BUILDING EQUITY INTO YOUR RESEARCH AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

This document is meant to get investigators thinking about how their projects might advance equity/justice. The goal is to (1) encourage investigators to think critically about power, JEDI (justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion), EJ (environmental justice), and other related topics and to (2) empower them to come up with ideas about how to integrate/address these topics in their work. We provide a list of questions for you to consider as you write your Environmental Justice statements for the NYSWRI RFP, and more broadly plan your work.

Starting Questions

1. **How does your project advance equity/justice? If your project doesn’t currently advance equity/justice, how might it do that?**
   As you explore this question, you might also like to ask yourself: is the project proposal solidifying existing power structures or challenging them (or both)? How does the issue you are working on relate to the various “-isms” (i.e. racism, sexism, ableism, classism, etc.)? Is the issue you are working on caused by broader systems that have social justice impacts (i.e., how the use of pesticides not only impacts water quality but also the health of farmworkers)? Adoption of a broad lens for this question is encouraged, as well as the consideration of:
   - Immediate deliverables of this project,
   - How any knowledge and research may be applied,
   - Who may be implicated in this work,
   - How this project relates to broader social justice goals, and
   - How your team may work to be more anti-oppressive internally.
   The goal here is not to be perfectly informed, but to critically think about these important issues. Some projects may already have explicit equity components, others might not. That’s okay! Just consider what could be possible. As abolitionist organizer Mariame Kaba says, “We need a million experiments.” What ideas do you have? What work can you do?

2. **What questions do you still have about how equity/justice relate to your project? What more do you need to know to have a better grasp of the equity implications at hand?**
   We encourage you to explore the work in your discipline or field of practice that addresses equity and consider how it might inform your work. Further, please explore resources related to your specific methods and approaches. We have provided a few general resources for researchers and outreach professionals as a starting point for this investigation (see below).

[An incomplete] list of considerations for Environmental Justice statements

1. **Center community knowledge & lived experience.** Consider the forms of knowledge and input are being upheld in your projects, as well as who is being asked to collaborate and participate in the research and broader conversations of these topics. Specifically, consider how community knowledge and lived experience is or is not incorporated into your work, as either part of your research or recommendations. The most robust research and outreach centers communities and is led by them. As much as possible, communities should be genuine partners in the work.
Relatedly, don’t be a savior and don’t parachute in and out! “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is tied up in mine, then let us work together.” –Lilla Watson

2. **Remember that nothing is neutral.** Policies and programs either maintain the (inequitable) status quo, exacerbate it, or undo harm and create justice. Often, policies/programs will do all of these in varying degrees. “In a racist society, it is not enough to be non-racist, we must be anti-racist.” –Angela Davis Our research questions are rarely, if ever, neutral. And our biases are inherent in the questions we ask and where we chose to work. Think critically about these implications of these decisions.

3. **Know your audience.** Some of these projects proposed involve academic writing, while others involve non-academic programmatic writing, such as reports, fact sheets, or other deliverables to be seen by those working in government, community leaders, etc. Keeping in mind the target audience and using accessible language will most effectively communicate your message.

4. **Be specific & define your terms.** Going back to language – the more specific you can be in your definitions and your suggestions the better.

5. **Call out racism and other oppressive structures directly.** Call out structures and groups harmed specifically. Don’t wash over injustice by using overly broad language. To implement environmental justice into research and outreach requires identifying and describing the injustice clearly and directly.

6. **Acknowledge the limitations & blind spots of your work.** What analyses were left out? What further research needs to be done? What are the biases inherent in data sets you draw on? How can’t a specific tool be used? Be clear about limitations, blind spots, possibility for error, etc.

7. **Leverage your outsider ability & perspective.** For those projects that are analyzing existing programs/efforts, given your role as an outsider and your academic affiliation, there may be more leeway and ability to make critiques/comments/connections that those involved with the program’s day-to-day do not have. How can you leverage your unique position, while also respecting the work of those on the ground and not being an armchair critic?

8. **Keep going back to the project objectives and the overall strategy.** From an equity lens, what is the main goal? Keep going back to those ideas and asking yourself what an equitable result would look like and what actions would be necessary to get there.

**Resources**

**Research:**


Outreach and Engagement:

