputy Secretary for Public Affairs

The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is the lead environmental stewardship agency for the protection of North Carolina’s environmental resources. DEQ administers regulatory and permitting programs designed to protect air quality, water quality and the public’s health. The

department also works to advance an all-of-the-above energy strategy that fits North Carolina’s needs. Additionally, DEQ offers technical assistance to businesses, farmers, local governments and the public, and encourages responsible behavior with respect to the environment.

## EJ Highlight: Ensuring Federal Funds Reach EJ Communities



### WHAT IT IS

DEQ provides low-interest loans and grants to assist North Carolina communities in meeting their water infrastructure needs. With the additional historic funding from the American Rescue Plan Act, DEQ created an additional funding opportunity to prioritize projects that increase water and sewer services in historically disadvantaged communities.



### GOAL

This effort aims to ensure that federal funds reach the communities that need them most.



### EJ ANGLE

DEQ worked with health departments, organizations and advocates to identify communities that had been bypassed by water services in the past or those that would benefit from additional water and service. DEQ expanded outreach to assist communities and local governments with limited capacity and ensure they were able to apply for this funding.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

More information is available on DEQ’s website, including a successful example of the initiative’s impact in Ivanhoe, N.C.



## Additional EJ activities:

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### **EJ program**

DEQ has a dedicated EJ program that interacts with the public and community organizations and provides analysis and support to all divisions within the department. All the following EJ activities are managed by this team.

### **Anonymous environmental comment tool**

The tool allows people to anonymously report an environmental complaint to DEQ. Complaints are referred to DEQ staff for investigation. If substantiated, DEQ takes appropriate enforcement and compliance actions. The comment tool is publicly available on DEQ's website.

### **EJ reports**

EJ reports are prepared by the EJ program for permitting and rulemaking actions. The report provides an initial assessment of the nearby community's EJ burden, considering demographic and socioeconomic data, including, race and ethnicity, education and poverty levels, disability, age and English proficiency—as well as other permitted sites and the potential emissions/impacts of the proposed facility. The draft reports are distributed to community members and posted on DEQ's website for public comment. Comments are incorporated into the final EJ report, which is used to inform permitting decisions.

### **Community mapping system**

DEQ's mapping tool overlays facility permits, incident tracking and other environmental information, with map layers containing demographic data at the census block group level and health data at the county level. Residents, organizations and local planners can use the publicly available tool to explore what is in their community and consider EJ when making development decisions. DEQ also uses the tool in conjunction with EPA's EJ screen to identify potentially underserved communities

for additional public engagement, as detailed in the public participation plan.

### **Public participation and language access plans**

The public participation plan details DEQ's strategies for community engagement, including distributing information about proposed projects, hosting public meetings and providing virtual tools for public comment. The plan outlines enhanced strategies for engaging underserved communities, such as coordinating with local organizations, attending community events and distributing physical communication. When appropriate, the department translates information to non-English languages, provides interpreters at public events and includes contact information for additional language support.

### **Ensuring Title VI compliance**

Like other agencies that accept federal funding, DEQ's activities fall under Title VI, part of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race or ethnicity. DEQ's EJ Program includes a Title VI coordinator who works with legal staff to investigate complaints and ensure that contractors, subcontractors and subrecipients of DEQ grants adhere to Title VI.

### **Consulting on the EJ impact of economic development projects**

DEQ's EJ Program provides screening and consultation to DOC and the Economic Development Partnership of North Carolina during the incentives or economic development process. DEQ created the EJ toolkit for businesses, used by DOC, to encourage new businesses to consider EJ in their development plans.

# Department of Health and Human Services

**EJ Council member:** Dr. Virginia Guidry, Branch Head, Occupational and Environmental Epidemiology

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is responsible for implementing programs that improve and ensure the health and well-being of North Carolina residents. Divisions cover a broad

range of services to support people and communities through their lifetime, including Social Services, Public Health, Aging, Child Development and Early Education, Health Benefits and more.

## EJ Highlight: EJ in Community Health Assessments



### WHAT IT IS

Each local health department in North Carolina completes a community health assessment (CHA) that reports health outcomes and needs every three to four years. DHHS is helping local health departments include EJ chapters that detail relevant efforts and issues in the local community.



### GOAL

This effort aims to increase community awareness, consideration and study of EJ issues.



### EJ ANGLE

Preparing these EJ chapters will require inquiry into EJ issues and consideration of possible solutions by local health departments. CHAs are also public, meaning that community members will also be able to track progress addressing issues if the chapters are repeated or enhanced each cycle.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Information on the effort will be available on DHHS' EJ webpage, which will soon be posted. EJ section examples can be viewed in Alamance and Durham County CHAs.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Environmental health data dashboard

In DHHS' Environmental Health Data Dashboard, users can explore the geographic distribution of data on demographics, climate, air quality and pollution, and various health outcomes across North Carolina. Data are available from different years and

there are sections showing trends and county-level comparisons. The dashboard also displays a map of the CDC's EJI, a measure of cumulative EJ impact across census tracts in North Carolina.

### **Partnership to address private well contamination in Sampson County**

DHHS, Environmental Justice Community Action Network, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Appalachian State University are collaborating on a community-based project to reduce exposure to contaminants in private wells in Sampson County. DHHS is overseeing the project and providing health education resources. Project partners will be collecting private well samples for testing and providing low-cost treatment, if needed. Most of the census tracts in the county are rural and rank highly on the CDC's EJI. The project is supported by a grant from the EPA Environmental Justice Government-to-Government Program.

### **Evaluating septic system needs in marginalized communities in N.C.**

DHHS' Environmental Health Section (EHS) is conducting a case study to evaluate the status of septic systems and their impact on the environment and health in historically marginalized communities in Bladen and Scotland counties. The compiled data will also aid efforts to enhance infrastructure investment opportunities in underserved communities experiencing adverse health outcomes due to a lack of resources.

