

**Sustainable and Resilient Communities Work Group
ZOOM Online Meeting
Tuesday, February 8, 2022 – Meeting Summary**



Attendees

Deb Visco Abibou, CTSG
Sarah Schaefer-Brown, NYSG
Elizabeth Hornstein, NYSG
Sara Powell, NYSG
Nikki Tachiki, EPA LISS
Jimena Pérez Viscasillas, NYSG
Sarah Watson, CT DEEP
Cayla Sullivan, EPA LISS
Jim Ammerman, LISS/NEIWPC
Sylvain De Guise, CTSG
Brian Thompson, CT DEEP
Victoria O'Neill, LISS/NYSDEC/NEIWPC
Kathleen Fallon, NYSG
Bessie Wright, EPA
Chris Schubert, USGS

Lynn Dwyer, NFWF
Sue Van Patten, NYS DEC
Alexa Fournier, NYS DEC
Anthony Allen, Save the Sound
Jessica LeClair, Sustainable CT
Kathy Bunting-Howarth, NYSG
Lillit Genovesi, NYSG
Nancy Balcom, CTSG
Nancy Seligson, LISS CAC
Rebecca Shuford, NYSG
Corey Humphrey, Suffolk County SWCD
Mark Tedesco, LISS EPA
Alicia Tyson, CTSG (*not able to attend but assisted in the development of presentation materials*)

Welcome

- Becky and Sylvain welcomed everyone to our first official workgroup meeting with the full SRC EP team officially on board!
- If you have any feedback on the [November 9, 2021 meeting summary](#), please let the SRC team know. These are not formal minutes, but we want to ensure the summary is accurate as we will be posting them on the [SRC Work Group page](#).

Review of SRC Workplan Year 1 Tasks and Proposed Timeline; Deb Visco Abibou

- Deb presented an overview of the SRC Extension Professionals' Year 1 timeline and tasks, particularly focusing on how we intend to use information collected from the needs assessment currently being developed to plan future annual workshops and build a clearinghouse of tools & resources.
- We are also currently gathering lists of current/potential sustainability and resilience projects and will use the information we collect during the needs assessment to think about how we might prioritize projects. We plan to talk about this prioritization more at the May Work Group meeting.

USGS Compound Flood Risk Model Update; Chris Schubert, USGS

- USGS has prepared a draft modeling QAPP that has been reviewed internally and submitted to EPA for review. We anticipate that we are on schedule for finalizing this by the end of March 2022.
- USGS, with assistance from Becky, Sylvain, and others, has been working to put together a proposed Steering Committee for the project, comprised of:
 - Giovanni Zinn, New Haven City Engineer (*invited*)
 - Adam Parris, NYC MOCR Deputy Director (*invited*)
 - Diane Ifkovic, CT DEEP NFIP Coordinator (accepted)
 - Brian Zitani, NYSFSMA Long Island Chapter Chair (*invited*)
 - Gaurav Savant, USACE ERDC Senior Research Hydraulic Engineer (accepted)
 - David Vallee, NWS NRFC Hydrologist-in-charge (*invited*)
- An additional possibility that has been brought up is to have indigenous representation on the Steering Committee. **USGS welcomes additional input from the working group as to who may be appropriate to invite?**

Needs Assessment Development; Sarah Schaefer-Brown & Elizabeth Hornstein

- Sarah provided an overview of the needs assessment purpose, tasks, and considerations as we move through the development process. The SRC team is aiming to conduct our needs assessment over the next 3-4 months.
- The SRC team is also conducting a gap analysis and reviewing studies/reports/analyses that have been developed regarding sustainability and/or resilience in the region.
- Sarah reviewed the stakeholders we are targeting our needs assessment to. There are three broad categories: Government/Regional entities, NGOs/Nonprofit organizations, and Community groups.
- We've broken them into two tiers based on priority to engage with, noting that this prioritization is of course flexible/adaptable depending on the region.
- Elizabeth provided an overview of the information that we want to know from our communities:
 - What are their primary environmental concerns/threats?
 - What are their goals/what are they doing? What are their challenges and barriers?
 - How can we help them overcome these challenges and advance sustainability and resilience efforts?
- The goal is for us to build out the SRC program based on the information we collect, by creating tools & resources that will be most helpful to our communities.
- We are refining our approach, but foremost we want to listen to our stakeholders and hear their concerns/needs. It's most likely that we'll hold both individual discussions and collective conversations, perhaps through public meetings, with key leaders and stakeholders.
- As we move through this process, some of the things we are thinking about include:
 - How we are communicating (depending on who we are speaking to)
 - Centering EJ to increase engagement from a wide variety of stakeholders (we will be coordinating with EJ co-chairs as they think about their needs assessment)

- Awareness of assessment fatigue – we want to integrate with other ongoing efforts as appropriate
- Identifying benefits clearly - we want build relationships and collaborations, not just ask for information and disappear

