



# ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE REPORT

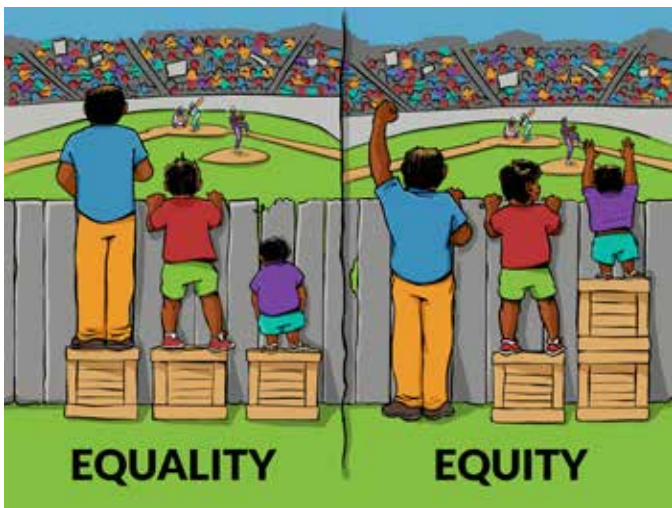
FALL 2024

## WHAT IS ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE?

### A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE, PART 1: EQUITY AND JUSTICE

by Oliver Riley

Environmental justice (EJ) is both a field of environmental science and a grassroots movement rooted in social justice and environmental advocacy that, at its core, identifies that everyone deserves to live in a healthy environment. Born out of the Civil Rights Movement and environmental movements of the 1960s and 1970s, EJ seeks to understand how environmental burdens like pollution and climate change are distributed throughout society and what actions can be taken to address past harms and improve equity.



Interaction Institute for Social Change | Artist: Angus Maguire.

We know that environmental burdens and benefits are not evenly distributed throughout society. In many communities throughout New York State, it is easy to see how environmental burdens like highways, waste disposal sites, and other sources of pollution are more frequently located near low-income communities and communities of color. Because of that, these

communities tend to experience more harms associated with exposure to these environmental burdens. Conversely, wealthier communities tend to more likely enjoy environmental benefits, such as access to green spaces and clean water. This unequal distribution of environmental burdens and benefits is well-documented over 30 years of study from governmental, academic, and community-based institutions, and is the core issue that EJ seeks to address.

To talk about EJ, we need to establish what justice itself is. Justice can be thought about in three levels: equality, fairness, and equity.

Equality is simple: everyone gets treated the same regardless of need, ability, or circumstances. This could be described in an EJ context as access to clean water; everyone should have access to unlimited clean, drinkable water. This is a circumstance that many people effectively enjoy, but not all.

Fairness is treating people according to their needs, wants, and abilities. Fairness is more complicated than equality because it is responsive to individual contexts, but it can produce more optimized outcomes, especially when considering limited resources. We can see examples of fairness in how we react to air pollution burdens. Statewide, air quality has greatly improved over the last several decades; thus, many communities do not experience significant air pollution burdens. However, many communities, like those close to industrial sites or solid waste landfills, do experience significant air pollution burdens that can have effects on health outcomes. The communities that experience higher air pollution burdens need more protection than those that do not, so EJ advocates work to ensure policies are developed and implemented that reduce the air pollution burdens and mitigate the effects of exposure to air pollution.

Equity is like fairness in that it considers needs, wants, and abilities, but it also considers history. Equity is the objective for most efforts within EJ. For more than 200 years, New York State has been a major hub for economic and industrial activity, and over the course of that history there have been instances where that activity contributed to environmental injustice. To respond equitably to this history, we need to consider not only what the needs of communities are today, but also acknowledge what harm they have endured historically and interrogate the decision-making processes and motivations that allowed it to occur.

There are several kinds of equity we consider when thinking about EJ: procedural, distributive, and social.