### **Restoration of Waste Detection and Elimination Program**

The Waste Detection and Elimination (WaDE) Program helped low-income homeowners in marginalized communities repair their septic systems and conducted educational and outreach programs to show the importance of proper system maintenance. Funds were allocated based on financial, public health and environmental needs. A total of 34 septic systems in 13 western North Carolina counties were repaired through the program. However, an additional 34 projects were unable to be addressed due to lack of funds.

### **Addressing PFAS and other contaminants in septic systems and private wells**

EHS recently completed a study of contaminants in communities with aging and/or compromised septic systems and private drinking water wells. EHS collected and analyzed septic system effluent and private well samples to identify the presence of traditional contaminants, including nitrogen, chloride and *E. coli*, and emerging contaminants, such as PFOA, PFOS and GenX. EHS also pumped each septic tank to remove the solids and communicated routine maintenance information to the homeowners.

### **Reducing nonpoint source-derived emerging contaminates**

A larger percentage of North Carolina's population, especially in rural communities, depends on private wells for drinking water. Testing of private wells is required when a well is first constructed, but any additional testing is up to the owner. Therefore, contaminants that may occur after well construction may not be discovered. Through education and outreach efforts, EHS is working to improve groundwater testing and reduce exposure to emerging contaminates. EHS has translated educational materials, such as the septic system brochure and door hangers into Spanish, and shared English and Spanish language versions with local health departments.

# Department of Information Technology

**EJ Council member:** Torre Jessup, Deputy State Chief Information Officer

The Department of Information Technology (DIT) provides technical support to all state agencies. DIT's activities include improving the digital accessibility of government information for the public; managing

IT budgeting, procurement and support personnel across state agencies; and providing support on data security and analysis.

## EJ Highlight: EJ Hub



### WHAT IT IS

The EJ Hub provides a central location for EJ information, including awarded grants and a state-adapted tool for mapping EJ data in North Carolina. The tool will include environmental, health and socioeconomic data from across departments.



### GOAL

The EJ Hub is a central place to present government wide EJ efforts and consolidate mapping tools for easy public navigation.



### EJ ANGLE

The mapping tool will allow community members, local governments and state-level departments to see the distribution of environmental burdens, and social and health vulnerabilities across the state. This information will help improve planning and outreach decisions, advocacy efforts and public awareness of EJ. DIT is also engaging the public in the tool development process and recently presented a draft to EJ community members for feedback.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

A beta version will be released in October 2024. Public comments will be incorporated into subsequent versions.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Accessibility of EJ information

DIT helps all departments ensure that their resources, including EJ information, are digitally accessible. These efforts help facilitate meaningful community engagement and ensure that critical information

is accessible to everyone. DIT also supports digital outreach and virtual events across state government, as needed.

# Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

**EJ Council member:** Douglas Taggart, Interagency Coordinator

The mission of the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) is to support the military community in North Carolina, including the personnel, installations and their adjacent communities. The department also supports the state's veterans and their families. DMVA provides access to a full spectrum of resources that further enhance North Carolina's military and veteran friendly environment. The department will facilitate collaborative opportunities for business development, leveraging of technology, transportation and healthcare services, educational opportunities and economic development by engaging with federal, state and local government. DMVA will continue collaborative and supporting efforts with non-profit and civic organizations that support an engaged military and veteran populace that is a fully vested participant in all facets of the state's life.

The department includes a Veterans Affairs Division that connects veterans with their earned federal benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) across healthcare, disability and education. The department's Military Affairs Division supports communities around North Carolina's

military installations by working to impact quality-of-life issues experienced due to the service members' military service. DMVA's Transition Division focuses on keeping service members in North Carolina as they leave military service or return home, so both groups have a successful civilian transition.

While the U.S. military is a very diverse organization, veterans of military service are unequally affected by environmental concerns depending on where and when they served. For example, VA healthcare is available to veterans who may have been exposed to burn pits or other environmental hazards while deployed. DMVA's role in this is to connect veterans to earned healthcare benefits with the VA.

## **Comprehensive community outreach**

DMVA's outreach efforts are widespread across the state. In 2024, this included approximately 73 outreach events across three divisions and four regions. Once the EJ Mapping Tool is released, the department will pursue its goal of ensuring that there are a minimum of two events annually within an EJ community.

# Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

**EJ Council member:** Dr. Tamara Holmes Brothers, Program Outreach and Engagement Director

The Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) manages, promotes and enhances the things that people love in North Carolina—its diverse arts and culture, rich history and spectacular natural areas.

DNCR manages North Carolina’s treasures, including 28 historic sites, seven history museums, two art museums, four science museums and two outdoor science education centers, three aquariums, Jennette’s Pier, 42 state parks and recreation areas, the North Carolina Zoo, the nation’s first state-supported symphony, the State Library, the State Archives, the North Carolina Arts Council, the African American Heritage Commission, the State Preservation Office, the Office of State Archaeology, and the Division of Land and Water Stewardship. These things unite North Carolinians,

create a shared identity and provide common ground.

DNCR’s mission is to improve the quality of life in North Carolina by creating opportunities to experience excellence in the arts, history, libraries and nature. These opportunities stimulate learning, inspire creativity, preserve the state’s history and conserve its natural heritage, encourage recreation and cultural tourism, and promote economic development.

DNCR’s vision is to be the leader in using the state’s natural and cultural resources to build the social, cultural, educational and economic future of North Carolina. Every day, DNCR’s places, programs and ideas strengthen education, improve public health, enhance the quality of life and support robust economic growth across the state.

## EJ Highlight: Telling the Story of EJ in North Carolina



### WHAT IT IS

In 2023, the North Carolina Museum of History hosted an event celebrating Warren County and the birth of the EJ movement.



### GOAL

The event aimed to increase awareness and understanding of the history of EJ in North Carolina and celebrate the contributions of the Warren County community.