Discussion:

- Nancy Seligson noted that she appreciates the focus on EJ, but wanted to ask about non-EJ communities who desperately need to do work in this arena? We want to make sure they aren't lost in this conversation.
 - Sarah agreed and noted that we do plan to include all communities.
 - Deb noted that Lynn shared in the chat "All communities fit within 4 CCMP themes and often one or more of the three cross-cutting principles: resilience to climate change, sustainability, and environmental justice."
- Nancy also noted the value in placing an emphasis on letting communities know the benefits of this work: not just that we're here to listen/get information. Everyone in a local municipality is already overworked - they need to know there is a benefit. This is key.
- Nancy asked if there is going to be a press release/announcement about this effort and the fact that that this is a great opportunity for municipalities!
 - The SRC team is working with the appropriate press folks in both NY and CT Sea Grant, as well as LISS to hopefully get a press release out soon!
- Anthony Allen asked if foundations/funders should be added to the target audience? Specifically thinking about community/family foundations... He noted that these smaller foundations may not know where to start with climate resilience work & at the least could benefit from seeing the results from this needs assessment.
 - Lynn Dwyer noted that the LIS has a funders collaborative already in place that might be a good place to start.

Environmental Justice in Sustainable and Resilient Communities; Jimena Pérez-Viscasillas, Bessie Wright, Nikki Tachiki (EJWG Co-Chairs)

- Jimena provided an overview of basic Environmental Justice definitions and concepts, including equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice.
- EPA's definition of EJ is: the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
- Underserved populations are those that receive inadequate or inequitable services, who experience quality-of-life disparities, and who by design have little power or influence over outside decisions that impact their daily quality of life - Chesapeake Bay definition.
- Nikki gave a brief overview of why the LISS is working on EJ - it's in the CCMP! The CCMP has 4 themes, and 3 cross-cutting principles (long-term sustainability, climate resiliency, environmental justice).

- Bessie gave an overview of the EJ Work Group mission and strategies. The mission is to promote the incorporation of EJ into LISS decision-making and implementation of all CCMP goals. Our strategy is both outward (e.g., improve outreach within the LIS watershed) & inward (e.g., foster internal learning and education)-facing.
- Over the past year, we've developed a 5-year workplan diagram to demonstrate how our goals and objectives align with planned tasks over time, and how those are tied to the outcomes we are hoping to achieve.

Facilitated Discussion about Integration of EJ across SRC Workplan Tasks

Following the presentations, meeting attendees were randomly split into three breakout groups of 6-8 focused on the Needs Assessment, Clearinghouse, and Annual Workshops tasks, respectively. Groups spent 30 minutes responding to the following questions:

- *What does it look like to incorporate EJ into this task?*
- *Are any assumptions being made about EJ related to the task?*
- *How would we fail to implement the goals of the CCMP if we do not do anything?*

Break out groups returned to the full group and shared highlights of their discussions. (See the three Breakout Room Discussion Summaries attached).

- **Room 1 (Needs Assessment) summary:** Sarah Schaefer-Brown shared that this group talked a lot about being mindful of specific communities' needs and concerns – we should not assume that what we want to focus on is their top priority. We should try and tailor our questions/conversations to their top priorities in order to develop relationships and build from there. Also, EJ may mean different things to different communities – again, we need to be mindful about making that assumption and should be open to different perspectives. Want to be sure we are building off of the SRC Needs Assessment as EJ Needs Assessment work begins.
- **Room 2 (Clearinghouse) summary:** Elizabeth Hornstein shared that this group talked about ways that we can structure and organize a clearinghouse in order to be easy to find and simple to use. One idea is to organize it based on different types of communities (e.g., larger towns, small villages, etc.) so like communities can learn from like communities. Another possibility is to have it set up based on different types of problems that communities need help solving (e.g., flooding). We want to make sure we include resources that are relevant to EJ communities – communities have to be able to see themselves in this tool. Clearinghouse may not be the best term to use – it doesn't translate easily to other languages. We also discussed how people would find this and how to get the word out; one idea is to partner with community organizations (even if they aren't primarily focused on this type of work).
 - Anthony (not in Clearinghouse group) offered these thoughts in the chat: For the clearinghouse gaps analysis, how might we account for implicit bias in data sets and algorithms (i.e. what factors are / are not accounted for, where do we have more / less data) used to produce maps and tools that might be used to identify and prioritize areas of need?

- **Room 3 (Annual Workshop) summary:** Deb shared that this group discussed stepping back & framing workshops around the questions ‘what do we want people to get out of this? what would benefit them?’ We need to give our target audience a reason to participate and attend. SRC team will use the needs assessment to further understand what would be most helpful. Also, assumptions around accessibility with regards to location, timing, translation, etc. What are people’s work schedules? Are we making assumptions about the availability of broadband internet, childcare, etc.? We may not be able to have solutions to all of the barriers, but if we integrate these questions into our planning, hopefully we can address as many as possible to make sure we’re reaching our target audience as effectively as possible.