Procedural equity relates to the perception of fairness of laws, rules, regulations, and institutions in our society and how those procedural elements regulate the allocation of resources. An example of procedural equity within the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) programs could be not only providing the public with opportunity to comment on proposed policies, but also responding to those comments and providing transparency with how their feedback will be used.

Distributive equity refers to the way resources, harms, and benefits are distributed throughout a society and takes into account geography, characteristics of a community, and the sense of ownership and belonging that occurs within a community.

Social equity tries to capture the social and economic factors, such as race and income, that affect a community. An example of social and distributive equity could be how Office of Environmental Justice (OEJ) grants programs are specifically designed to invest in projects that serve EJ and disadvantaged communities (DACs) since those are the geographic areas with higher environmental burdens and vulnerabilities.

Only when we address equity holistically can we achieve environmental justice. But to do so, it is important to recognize that policy makers and analysts are often unable to appropriately prescribe solutions to EJ issues or inequities without the perspectives of those who have lived within the affected communities. To do so would put EJ practitioners at odds with the foundational principles utilized by those in the EJ movement. This is why EJ advocacy prioritizes close collaboration and input from community members and leaders because it is impossible to understand the details and history of a place from a distant perspective. This also serves to help address procedural inequities by directly including communities in the development of laws and institutions that directly impact EJ outcomes.

## **AVAILABLE EJ GRANT OPPORTUNITIES**

### **COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER GRANT**

DEC's OEJ is providing \$7 million in competitive grant funding for community-based, not-for-profits, and Tribal Organizations that will implement the support of new construction or renovation of a facility to create a Community Environmental Education Center (Center).

The Center should inspire exploration, discovery, and learning about the community's environment. Eligible projects for grant funding must be located within or serve a DAC and/or an EJ community.

Applicants must develop and electronically submit grant applications in the Statewide Financial System (SFS) Grants Management System no later than 3 p.m. on Jan. 22, 2025. The maximum amount an applicant may request is \$3,000,000. Applicants are not required to have matching funds under this grant opportunity. Please e-mail all EJ grant opportunity questions to Raymond Lofffield, Program Manager: [justice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:justice@dec.ny.gov).

DEC will accept questions regarding this grant opportunity until close of business on Jan. 8, 2025. Applicants are required to register and prequalify in the SFS Grants Management site's prequalification page before applying. Once registered and prequalified, organizations can apply for the grant in SFS. Full eligibility criteria, instructions and application are available online at the SFS website and in the Guidelines and Instructions document (PDF). DEC will upload all questions and answers in SFS for all applicants to view.

## AIR POLLUTION MITIGATION GRANT

With the completion and release of the Disadvantaged Communities Air Monitoring Grant, DEC is excited to announce approximately \$3 million in funding for projects that implement and address ambient air pollution mitigation strategies.

Projects should focus on mitigation strategies that reduce air pollution in their communities with a goal of evaluating the projects effectiveness so that successful strategies can be replicated in other communities across the state.

Applicants must develop and electronically submit grant applications in the SFS Grants Management System no later than 3 p.m. on Jan. 29, 2025. The maximum amount an applicant may request is \$500,000. Applicants are not required to have matching funds under this grant opportunity. Please e-mail all EJ grant opportunity questions to Raymond Lofffield, Program Manager: [justice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:justice@dec.ny.gov).

DEC will accept questions regarding this grant opportunity until close of business on Jan. 15, 2025. Applicants are required to register and prequalify in the SFS Grants Management prequalification page before applying. Once registered and prequalified, organizations can apply for the grant in SFS. Full eligibility criteria, instructions and application are available online at the SFS website and the Guidelines and Instructions document (PDF). DEC will upload all questions and answers in SFS for all applicants to view.

For more information about OEJ grants, check out the grants page at <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/environmental-justice/grant-programs>.

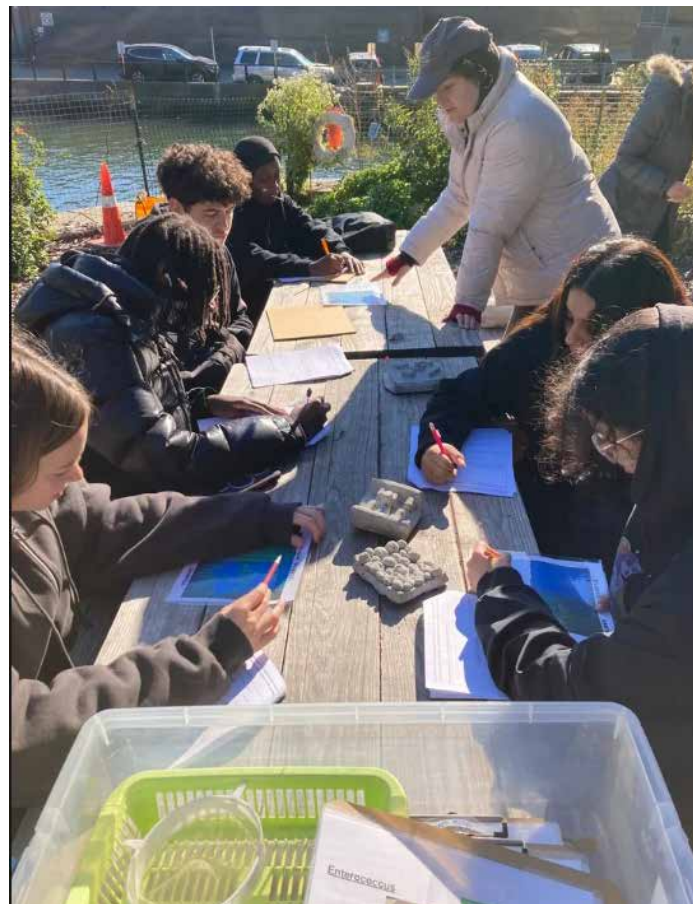
For more information on DACs and Potential EJ Communities, head to our OEJ page at <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/environmental-justice>.

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: GOWANUS CANAL CONSERVANCY

The Gowanus Canal found in Brooklyn, NY, is often described as dirty, smelly, and polluted. Once a system of tidal creeks through a salt marsh, it was transformed into a canal for cargo transport and major industrial hub during a time of rapid growth in nineteenth century New York City. Today, this legacy has resulted in the canal being one of America's most polluted waterways.

After being designated as a federal Superfund site in 2010, work to clean up the canal began in 2013. This work continues today as a collaborative effort between DEC and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and is supported by the work of multiple organizations, including the Gowanus Canal Conservancy (GCC).

The GCC is dedicated to building an equitable, thriving, and resilient urban ecosystem encompassing the urban forest, parks, and open space network centered on the Gowanus Canal through education, stewardship, and advocacy that empowers the community. Since 2006, this not-for-profit has served as the environmental steward for the Gowanus community through leading grassroots volunteer projects, educating students on environmental issues, and working with



Students learn about *Enterococcus* bacteria levels in the Canal during the summer of 2023.

various groups to advocate for, build, and maintain innovative green infrastructure around the canal.

Since 2014, GCC has engaged more than 10,000 K-12 students, equipping young people to be stewards for the urban environment. Along with educating students, they have a robust network of more than 700 adult and youth volunteers who work to care for and improve neighborhood greenspaces every year. GCC is responsible for a few different initiatives focused on green infrastructure, including building and maintaining public rain gardens and planters, as well as growing native, urban-adapted plants to be used in such installations. These developed sites aid in stormwater retention, filtering trash and contaminants from rainwater, and reducing sewage overflow from reaching the canal.

Most recently, GCC received a DEC grant award of \$100,000 to continue their partnership to build and test constructed mussel habitat in the canal and create educational opportunities for local students and community members. The project has so far engaged three cohorts of 10th grade students from Brooklyn Collaborative Studies High School.