### EJ ANGLE

Understanding and awareness of past environmental injustices is a crucial piece of addressing ongoing injustices, ensuring similar situations are not repeated and recognizing the significant contributions and sacrifices of communities like Warren County.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

A recording of the event is available on YouTube and more information about Warren County is available online.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Ensuring equitable access to state parks and recreation areas

EJ also means equitable access to safe and healthy environments to play. DNCR awards grants through the North Carolina Land and Water Fund to protect and restore land and water resources. The North Carolina Land and Water Fund also manages public outdoor areas, such as state parks and recreation areas; publishes trail maps; maintains a directory of parks and works to ensure that North Carolina's natural resources are physically and culturally accessible to all.

### North Carolina African American Heritage Commission

Through relationships and collaboration, the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission facilitates meaningful engagement between African American communities and DNCR. The commission supports community members and professionals, such as curators and historians, sharing and exploring African American history, culture and arts. One example of their work is the North Carolina Civil Rights Trail, which will mark 50 sites across the state that are critical to the Civil Rights Movement. With physical markers and a virtual tour, the project increases awareness of the history of civil rights in North Carolina.

### North Carolina Office of State Archaeology

The Office of State Archaeology (OSA) serves North Carolina's citizens through programs that identify archaeological resources on land and beneath state waters. OSA protects the state's legacy of American Indian villages, colonial towns, farmsteads and historic shipwrecks through application of state and federal archaeology laws and regulations, and by maintaining inventories of site data and artifact collections.

OSA collaborates with the state's African American Heritage Commission to plan a convening of African American cemetery stakeholders in North Carolina.

This effort stems from an ongoing crisis regarding the stewardship of these spaces to include limited capacity and resources. This gathering will create a space for connection and sharing of resources—success stories, grant sources and planning sources.

To assist with stewardship efforts, the North Carolina African American Heritage Commission will welcome a cemetery technician to support the work of state archaeology. The position will digitize backlogged historic cemetery records to help update the state's overall records of cemeteries.

### North Carolina American Indian Heritage Commission

The North Carolina American Indian Heritage Commission, a partnership between DNCR and the American Indian community, works to promote and protect the history, culture and arts of the state's American Indian communities. Currently, the commission is working to publish land acknowledgments and formally recognize historical and cultural sites. Although their work does not always directly relate to EJ, American Indian communities have been disproportionately impacted by environmental burdens. The commission is a platform to ensure ongoing collaboration.

### Natural Resources

In July 2024, the EPA awarded \$421 million to DNCR for its bipartisan, multi-state coalition application in partnership with South Carolina, Virginia and Maryland, along with The Nature Conservancy named the Atlantic Conservation Coalition (ACC). The coalition's goal is to reduce carbon emissions through conservation and restoration of natural resources while increasing community resilience to natural hazards.

The ACC will use the funding for conservation and restoration projects for peatland wetlands, coastal habitats and forests across all four states. \$50 million will be allocated to each state for shovel-ready projects and \$200 million will be allocated to The Nature Conservancy for additional forest and

wetland restoration projects across coalition states. The 21 projects identified in the application will reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 28 million metric tons, CO<sub>2</sub>e, by 2050. Examples of projects include salt marsh restoration, conserving land for outdoor recreation, building living shorelines, cost-assistance to small forest landowners, planting trees in cities, preserving farmland and reforestation. The ACC identified 594 unique census tracts or block groups as both low-income or disadvantaged

communities that could reasonably be expected to benefit from this funding. This includes communities supported by the Black Family Land Trust, one of the nation's only conservation land trusts dedicated to the preservation and protection of African American and other historically underserved landowners' assets.



# Department of Public Safety

**EJ Council member:** Cara Bridges, Director of Policy and Strategic Planning

The Department of Public Safety (DPS) is responsible for protecting North Carolina residents and their property. DPS divisions include Law Enforcement, Juvenile Justice, Emergency Management (NCEM), Homeland Security, North

Carolina National Guard and the Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR). Most of the department's initiatives related to EJ are implemented by NCEM and NCORR.

## EJ Highlight: Partnership with Local Organizations



### WHAT IT IS

The heat action plan toolkit is a free resource of strategies and considerations to manage for extreme heat. NCORR's climate resiliency side released the toolkit in April 2024.



### GOAL

The information will help local governments create an action plan to address the effects of extreme heat.



### EJ ANGLE

While the toolkit is available to everyone, it will be particularly useful to local governments that may lack the resources to develop their own heat-resistance materials. Additionally, the toolkit contains information to help governments consider how some communities—such as farmworkers, elderly people and those living without air conditioning—are more vulnerable to extreme heat.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

The toolkit is now part of the North Carolina Resilience Exchange and is available on the ReBUILD NC website.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Individual Assistance & Mitigations Program

The department's Individual Assistance Program provides federal funding, housing resources and inspections for individuals whose homes have been damaged by natural or manmade disasters. These programs are particularly important in EJ communities that may have been unjustly subject to manmade disasters. The department's Mitigations Program provides grants to help communities rebuild to be more resilient after federally declared disasters. It also awards grants to proactively reduce damage risk, such as Flood Mitigation Assistance and Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities. NCEM manages both programs.

The North Carolina Resilience Exchange helps local and state leaders understand their community's climate resilience needs, identify appropriate actions and find the resources to implement solutions. Residents are already experiencing climate impacts such as drought, flooding, high daytime and nighttime temperatures, hurricanes, wildfires and sea level rise. North Carolina's ecosystems are changing, too. [The Exchange](#) organizes the state's resilience resources for leaders who want to help manage these impacts. With the support of the Resilience Exchange, practitioners can improve the resilience of their communities, natural areas and farmlands.