Bessie thanked SRC group for the opportunity & discussion. Looking forward to further work and collaboration with this group!

If you have any further thoughts on these categories, please email one of the SRC EPs.

Wrap up & Next steps; Sylvain De Guise

- Sylvain closed out the meeting by thanking everyone for their participation, both in today’s meeting and in the development of the 5-year SRC plan. Thank you also to EJ Co-chairs for their engagement; we were intentional today about devoting a large portion of this meeting to considering and discussing this process.
- Next SRCWG meetings: 5/10/2022, 08/16/2022, November TBD
 - SRC Team will offer another November date, as our regular second Tuesday, 11/8, is Election Day.

Breakout Room 1:

Needs Assessment Task

Jimena & Sarah

Participants: Chris Schubert, Anthony Allen, Sue Van Patten, Kathleen Fallon

25 min discussion

Report out 2 major highlights back to full group

1. What does it look like to incorporate EJ into this task?

- Engage underserved communities where they are (geographically and to make sure they are given an even playing field to engage in the process). Understanding/being mindful that groups/communities may not have a person available/capacity to attend our meeting/respond to needs assessment. Often our requests for information do not come with funding.
- Being mindful not to ask people to engage on “our turf”- do not ask people to attend meetings to talk specifically about SRC. Instead attend meetings that already exist and people are engaged in. Ask for 10 minutes of time from that existing meeting to speak to the group. This approach can open the door to initial feedback and lead to further participation and follow-up with specific members of that group.
- People will have different ideas of what environmental justice/ justice means in their community and how it is linked to other forms of justice. Consider being open to hearing all concerns/points in the assessment process. Issues related to health and well-being and inequality in the community may be of top concern.
- Take another look at how we are incorporating EJ into the needs assessment. Potentially ask what EJ means in their community.
- Being open to the interpretation of an EJ community. We do not want to overlook one community because that community does not fit into the federal or state definition of an EJ community.
- Make sure we are including communities that might not meet the definition of an EJ community.
- Focus on the priority concerns of the community which might be health/well-being, having healthy/safe food on the table, etc. Focus on immediate needs/ concerns of the community and incorporate that into the discussions we are having with the community.
- Be open to hearing all of the community's potential concerns, know that we may hear other concerns.
- Tailor the questions to SRC focus and scope but be mindful of each community's everyday needs/concerns.

- Make sure to coordinate EJ/SRC Needs Assessments to the best of our ability. Be mindful of the community's time/ capacity to engage with SRC and EJ team through the needs assessments.
 - After initial engagement (during the time between SRC and EJ needs assessment) make an effort to bring information/ tools/ resources that were requested back to the community we had engaged with. Focus on building the longer term relationships/ showing this is a two way relationship.
- 2. Are any assumptions being made about EJ related to the task?**
- Cannot assume community members/leaders have the time/ capacity to engage with us.
 - Do not assume EJ means the same to everyone/ every community.
 - While we understand there are correlations between the racial composition/income level demographics of a community related to the level of burden or impact from an environmental hazard/health risk and that community being categorized as an environmental justice communities, this may not always be accurate. Do not assume available EJ maps are accurate and suspend assumptions that we necessarily can tell from observations that a community is an environmental justice community. There is value in looking more closely at the specific community and the needs/risks to identify if that community should be considered an EJ community.
 - We often consider the entities that we work with as partners. Tribes and Nations do not consider themselves to be partners, they are sovereign nations (Tribes in the Northeast have historically been the first to be colonized and the last to be recognized). Recognize humility needed to work with Tribes/First Nations.
- 3. How would we fail to implement the goals of the CCMP if we do not do anything?**
- If there are communities left out and not engaged with equity and justice, we will have not met the goals of the SRC workplan and CCMP.
 - Will not have the full community representation and so we will not be as successful.
 - Nothing may change if the assessment is not done with the full community involved. The environmental movement will stay on the same track it has been on. The tools/resources that we will be providing will be to those that are already engaged/interested already and will only serve the needs of those already engaged stakeholders/communities.

EJ/SRC Needs Assessment Coordination:

- Be open to other co-benefits of this work- water quality improvements, shoreline resiliency, food security, cultural value (specifically in tribal communities). Other CCMP themes can be engaged through the SRC work.
- Use knowledge gained from Needs Assessment to focus future communications and resources LISS can provide to address those needs.
- Finding a broader group that can benefit from SRC/EJ work.
- Building one needs assessment off one another. Consider how questions from SRC Needs Assessment can help build the questions for the EJ Needs Assessment.