For more information on GCC—their initiatives, programs, and how you can get involved — visit <https://gowanuscanalconservancy.org/>.



Volunteers taking care of trees as part of the Gowanus Tree Network.



Students presenting their habitat design to a judge who rated which group's designs were best to benefit Atlantic Ribbed Mussels.

## RECYCLE RIGHT WHILE HOLIDAY SHOPPING

As the holidays are just around the corner, shopping season is about to ramp up. DEC encourages New Yorkers to consider sustainable practices this holiday season but, as stores get busier, many turn to the internet for a more convenient process to avoid the crowds and lines. The rise in online shopping brings with it an increase in negative environmental consequences from truck traffic and the resulting air pollution, and waste, like from packaging.

Feeling overwhelmed by all the different packaging materials that arrive with your deliveries? You're not alone. Navigating what can and can't be recycled can be confusing. Here are some hints on how to recycle right.

By recycling right, we can ensure these materials are recycled instead of ending up in landfills and combustion facilities.



## RECYCLE RIGHT:

- Flatten cardboard boxes, remove any non-paper packaging, and place the cardboard box in the recycling bin.
- Recycle paper envelopes and paperboard in your recycling bin.
- Bring all-plastic mailers, plastic air pillows, and bubble wrap to specific drop-off locations that accept plastic bags and film plastic for recycling. <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/bag-waste-reduction-law/plastic-bag-film-plastics>

## REDUCE:

- Consolidate purchases to reduce the number of packages.
- Opt for retailers that use more sustainable packaging. You can also ask what types of packaging materials they use if the information isn't available online.
- Buy local or visit a brick-and-mortar store—and voila! No shipping packaging to manage!

Some materials that definitely **DO NOT** belong in your recycling bin:

- Plastic Mailers: These may be a thinner all-plastic mailer bag or a thicker all-plastic mailer bag containing a layer of bubble wrap. Instead of tossing them in your recycling bin, take them to specific drop-off locations that accept plastic bags and film plastic for recycling. <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/bag-waste-reduction-law/plastic-bag-film-plastics>
- Foam Packaging: Many types of foam containers and packaging are banned in New York State, a win for the environment! However, there are still some types of foam packaging that are not part of the state's foam ban. These lightweight materials are not accepted in most curbside recycling programs. Contact your local recycling coordinator to ask if there are special recycling programs with separate drop-off locations for recycling some types of expanded polystyrene foam. Check out New York State's foam ban at <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/go-foam-free> and find your local recycling coordinator by going here: <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/local-recycling-coordinator-dec-contacts>.
- Plastic Air Pillows & Bubble Wrap: While convenient for protecting your items during travel, these also need to be taken to separate drop-off locations that accept plastic bags and film plastic for recycling. Considered a "tangler," these items can cause mechanical issues in recycling facilities where regular household recyclables go. Visit <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/bag-waste-reduction-law/plastic-bag-film-plastics> for more information.

For a complete list of non-accepted items, you can check your local program rules at [recyclerightny.org/local-recycling-guidelines](https://recyclerightny.org/local-recycling-guidelines).

For more information about how to have a sustainable holiday, check out some tips and tricks here: <https://dec.ny.gov/environmental-protection/recycling-composting/waste-reduction/sustainable-holidays>.



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT

For this Staff Spotlight, we would like to introduce one of our newer team members of the OEJ family, Raymond Loftfield. Ray is an Environmental Program Specialist at the DEC Central Office and part of our small but mighty grants team.

**Q.** When did you first hear of the term “environmental justice?”

**A.** Honestly, not until I started working with the Office. I started my employment at DEC with the Division of Water and I was lucky enough to interview for my current position with the existing grants team. I was familiar with the concept of environmental justice, but I was unaware that there was such an active unit dedicated to its advancement for communities around the state.