### Homeowner recovery

NCORR helps rebuild homes destroyed by hurricanes and serves as a last-resort source of funding for people to rebuild their houses. These funds often support people who are uninsured or whose insurance refused to cover the rebuilding cost. The office's Fair Housing Policy helps ensure equitable access to these services and other housing programs under NCORR.

### Strategic Buyout Program

Through NCORR's Strategic Buyout Program, people whose homes are located in a flood-prone area can apply to have NCORR buy their house at market price. NCORR will demolish and clear the house and turn the land over to the local government to be preserved as greenspace. The program addresses EJ by providing monetary assistance to help people relocate to safer areas and increasing greenspace, which can mitigate flooding risk. While the program is available statewide, it provides essential assistance to EJ communities that are facing extreme weather resulting from climate change.

### Language Access Plan

NCORR is translating all vital documents into Spanish. This includes public comment notices and applications for benefits. The department will translate all public-facing NCORR and NCEM documents related to natural disasters into at least one other language, which will vary according to the language needs of different communities. These steps aim to ensure that people with limited English proficiency can access NCORR programs and services.

### Public participation

DPS aims to have translators present at all public meetings. The department also hosts meetings at varying locations and times of day, and uses websites and social media to reach a broad population. Additionally, DPS evaluates how it collects feedback to ensure it is providing sufficient and varied platforms for engagement. These initiatives are part of the DPS' Public Participation Plan, which is updated every year.

# Department of Revenue

**EJ Council member:** McKinley Wooten, Assistant Secretary for Tax Processing, Research and Equity

The primary responsibility of the Department of Revenue (DOR) is the administration and collection of state taxes. The department processes state taxes and returns, maintains tax resources and staffs a customer

service center. While not responsible for processing federal taxes, the department provides information to North Carolina residents about the process.

## EJ Highlight: Partnership with Local Organizations



### WHAT IT IS

DOR meets regularly with nonprofits that provide tax advice to North Carolinians, works with them to develop public-facing information and provides access to necessary data.



### GOAL

These partnerships help ensure that tax advice and benefits are available to all North Carolinians, and that DOR is aware of inequities and challenges people face in filing taxes.



### EJ ANGLE

Certain populations may need specific information for navigating the tax system, including payment plan options or help filing without a social security number. Additionally, if people do not file taxes because they are tax exempt due to low income, they miss out on tax credits for which they may be eligible, such as the Earned Income Tax Credit or the Child Tax Credit.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

DOR's tax advice is available on its website.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Bringing an equity lens to taxes

DOR established its Division of Tax Research and Equity in 2020 to bring an equity lens to the department's work. DOR is increasing awareness of EJ among staff and is considering the specific economic challenges that individuals in EJ communities may face.

### Ensuring access to modern tax filing system

DOR is in the process of moving state tax filing to an entirely electronic system. Currently, only 8% of North Carolina residents file on paper; however, DOR is working to identify which populations are represented in that 8%—such as individuals who do not have stable internet connection—to ensure that the new system will fit their needs.

# Department of Transportation

**EJ Council member:** Ebony Pittman, Deputy Secretary for Business Administration

The Department of Transportation (DOT) houses departments overseeing all forms of publicly used, state-level transportation. This includes highways, ferries, aviation, railways and public bikeways. In each of these systems, the department is responsible for

the ease and connectedness of transit, while also considering safety and environmental impact. DOT is a statewide department with offices across the state and more than 9,000 employees.

## EJ Highlight: Equity Focused Research and Development Program



### WHAT IT IS

DOT's research team has recently been prioritizing projects with an equity focus. There are several ongoing EJ-related projects, including one assessing the historical EJ impacts of transportation projects in North Carolina and another evaluating strategies to better incorporate EJ into long-range planning. DOT also has an upcoming project to map unmarked burial sites belonging to historically marginalized groups, including Indigenous burial sites, graves of formerly enslaved individuals and historic African American communities.



### GOAL

These projects aim to identify areas of inequity and ways to advance EJ, and examine systemic causes of environmental injustice.



### EJ ANGLE

Research and reflection is a critical piece of undoing systems and processes that perpetuate environmental injustice and ensuring that future decisions advance justice.



### FOR MORE INFORMATION

DOT's research projects are available on the department's Research and Development Office webpage. This includes the most recently approved project: "Cemetery Mapping for Indigenous and Enslaved People's Remains." Research & Development Office webpage.

## Additional EJ activities:

### Title VI and the Office of Civil Rights

Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, all state-level DOTs are mandated to ensure non-discrimination, including fair treatment and meaningful engagement in decision-making, in all transportation actions. DOT updates its Title VI Implementation Plan yearly. Additionally, each business unit within DOT has a Title VI liaison that meets monthly with the Office of Civil Rights to ensure adherence to requirements. Many of DOT's EJ initiatives, including significant public participation efforts, are implemented and enforced under Title VI. DOT's current Title VI Implementation Plan contains a section on EJ.

### Transportation project environmental assessment

DOT integrates EJ considerations during both the project planning and NEPA/environmental review phases to ensure that community needs and potential impacts are thoroughly addressed. The process begins with the department's Community Studies Team conducting demographic analyses through reports, such as community understanding reports, community characteristics reports, community impact assessments and findings from the direct & indirect screening tool. These findings inform the development of a public involvement plan tailored to the specific needs of each project. The department then conducts outreach efforts to share key messages and gather public input. The public input is compiled and reviewed by an internal workgroup before responses are prepared for each comment. A summary of that meeting, along with any decisions made, is posted online for transparency. If the department identifies potential project impacts, it develops mitigation strategies in collaboration with the community to address the effects, particularly those in underserved areas.

### NCDOT Engagement Hub

DOT posts the majority of the projects that are proposed, planned or underway on its [public engagement hub](#). This hub allows people to learn about ongoing projects and provide comments and feedback. The goal is to provide a centralized place for the public to learn about and engage with DOT plans.

### Residents Guide to Transportation

DOT's Residents Guide to Transportation is an example of department's public engagement efforts. The guide includes a PDF factsheet and a series of YouTube videos that show how transportation decisions are made and how the public can get involved at each stage. DOT also created a version geared towards public officials.

### Internal EJ workgroup

Various business units throughout the department gather regularly to discuss EJ issues across divisions. Because DOT is a very large department with offices across the state, the workgroup facilitates statewide awareness and coordination of EJ efforts.

Learn more about [DOT's Residents Guide to Transportation here](#).

# AGENCY IMPLEMENTATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLANS

## Department of Administration

Per E.O. 246, the Department of Administration (DOA), established its Public Access and Participation Plan to include commitments to:

- Increase staff awareness and sensitivity to the value of incorporating the perspective of underserved populations in agency activities and decision-making, through internal training.
- Develop staff facilitation capacity to improve meaningful public participation in agency public meetings.
- Develop staff capacity to represent the agency to the public and be responsive to citizens who contact the agency seeking help.
- Revisit and redesign the ways that the public accesses the agency to increase transparency and better enable meaningful participation.
- Adopt means of measuring success in public access and participation, and incorporating lessons learned through public engagement to ensure continuous improvement in these efforts.

Currently, DOA has taken several steps toward fulfilling these commitments and goals set forth in its plan. To maintain accountability, executive leadership and division directors reference this plan in day-to-day tasks, improvement projects and equity efforts. Thus far, DOA has taken advantage of its outward-facing advocacy groups and online presence to meet a number of the commitments.

In reference to Part 1 of DOA's plan regarding public meetings, there has been an intentional consolidation of boards and commissions records and oversight through the policy team's program and policy coordinator position. Subsequently, the

department has consistently been in compliance with meeting of public bodies, per N.C. Gen. Stat. § 143-318.9-318.18 requirements. DOA has also created a direct line of communication for the public to inquire about and be considered for positions within the agency's boards and commissions. Through this process, the policy team and boards and commissions staff representatives continue to improve the management and practices that govern the conduct of the agency's public meetings by:

- Encouraging greater public awareness
- Prioritizing inclusivity
- Ensuring the department remains compliant with requirements for all boards and commissions, which includes publishing a public-facing meetings calendar on the DOA website that is updated regularly by the communications team.

Lastly, the policy team, executive leadership and the communications team are currently testing an internal calendar for managers to raise awareness of public meetings and events among the department's employee base. Within the day-to-day management of the agency's advocacy groups, a handful of staff members from various divisions have had direct experience improving public meeting facilitation and maintaining professional representation in public-facing interactions.

In reference to Part 2 of the plan regarding website improvement, the executive leadership and policy team worked extensively with the communications team to overhaul the entire DOA website. This included completely new webpage templates, greater visualizations for viewers and clearer information sharing to increase equity and inclusivity. All division

and advocacy webpages have consistent templates to increase the consistency of information sharing. Specifically, these improvements have allowed viewers quick, direct and easy access to information. Additionally, the communications team continues to work daily to maintain up-to-date information throughout the agency's website to include current programs, public resources, projects, reports, events, meetings, contact information and customer service needs. Currently, the communications team is collaborating internally to obtain and share data metrics on the access and use of each webpage to better understand interactions with the public. An important part of prioritizing the department's improved website has been continuously sharing the website with agency partners, the public and various stakeholders during events, meetings and through social media. Lastly, DOA is now working with DIT to maintain a partnership with the software company Monsido to provide more tools for increasing accessibility in online agency communications.

The department's advocacy groups continue to provide unique perspectives from underserved community representatives throughout North Carolina, which will continue to inform new and existing policies and procedures for the agency and its divisions. Moving forward, DOA leadership is working on finalizing an agency language access plan to:

- Increase accessibility for non-English speaking North Carolinians.
- Continue to collaborate with management and stakeholders on the best ways to involve the public in agency efforts.
- Train employees on the importance of inclusivity and equity.

# Department of Adult Correction

The North Carolina Department of Adult Correction (DAC) is committed to fostering transparency, accountability and collaboration with the public it serves. Recognizing the importance of community involvement in decision-making processes, DAC has developed a Public Participation Plan to ensure that citizens, stakeholders and other interested parties have meaningful opportunities to engage with the department’s policies, programs and initiatives. This plan outlines the strategies and methods by which DAC will actively seek and encourage public input, while also ensuring that input is considered in the department’s efforts to maintain public safety, rehabilitate offenders and protect communities.

The purpose of this plan is to establish a clear framework that guides how DAC will engage with the public. The plan seeks to:

- Promote transparency by providing accessible information on key DAC decisions and actions.

- Facilitate two-way communication between DAC and the public, ensuring that voices from diverse communities, including those most impacted by the correctional system are heard.
- Encourage active and informed public involvement in the development of policies, programs and reforms within the correctional system.
- Ensure that public input is not only solicited, but is thoughtfully considered in the decision-making process.
- Build trust and strengthen relationships between DAC, community stakeholders, advocacy groups and the public.

By adopting this plan, DAC demonstrates its dedication to creating a correctional system that reflects the values and concerns of the people it serves, while upholding the highest standards of safety, equity and justice.



## Department of Commerce

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The Department of Commerce's (DOC) Public Participation Plan continues to be a living document that outlines the department's efforts to engage with the public and make information accessible. The plan is intended to support the state's First in Talent Strategic Economic Development Plan by ensuring that all North Carolinians have access to economic opportunities.

DOC has always included proactive efforts for outreach and engagement of its stakeholders as it relates to specific workforce and economic development initiatives. In 2024, the department's public participation efforts include:

**Public meetings:** DOC is committed to maintaining transparency, accountability and two-way engagement with its stakeholders and the people and communities it serves by offering multiple opportunities and methods for participation. The department does this by ensuring public meetings are properly noticed in advance through several channels. DOC holds public meetings and other engagement activities in diverse locations of the state. The department also targets underserved and rural communities as well as key demographics to ensure effective outreach and opportunities to participate. Additionally, DOC offers meeting participation both in-person and virtually.

**Types of public engagement:** The department uses multiple digital, virtual and in-person communication channels and methods for one-way and two-

way communication and engagement. This helps reduce barriers to participation and expand reach of accessible information for stakeholders across the state. DOC aims to meet people where they are and offer multiple opportunities to access information and engage.

**Website/content accessibility:** DOC regularly reviews and updates the department's website and content to ensure greater accessibility, transparency, continued feedback loops and an improved user experience overall. DOC's Language Access Plan supports efforts to provide more accessible information online and translate key materials and assets to Spanish and multiple other languages for greater accessibility.

**Staff training:** The department offers routine staff trainings on cultural awareness, engagement and accessibility. These trainings are designed to reduce barriers to program participation, community involvement and economic opportunities.

**Ongoing plan review and solicitation of feedback:** The department is committed to evaluating its Public Participation Plan every two years to ensure goals are being met and improvements are made, as identified and needed. Part of this commitment is to maintain a permanent method for collecting plan feedback from constituents and stakeholders, and to be responsive to feedback and questions.

## Department of Environmental Quality

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The Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) strives to conduct the people's business in an open and transparent way. To achieve this goal, the department and its staff must be aware of and sensitive to the changing diversity of the state's population and culture, as well as the needs of communities across the state when developing and implementing public participation, outreach and engagement programs. The DEQ's Public Participation Plan and Limited English Proficiency Language Access Plan are intended to be living documents that address the department's ongoing efforts to engage the public and continue presenting clear and easy-to-consume information to all stakeholders.

DEQ released a Public Participation Plan in 2021 and continues to update the plan annually to better reflect communities' needs and department activities.

DEQ's Language Access Plan seeks to provide DEQ staff with resources and a protocol for interacting with identified individuals or communities. It is DEQ's policy that when communities need language assistance to meaningfully participate in DEQ programs or events, opportunities for such assistance will be identified and pursued when deemed appropriate through the plan's guidelines. DEQ has also contracted with a language services vendor to provide on-demand translation and interpretation services upon request.

DEQ continues to look for opportunities to collaborate, promote dialogue and improve engagement with North Carolina residents.

# Department of Health and Human Services

The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) published its [Public Participation Plan](#) in June 2023. DHHS operates a comprehensive communications and media program focused on raising awareness and building relationships within the communities it serves. However, the department acknowledges that there is more it can do to reach communities across the state that may be unaware of and underserved by its programs. This includes communities of color, Indigenous communities, rural communities and low- and moderate-income communities.

The department’s plan aims to improve communication, create meaningful dialogue and enhance transparency in decision-making with the public. DHHS’ stakeholders include a focus on historically marginalized populations and those with limited English proficiency.

Public meetings and outreach. When planning public meetings, DHHS staff examine meeting elements to identify and remove potential barriers to participation. This includes considering the timing, venue and how to publicize events. It also includes the provision of nontechnical information. DHHS recognizes that the department’s success in achieving its outreach goals is directly tied to the relationships it maintains with community organizations, advocacy groups and other health leaders who possess their own networks to help spread the word. Staff explore existing resources and engage trusted leaders at the beginning of the planning process to maximize the benefit of these relationships.

DHHS website and social media. To maintain digital resources, DHHS reviews webpages and updates content with clear, plain-language statements, if necessary. The department uses lessons learned from community outreach to guide this work and provides contact information or comment forms to aid the public in submitting input. DHHS also ensures websites are accessible so they are able to be used by as many people as possible. Additionally, the department relies on the assistance and expertise of website specialists to meet public expectations and understand best practices.

- The public can sign up to receive newsletters and press releases on the website at <http://www.ncdhhs.gov/news>.
- The agency’s social media accounts are listed on the website at <https://www.ncdhhs.gov/follow-ncdhhs-social-media>.

Staff training. DHHS provides staff with access to an online learning center that offers training on a wide variety of subjects, including meeting facilitation and communication best practices. The department’s Office of Health Equity provides training opportunities for staff to learn more about diversity, equity and inclusion, historically marginalized populations and how to apply an equity lens to their work.

# Department of Information Technology

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The Department of Information and Technology (DIT) has developed a Public Access and Participation Plan to ensure that all North Carolina residents have equitable access to government services and can meaningfully contribute to government decisions. DIT's plan recognizes the importance of leveraging technology to create a prosperous, healthier and more educated state. It aims to address gaps in service and engagement, particularly among communities of color, Indigenous communities, and low- and moderate-income communities.

To achieve these goals, the plan outlines several key initiatives. These include:

- Increasing staff awareness and sensitivity to the needs of underserved populations through internal training. Enhancing staff facilitation skills for public meetings.
- Improving the ways the public can access the agency.

Additionally, the plan emphasizes the importance of continuous improvement by adopting measures to assess the success of public access and participation efforts and incorporating lessons learned from public engagement.

Public meetings are a crucial component of the plan, providing opportunities for the agency to engage with communities and gather diverse perspectives. These meetings help ensure that the agency's proposals and actions are well-understood and that community views are considered. The department's Division of Broadband and Digital Equity, for example, conducts public meetings with local municipalities and stakeholders to raise awareness about infrastructure and digital equity grant programs.

Overall, DIT's Public Access and Participation Plan is a comprehensive effort to foster a more inclusive and participatory government. By encouraging greater public involvement, the plan aims to create an equitable opportunity for all North Carolinians to share in the benefits of a more prosperous state.

# Department of Military and Veterans Affairs

The Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) completed its first Public Participation Plan in October 2024. As a result, DMVA does not have an update on the plan execution beyond summarizing the plan’s intent and past activities. The agency’s plan is limited due to the nature of DMVA’s mission and size.

The department’s Veterans Affairs Division works to ensure North Carolina’s veteran community is supported in accessing earned federal benefits through the state’s veteran service officers situated across 12 veterans service centers within a four-region area.

DMVA staff in the 12 service centers regularly interact with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), veterans service organizations and associated community network meetings to find opportunities to present information about earned benefits for military service to veterans and their family members.

The Veterans Affairs Division participates in many local outreach events—73 in 2024—to communicate availability and access of benefits for veteran communities across the state.

The department’s Military Affairs Division conducts specific public engagement on relevant military topics, some of which focus on underserved communities, such as:

- African American Military and Veteran Lineage Project grant – The collaboration between Elizabeth City State University and Department of Natural and Cultural Resources brought a travelling exhibit of 12 display panels to museums and colleges highlighting stories and experiences of African American service members and veterans.
- Reserve Officers’ Training Corps roundtable events – these events highlight senior minority military leaders and share their experiences with students at the college and high school level.

- North Carolina Military Hall of Firsts –DMVA also partners with DNCR for the North Carolina Military Hall of Firsts, which honors veterans that have brought honor, recognition or esteem to the state.
- Military Child of The Year, semi-finalists recognition events – Operation Homefront holds an annual national Military Child of the Year contest. The Military Affairs Division has conducted three annual recognition events since 2022 for all North Carolina-based semi-finalists and their families.
- Repatriation Services – The division supported three service members’ remains being repatriated home to North Carolina in the last year (Asheville, Charlotte and New Bern). with the division is also partnering with DHHS to conduct a military childcare roundtable in late 2024.

Additionally, DMVA operates five state veterans’ homes and has four State veterans’ cemeteries that interact with citizens to determine eligibility and receive services.

The department’s Public Participation Plan includes a commitment to:

- Develop staff capacity to represent DMVA to the public, and to be responsive to citizens who contact the department seeking assistance.
- Annually review how the public accesses DMVA, and how the department promotes transparency and enables meaningful engagement.
- Strive for continuous improvement in the areas of public access, participation and engagement.

# Department of Natural and Cultural Resources

## DNCR Public Participation Plan Implementation

### Introduction

The North Carolina Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR) strives to improve the quality of life in North Carolina by creating opportunities to experience excellence in the arts, history, libraries, and nature by stimulating learning, inspiring creativity, preserving the state’s history, conserving the state’s natural heritage, encouraging recreation and cultural tourism, and promoting economic development.

We have developed this public participation plan to foster community engagement, meaningful dialogue, and efficient mechanisms to receive and incorporate public input. The public participation plan aims to improve communication, create intentional dialogue, and enhance transparency in Department or division processes with the public.

### Public participation

It is critical to have a process that involves the public in decision-making. The process can include a series of activities and actions over a project’s lifespan to inform and obtain input from the public. Public participation encourages constituents to help shape decisions that may impact their lives.

When conducting meaningful public participation, the Department will gather input from a spectrum of constituent interests, resulting in various views and concerns and providing fair treatment, meaningful involvement, and social inclusion for all people regardless of race, color, national origin, sexual orientation or income, concerning the development, implementation, and decisions made through the public participation process.

This Plan seeks to fulfill the Department’s public participation and environmental justice goals by providing meaningful outreach and engagement in our decision-making processes.

### Public outreach

DNCR has enhanced its public outreach by ensuring that its websites meet Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). These guidelines help make digital content accessible to people with disabilities, providing a more inclusive online experience. Google Translate has also been added to the agency’s websites, enabling users to translate content into multiple languages, breaking down language barriers, and ensuring broader access to resources. To expand outreach to Spanish-speaking audiences, DNCR has partnered with Univision and is translating press releases into Spanish, making communications more inclusive and relevant. By embracing diverse and accessible communication channels, we continue to build stronger connections with all constituent groups.

Other extended outreach methods include a Strive for Access initiative, led by the Division of Parks and Recreation. This effort proposes ensuring access for all North Carolinians to an outdoor recreation opportunity within ten minutes of their home. The initiative will produce maps that identify communities lacking outdoor recreation gaps and will generate plans to target resources to create parks, trails, or greenways in those areas. The initiative also aims to inform lawmakers and private funders of the need for funding support to achieve the goals.

# Department of Public Safety

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The 2024 Department of Public Safety (DPS) Public Participation Plan includes the commitment to:

- Develop staff capacity to represent DPS to the public and be responsive to citizens who contact the department seeking help. Continually review how the public accesses DPS to promote transparency and better enable meaningful participation.
- Strive for continuous improvement in the areas of public access, participation and engagement.

DPS is committed to hosting public meetings that are open and accessible. Public meetings are an opportunity for the agency to engage communities whose opinions may have been overlooked in the past. DPS regularly reviews public meeting schedules for things like timing and location. For example,

meetings for the department’s Strategic Buyout Program, managed by the Office of Recovery and Resiliency, are regularly held in the impacted communities and are hosted in the evening hours to allow attendees to join after regular work hours. DPS also continues to look for opportunities to improve community engagement and outreach efforts, especially in underserved communities. In 2023, the state launched the N.C. S.A.F.E.—Securing All Firearms Effectively—awareness campaign to engage directly with communities throughout the state and share the importance of safely securing firearms. This campaign also provides free gun locks directly to citizens as well as through trusted community partners, including schools, places of worship and medical providers. Finally, DPS is committed to language transparency. DPS recently completed a project to fully translate the agency’s website into Spanish, providing increased access and awareness.

# Department of Revenue

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In August 2024, North Carolina announced it will join the list of states offering Direct File, a no-cost tax filing option that qualifying taxpayers can use to file their federal and state tax returns. The Department of Revenue (DOR) will conduct public outreach to educate them about Direct File. On Sept. 12, 2024, a meeting was held with advocacy agencies, legal aid agencies and state agencies that represent clients and employees who will be likely eligible to use Direct File. Once eligibility requirements are solidified by the IRS, DOR will conduct a rigorous public information and education campaign from November 2024 through tax filing season in March 2025 to make sure the public is aware of this tax filing option. Taxpayers with less complex tax filings will benefit from this free option, which will be available for the 2025 tax season.

DOR is also continuing to work on its language access capabilities. The department’s website and online platforms have built-in accessibility features, making them accessible to all users, including those who rely on screen readers. DOR continues

to review all website language describing agency policies, programs and processes. The department also updates content with clear, plain-language statements, where necessary. DOR is in the process of procuring a new modernized tax system that will include a public-facing component. This will give taxpayers more online access to their tax information. To kick off the effort, the department is releasing a response for proposal in fall 2024. The project is expected to be completed in spring 2026.

DOR remains committed to creating greater sensitivity to the challenges that many communities face by training all staff, especially those who make decisions about the collection of delinquent taxes and establishment of payment plans, and those who work with the public through DOR’s call and contact centers. Additionally, the department’s Office of Employee Experience and Engagement created bimonthly lunch-and-learn sessions, which have included topics on diversity, inclusion, and managing with empathy and respect.



## Department of Transportation

The Department of Transportation (DOT) released its agency plan, known as the Statewide Public Involvement Plan, in 2020. The plan includes best practices for community engagement, meaningful dialogue and efficient mechanisms to receive and incorporate public input into agency decision-making. In response to E.O. 246, the department updated the plan to strengthen language around EJ and LEP engagement, and released updates for public review in early June 2022. DOT posted the plan and survey link on the department's website under the following link: [Statewide Public Involvement Plan Survey](#). In response to E.O. 292, the department also updated the plan in 2024 to include the Board of Transportation.

Over the last 30-40 years, DOT has provided fair, accessible and meaningful opportunities for all interested and affected parties to engage in its outreach efforts. To increase this outreach, the Statewide Public Involvement Plan recommends that individual public involvement plans be developed for every plan and project.

As part of the process for developing a public involvement plan, once a project-specific or plan area study has been proposed, DOT's Community Studies Team develops a demographic study area (DSA) that encompasses all residential areas near the project. The team uses a demographic snapshot tool to pull block-group-level data on minorities, race, ethnicity, low income, zero car households, under 18 and over 65, disabled persons and adults who speak English less than very well. Language is determined using tract-level data. These DSA block groups are compared with the county average for EJ and Title VI populations. Language groups are noted for each block group with a "less than very well" population, with LEP thresholds determined by the DSA total.

In addition to census data, EJ and LEP populations are further assessed through site visits, satellite image review and consultations with the local area resource contacts (LARCs)/community-based

organizations (CBOs) network. These practices can identify concentrations too small to stand out at the block-group level. This includes affordable housing complexes, independent living facilities, disabled group homes and ethnic enclaves. These practices also help locate important resources, such as religious facilities, cultural centers and ethnic goods and services.

Data are provided to the public involvement team and project managers to aid in developing public involvement plans. DOT published a [Public Involvement Practitioners Guide](#) in 2023 as a resource to project teams to provide better community and public engagement in project decisions. When working with underserved communities, a best practice is to identify and reach out to a LARC/CBO. This includes a local/community leader, such as a reverend, pastor, priest, rabbi, imam, business owner, community activist or city/county commissioner. Local/community leaders can aid in organizing small group meetings and door-to-door community outreach efforts, disseminating information and gathering input. This helps to bring trust into the process because of the LARC's relationship with the community.

The [DOT Statewide Public Involvement Plan](#) serves as a critical framework for enhancing community engagement, meaningful dialogue and transparent decision-making in our operations. It ensures that our agency effectively incorporates stakeholder input and fosters relationships with all members of the public, including underserved communities and populations with limited English proficiency.

In line with the requirement to update and publish the plan annually, DOT acknowledges the agency's commitment to maintaining its relevancy and effectiveness in light of any changes at the legislative, regulatory or policy levels—both at the state and federal levels—that might necessitate updates to continue the alignment with the relevant guidelines and objectives set forth by E.O. 246 and E.O. 292.

Learn more about [DOT's Residents Guide to Transportation here](#).

DOT believes that its ongoing efforts in community engagement, and dedication to transparency reflect its commitment to the principles outlined in E.O. 246 and E.O. 292. DOT remains fully prepared to adapt the plan whenever circumstances necessitate and are committed to ensuring that stakeholders have ample opportunities to participate in the decision-making processes related to the agency's plans, projects, studies and actions.



## CONCLUSION

North Carolina is the birthplace of the environmental justice movement and has a rich history of community advocacy; however, more work is needed to advance EJ within the state. The Governor’s Environmental Justice Council has made significant progress in the year since Governor Cooper signed E.O. 292. As directed by the executive order, the Council has taken on a whole-of-government approach to advance EJ efforts and help improve the quality of life for all North Carolina communities.

The EJ Council made several recommendations, including but not limited to:

- Establishing an Environmental Justice Office within the Governor’s Office of Public Engagement.
- Increasing community engagement, transparency and accountability. Creating cumulative impacts guidance.

North Carolina communities have persevered through decades of environmental injustice. The Council acknowledges that trust building and community engagement is needed between state and local government, stakeholders, organizations and community members to create meaningful and lasting impacts in these communities.

# ABBREVIATIONS

- DAC** Department of Adult Correction
- DEQ** Department of Environmental Quality
- DHHS** Department of Health and Human Services
- DIT** Department of Information Technology
- DMVA** Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
- DNCR** Department of Natural and Cultural Resources
- DOA** Department of Administration
- DOC** Department of Commerce
- DOR** Department of Revenue
- DOT** Department of Transportation
- DPS** Department of Public Safety
- OSBM** Office of State Budget and Management
- OSHR** Office of State Human Resources