Breakout Room 2:

Clearinghouse Task

Nikki & Elizabeth

Participants: Sylvain De Guise, Vicky O'Neill, Lilli Genovesi, Nancy Seligson, Lynn Dwyer

1. What does it look like to incorporate EJ into this task? *What information should be readily available to make it easier for communities that don't have a lot of resources?*
 - Organize information based on size/make-up of municipalities/communities - Information targeted for towns, smaller towns/villages, etc.
 - Share examples/case studies of what similar communities are doing and then provide information so they can do it too (*this should also be embedded in communications with municipalities/communities and trainings/workshops*)
 - Connect like communities through the clearinghouse
 - Include information/tools/resources on how members can engage with their municipal officials, so they can advocate for their needs
 - Make information available in multiple languages
 - Have information available for students and all different demographics
 - Make sure EJ communities are a targeted audience
 - Keep it simple - we shouldn't pre-suppose a certain level of proficiencies by prospective users (for example working knowledge of GIS), and include some easily accessible tools.
 - Want tools that help them solve problems - setup based on problems/issues (flooding, erosion, etc.)
 - Need to be intentional, make specific efforts, and continuously think about it/work at it
 - Call the resource something other than "clearinghouse" - may not be readily understood and difficult to translate to other languages

2. Are any assumptions being made about EJ related to the task?
 - Will people be able to find the clearinghouse? What is our communication plan?
 - Partner with key, well-known and trusted community groups in each community (cultural organizations, community sites where people go schools, etc), even if the group is not focused on environmental issues, to get the information out. Ask them to include a link to the clearinghouse on their websites.
 - Will need to do outreach and engage underrepresented groups
 - CT is in the process of securing additional funds to test/pilot the best ways to increase engagement with underrepresented groups

- Think about how to communicate in a meaningful way - what's important to them. Focus on positives/benefits, not just threats.
 - Start building relationships through the needs assessment
- Make sure we are solving problems communities are facing/perceive, not the problems we think they have

3. How would we fail to implement the goals of the CCMP if we do not do anything?

We did not get to this question

Breakout Room 3:

Annual Workshops Task

Bessie & Deb

25 min discussion

Report out 2 major highlights back to full group

Participants:

Bessie Wright
Deb Abibou
Sarah Watson
Jessica LeClair
Alexa Fornier
Cayla Sullivan
Corey Humphrey

1. What does it look like to incorporate EJ into this task?

- Elements of co-creation
 - Meeting people where they're at and responding to their needs
 - Long-term goal, recognizing that this may take some time to develop
 - Need time to build relationships, meet people, build trust
- Try to broaden who we attract instead of the same people every time
- Making it a platform to enhance exchange, share knowledge, and further address barriers
- Observing communities across the Sound - consider how the demographics are similar/ or different.
- Prioritize accessibility
 - Translation
 - Think about what barriers to accessibility exist
 - What would it cost? Would it be free? This is a limitation to some groups. Consider a grant program.
 - Consider pre-paid gift cards
 - Time is also a limiting factor. Even municipal staff may need funding support. Consider planning what is necessary to meet objectives from the get-go.
- What do we want people to get out of this? How can the event add value to their lives?
Be sure to frame the workshops around this question
 - Take care not to make assumptions about/for groups of people (see additional discussion of assumptions below)
 - Co-create with—rather than for—people
 - Think about what would benefit THEM
 - Need to give residents a reason to care

- Specify which audiences we are trying to target
- Ask during the Needs Assessments what people would want to get out of a workshop
- Use Needs Assessment to find out what residents care about so that workshops can be relevant and responsive
- Location
 - Should they necessarily be spread out one per region? Perhaps it is better to target the underserved communities as the priority.
 - Consider the comfort of participants - people may be more comfortable in familiar community locations rather than town hall.
 - Think about 'brave spaces' where people feel confident and brave to speak their needs.
 - Consider where we have conducted the Needs Assessments

2. Are any assumptions being made about EJ related to the task?

- Target audiences
- Assuming that people want to come
 - WHY would people want to come?
 - What are their unmet needs?
- What is the assumption about accessibility
 - What are their work schedules?
 - Do they have child care?
 - Do they have broad-band internet access?
 - We can perhaps help address these issues by integrating it into our planning
 - Even those *paid* to be here can have trouble making time
- Limited by what falls into the CCMP
 - Geography:
 - Assuming that North Shore of Long Island contains more affluent communities

3. How would we fail to implement the goals of the CCMP if we do not do anything?*

*Note that our group did not get to this question.

Other Notes:

- <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Environmental-Justice/Connecticut-Equity-and-Environmental-Justice-Advisory-Council>
- Also connect with Edith Pestana at DEEP, who is the EJ program coordinator for DEEP - Edith.pestana@ct.gov
- <https://coast.noaa.gov/digitalcoast/training/risk-communication-strategy.html>