**Q.** Do you have a lived experience in equity and justice issues that you would like to share?

**A.** I do. Once I came to understand who, what, and where EJ was, I realized I have lived in EJ communities for at least the past decade. I am very familiar with the condition and the challenges that these communities are facing. Of particular interest to me is access to green spaces and walkable communities. I try to take advantage of any green space I can, and easy access can be difficult.

**Q.** What role do you play for the department?

**A.** I work with the OEJ grants team where we focus on developing and releasing grants that are for not-for-profit, community-based organizations (CBOs) that are focused on environmental justice in their own communities. We help these organizations fund programs that directly effect EJ communities. In fact, we just released two new grant opportunities in September—one designed to help communities mitigate air pollution and the second designed to fund the construction or renovation of a community-based environmental education center.

**Q.** What do you like about the position?

**A.** I have a history of service-related positions and I love the opportunity to help people, both directly and indirectly, with the programs we implement. I am also very happy that I can use more of my scientific history and experience in this position than I was in my previous job.

**Q.** What would you like the public to know about the work you do?

**A.** Mostly that we exist and are making efforts to expand. There are multiple DEC regions that are underrepresented in our grants program, and I want organizations in those regions to know that we exist and are looking to help them where we can. So, if you know of a CBO that you think addresses environmental justice issues, have them contact us to find out about opportunities we offer; and if you are an individual who is interested in making a difference in your community or maybe starting your own CBO, then I'd like you to know that our office is here and offers support.

**Q.** To close out this spotlight with a fun question, what's your weirdest food combination that you secretly enjoy?

**A.** I love to cook and will often experiment, so I don't know if it's super weird, but one of the best I have come up with is a toasted sandwich with cream cheese, bread and butter pickles, and pepperoni. Perfect combination of sweet, savory, and salty. Best if you use a sourdough bread.



Not Raymond, but his favorite companion Mia who accompanies him on hikes on days off from work.

## EVENTS SNAPSHOTS

Here are some events that DEC participated in these past few months!

### WOMEN'S FISHING EVENT SERIES | NYC

This summer, DEC staff hosted the 2nd Annual Women's Fishing Event Series. These events intended to introduce women, trans, femme, and non-binary individuals to the sport of fishing through free freshwater and saltwater fishing clinics. Despite the dry, hot heat in Prospect Park Lake, and wet, foggy weather in South Cove, Battery Park, folks showed up and had a blast catching and releasing fish. Due to the success of these events, we plan to repeat similar programs in 2025. Keep an eye out for future events and reach out [fwfish2@dec.ny.gov](mailto:fwfish2@dec.ny.gov) with any questions.



Participants posing with their catches during the 2nd Annual Women's Fishing Event at Prospect Park Lake and South Cove, Battery Park, in New York City.

### NYS FAIR | SYRACUSE

In August, OEJ staff joined many other DEC staff in participating at the New York State Fair to share information about our office, environmental justice, and grant opportunities with the public.



Top: Oliver Riley staffing the outreach table in the Center of Progress building.

Bottom: Taking a break for some state fair fun.

## XPERIENCE FOR ALL | BLUE MOUNTAIN LAKE, ADK

On Saturday, Sept. 28, 2024, DEC staff joined more than 30 organizations and individuals at the Adirondack Experience, The Museum in Blue Mountain Lake, for the third annual Xperience for All event. This event was all about the outdoors and introducing people to opportunities and ways in which they can safely pursue recreation on their own. There were workshops, games, demonstrations, and presentations for visitors to learn about the region, tips for getting started on outdoor recreation and to discover affinity groups that offer outings and guidance.

OEJ staff joined to help share DEC resources and promote job opportunities, the new Accessible Recreation Destinations Map, and new OEJ grant opportunities to the approximately 750 visitors who stopped by the event.



Dana McClure speaking with a participant about a new trail that opened in the area.



