

THE ARCHITECTURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:

Organizing the MN Environmental Justice Partnership (EJP)

As Minnesota considers how to protect its status as among the best places in the world to live, it increasingly recognizes that the only way to do that is to lead with a strong bridging of equity, environment, and economic considerations.

PURPOSE:

The Environmental Justice Partnership, catalyzed by the McKnight Foundation, is being developed to generate a powerful statewide coalition of stakeholders to:

1. Work in partnership with communities to lift up and resource Environmental Justice work with place-based communities and Native Nations being the core foundation for which we build, stand, and give voice.
2. Bring sectors together to build relationships, explore, commit to, and embark upon shared work resulting in environmental justice and improved environmental health in all communities.
3. Create change in the current structure and composition of the environmental movement and mainstream environmental organizations (MEOs) in order to honor the full intersectionality of 'the environment', and 'environmental issues', which include ALL issues.



VISION:

Minnesota takes responsibility for the environmental justice overburden which results in larger disproportionate impacts in/on poor urban and rural communities, people of color (African American, Latinx, Asian American, African, and more), American Indian urban communities, and Native Nations.

Minnesota acknowledges this environmental justice overburden stems from larger systemic injustices that include but are not limited to racism, corporate power, capitalism, ownership, private property rights, and the operationalization of the myth of white supremacy.

Minnesota broadens the definition of environmental justice work, recognizing the impact of the environment on human health and well-being, and adopts the belief that "all issues are environmental and all environmental issues are ours."

Beyond cleaning up harms of the past, Minnesota commits to and creates an environmentally just future, in partnership with communities, resulting in a policy framework that delivers on the triple bottom line of ecological integrity, social justice and economic viability.

IMPACT:

- Substantial increase in investment in environmental justice communities
- A future in which there is no longer white-dominated organizations doing "environmental work" and only small, under-funded initiatives doing the spot-work they can finance around environmental justice issues
- An evolution of environment work where relational skills are privileged equal to technical acumen and organizations doing that work reflect community
- Environmental justice initiatives are designed, developed, and implemented in a way that substantially enhances community resilience

This organizing vision was informed by the McKnight Foundation, the Northside Environmental Justice Coordinating Council, The Public Policy Project, and over 100 voices from environmental justice communities and MEOs through events and work groups.

COMPELLING NEED:

1. People have been doing environmental justice work for generations across the nation, in tribal communities, and in Minnesota; however, the environmental justice community is under-resourced and people of color and indigenous people need to lead the work locally, statewide and nationally.
2. We define “mainstream environmental organizations” as those that have been historically led by white people versus led by those who live in communities directly impacted; focus on traditional environmental problems like land, water and air; and have privileged connections and relationships with funders and decision makers. Many traditional, mainstream environmental organizations reinforce ecological apartheid by failing to lead from a broader definition of ‘the environment’, and failing to deeply partner with environmental justice communities to promote an ecologically wise and just environmental movement.
3. We face daunting challenges related to the way we care for the natural world and the things we share. We also have gaping disparities in the distribution of wealth, power, and opportunity that result in gaping health disparities, injustice, suffering and conflict. These critical challenges overlap, intertwine and are urgent. It is critical to address these challenges with an appreciative approach that starts with the honoring, full engagement from, and leadership by environmental justice communities across Minnesota.

VALUES & PRINCIPLES:

- We recognize all forms of oppression and commit to an EJ framework that connects the diversity of perspectives and issues in a way that does not marginalize any constituencies and actively promotes an end to all forms of environmental justice overburden.
- We acknowledge that the structures we are trying to dismantle and problems we are addressing are complex and inter-related and the solutions will be as well.
- We practice radical inclusion, honoring all voices and privileging the marginalized view in order to truly honor the power of diversity as a source of innovation and healthy (healing) community.
- We hold ourselves and others accountable for building power and identifying strategies to correct environmental injustice anywhere it happens without hesitation or bias.
- We work with creative impatience and a sense of urgency, respectful of the realities of what is pragmatically possible in the short term, and what is ethically and ecologically required today and over the longer term.
- We practice healing persistence in the face of patterns of resistance. We recognize and encourage transparency around resistance and discomfort, use transformational listening, and stay engaged to keep moving forward towards our common purpose.
- We recognize the tensions in how MEOs and EJs have historically approached work and we come together to find new ways forward together on practical initiatives of substantive benefit.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP FUNCTIONS:

- Convene, connect, and communicate with stakeholders from diverse sectors
- Elevate historically marginalized voices
- Leverage partnerships to drive work forward collaboratively
- Develop leaders from within environmental justice communities
- Generate and disseminate research and data
- Develop resources

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PARTNERSHIP AREAS OF FOCUS & DIRECTION:

- Environmental Justice Coordinating Councils: build on success of Northside EJCC with additional regional EJCCs
- Career Pathways: increase the representation of people of color and American Indians as leaders in the environmental movement
- Policy & Advocacy: develop a public agenda and tools to support advocacy (ie: EJ Scorecard)
- Relationship Development: structured and intentional networking and learning opportunities