DEC outreach table at the DREAM Symposium job fair.

## DISABILITY RIGHTS & EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH (DREAM) SYMPOSIUM | ALBANY

OEJ joined the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Civil Rights to represent DEC at the third annual DREAM Symposium's job fair. This symposium "celebrates the rights of people with disabilities and the value they bring to the workforce, matches prospective qualified candidates with employers, and offers workshops that can help people prepare for and succeed in employment."

Staff spoke to more than 30 attendees who were interested in working for DEC and provided resources for those who were interested in the outdoors.



# COMPLETED GENEVA FOUNDRY CLEANUP ANNOUNCEMENT | GENEVA

Members of OEJ joined Interim Commissioner Sean Mahar at Genesee Park in Geneva to announce the completion of the comprehensive cleanup of the former Geneva Foundry site and neighboring properties in downtown Geneva, Ontario County.

The extensive cleanup effort included working closely with the community and not only meets New York State's stringent health and environmental requirements, but also advanced environmental justice by removing 94,000 tons of contaminated soil from a community designated as disproportionately impacted by pollution and climate change.



Genesee Park, located within the cleanup and remediation area surrounding the former Geneva Foundry site.

After a cleanup and remediation of this location, BluePrint Geneva, Inc. has now set up a garden as part of its programming.



DEC and EPA representatives with local representatives from WSP, Labella Associates, and City of Geneva. State Senator Pam Helming (center in white), and Father Gregory Murphy from St. Michael's Orthodox Church (second from right) at the press event in Genesee Park.

## EPA/DEC EJ LISTENING TOUR | ROCHESTER

On October 7, 2024, DEC joined the EPA Region 2 on the third stop of our environmental justice listening sessions in Rochester at Brockport Downtown, a SUNY Brockport campus. The public was invited to a resource fair with EPA and DEC technical experts, Department of Health, and a local community-based organization, Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services, Inc. There were also brief remarks by DEC and EPA leadership, followed by the opportunity for attendees to engage with staff from both agencies and provide comments and feedback on environmental issues in their neighborhoods. With more than 100 registrants and approximately 80 comments, this listening session showed how involved and connected the community is in the Greater Rochester area. DEC and EPA will continue with our environmental justice tour around the state in 2025.



Empire Fellow Derek Fried and Liaison Kim Hill during the resource fair.



Director Tonia Wheeler during the resource fair.



Attendees at the listening session.



Alanah Keddell-Tuckey and Climate Policy analyst Oliver Riley during the resource fair.



Alanah and EPA Region 2 Regional Administrator Lisa Garcia meeting with members of Rochester Refugee Resettlement Services, Inc. to learn about making healthy choices when it comes to eating local fish during the resource fair.

## APPLY FOR FUNDING

Are you a community-based organization looking to fund a project? OEJ offers grants to not-for-profit organizations to address environmental harms in low-income and EJ communities. For additional information on OEJ grants and a complete list of previous project awardees, please visit our website: <https://dec.ny.gov/get-involved/environmental-justice/grant-programs>.

## WE CAN'T DO IT WITHOUT YOU

Do you have concerns about the environment where you live? Do you want to make your voice heard? Do you want to stay informed about the different environmental issues affecting New York State?



## JOIN OUR EJ LISTSERV

Go to <https://dec.ny.gov/news/dec-delivers> and sign up to receive regular updates from OEJ. Stay current on the issues that are important to you. As always, you can contact OEJ with any concerns by sending an e-mail to: [justice@dec.ny.gov](mailto:justice@dec.ny.gov).

Please include:

- Your location/address
- City, town, village, or borough
- The environmental concerns you wish to address
- List the potential source of pollution, if you know
- How or whether you wish to be contacted HELP

## HELP US SERVE YOU REGISTER TO VOTE

Visit

[www.elections.ny.gov](http://www.elections.ny.gov)

### Contact us:

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**Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation**