

# Guidance Document for the Environmental Justice Task Force of the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission

## INTRODUCTION

The Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF) was established by the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission in 2007 to enhance the consideration and integration of environmental justice throughout the regional planning process.<sup>1</sup> Environmental justice (EJ) refers to 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. The EJTF consists of 15 representatives from throughout the Region who meet regularly to gain an understanding of the Commission's technical work program and to provide input to that program through an EJ lens. This document serves as the basis for articulating the purpose, activities, structure, and functions of the EJTF. It is reviewed by the EJTF for necessary updates every two years and may be updated more frequently at the EJTF Chair's discretion.

## ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE PRINCIPLES

As embodied in Executive Order 12898,<sup>2</sup> and further articulated in the U.S. Department of Transportation's Environmental Justice Strategy,<sup>3</sup> the three EJ principles are:

1. To ensure the full and fair participation by all potentially affected communities in the transportation decision-making process.
2. To avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on people of color and low-income populations.<sup>4</sup>
3. To prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits by people of color and low-income populations.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original document guiding the EJTF, written on December 7, 2006, can be accessed at [www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPCFiles/EnvironmentalJustice/Files/ejtf\\_background\\_doc.pdf](http://www.sewrpc.org/SEWRPCFiles/EnvironmentalJustice/Files/ejtf_background_doc.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> Executive Order 12898, [www.transportation.gov/civil-rights/civil-rights-library/executive-order-12898](http://www.transportation.gov/civil-rights/civil-rights-library/executive-order-12898), February 11, 1994.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) Environmental Justice Strategy, [www.transportation.gov/transportation-policy/environmental-justice/environmental-justice-strategy](http://www.transportation.gov/transportation-policy/environmental-justice/environmental-justice-strategy), November 15, 2016.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. DOT Order 5610.2C defines a minority person (i.e., person of color) as someone who is Black, Hispanic or Latino, Asian American, American Indian and Alaskan Native, or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander. Low-income means a person whose median household income is at or below the Department of Health and Human Services Poverty Guidelines, [www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/Final-for-OST-C-210312-003-signed.pdf](http://www.transportation.gov/sites/dot.gov/files/Final-for-OST-C-210312-003-signed.pdf), May 16, 2021.

While the core groups represented by the EJTF are people of color and low-income populations, the EJTF places an emphasis on additional protected or disadvantaged population groups. Specifically, the EJTF considers the needs of populations protected under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, including people with disabilities, people with limited English proficiency, seniors, LGBTQ+ people, and women.<sup>5</sup>

## PURPOSE

The primary role of the EJTF is to enhance the consideration and integration of EJ throughout the regional planning process. The purposes of the EJTF are listed below, with specific activities described later in the document.

- **Involvement and Participation:** The EJTF collaborates with Commission staff to enhance the Commission's community engagement efforts. This includes ensuring the population groups represented by the EJTF are meaningfully involved in the regional planning process.
- **Address Relevant Issues:** The EJTF helps monitor and make recommendations on issues and analyses potentially relevant to the needs and circumstances of the population groups represented by the EJTF.
- **Identify Benefits and Effects:** The EJTF helps identify potential benefits and adverse effects of regional planning programs and activities with respect to the population groups represented by the EJTF.
- **Advise and Recommend:** The EJTF advises Commission staff and recommends methods to prevent the denial of, reduction in, or significant delay in the receipt of benefits, and/or to avoid, minimize, or mitigate disproportionately high and adverse human health and environmental effects, including social and economic effects, on the population groups represented by the EJTF.
- **Enhance Planning Awareness:** The EJTF enhances the awareness, understanding, appreciation, support, and implementation of planning recommendations and benefits, with emphasis on the needs of the population groups represented by the EJTF.

## MEMBERSHIP

The EJTF is made up of 15 voting members appointed by the Commission. The Commission also appoints a chair and vice chair from among the 15 members. Members are asked to make an initial three-year commitment to serving on the EJTF, which can be renewed at the EJTF Chair's discretion. EJTF members are encouraged to recommend individuals to the Commission to fill any vacancies on the EJTF as they occur. The 15 members are appointed based on the following criteria:

- **Diversity of perspectives:** It is important for each member to bring a diverse experience and perspective and for the membership to include representation from the various population groups represented by the EJTF. Given the specific characteristics of the Region's population and the focus of the Commission's planning program, it is essential that the EJTF include members representing low-income populations, people of color (particularly Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, and Native American residents), and people with disabilities. Members representing protected Title VI populations are also desirable.

---

<sup>5</sup> U.S. DOT Title VI requirements, [www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-A/part-21](http://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-49/subtitle-A/part-21). U.S. Department of Justice's Title VI page, [www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI](http://www.justice.gov/crt/fcs/TitleVI).

- **Geographic representation:** To provide perspectives from across Southeastern Wisconsin and ensure representation from communities with the highest concentration of population groups represented by the EJTF, the following geographies are represented:
  - Seven members to represent the counties in the region (one per county)
  - Three members to represent the largest city in the region (Milwaukee)
  - Three members to represent the three next-largest cities in the region (one per city)
  - One member from the remainder of the region outside the four largest cities
  - One member selected as an at-large representative
- **Relevant experience:** While not required, knowledge of planning topics addressed by the Commission is highly desirable. The Commission is the areawide planning agency for land use and infrastructure, so topics related to transportation, land use, housing, economic development, and the environment are particularly relevant for EJTF discussions.
- **Participation expectations:** Regular participation by all members is critical to ensure each discussion by the EJTF includes a diversity of perspectives. Upon inviting a new member to the EJTF, Commission staff explains the role of the EJTF and asks the invited member to sign a document of commitment that clearly indicates expectations. Commission staff will track attendance and participation and will inform a member with two or more unexcused absences within a one-year period of their need to participate. If the member does not increase their participation, Commission staff and the EJTF Chair will determine whether to propose the member's removal to the Commission. To be excused from a meeting, members must contact Commission staff prior to the meeting and Commission staff will note the absence as excused.

## MEETINGS

The task force typically meets on a quarterly basis on the second Tuesday of March, June, September, and December. These dates are reviewed annually at the December meeting and adjusted as necessary at the EJTF Chair's discretion. Special meetings may be called as needed at the EJTF Chair's discretion. A majority of voting members shall constitute a quorum at any meeting. Guidance on how meetings are scheduled and conducted is below.

- **Meeting location and format:** Meetings may be held virtually or in person at the discretion of the EJTF Chair. All in-person meetings include an option for joining remotely. In-person meetings are held in locations that are physically accessible to people with disabilities and served by public transportation, with a preference for community locations (e.g., schools, local organizations, churches, etc.). EJTF members are encouraged to nominate and provide contact information for specific locations.
- **Public meetings:** Meetings are publicly announced, open to the public, and include a reasonable opportunity for public comment.
- **Meeting topics:** Commission staff propose initial agenda items for each meeting and encourage members to suggest additional agenda items. The final agenda is determined by the EJTF Chair. In addition to Commission staff-led agenda items, EJTF members are encouraged to suggest expert speakers, including members themselves, that could be invited to attend a meeting to discuss a particular topic.

## ACTIVITIES

The EJTF engages in the following activities:

- **Enhance community engagement efforts:** Collaboration with Commission staff to enhance the Commission's community engagement efforts is a primary activity of the EJTF. Commission staff regularly provides updates to the EJTF on its public involvement and outreach efforts and opportunities. The EJTF in turn makes recommendations to strengthen these activities with the goal of ensuring the population groups represented by the EJTF are meaningfully involved in the regional planning process. This involves suggesting processes or products to better inform or equip the public, including ways that residents can support implementation of plan recommendations of benefit to population groups represented by the EJTF and society as a whole. A key task for EJTF members is sharing information related to Commission planning efforts and recommendations with their communities. Just as important, members also assist Commission staff in obtaining their communities' ideas, opinions, and feedback. Members are encouraged to regularly report input and issues important to their communities back to the EJTF and Commission staff for consideration.
- **Raise awareness:** Going hand-in-hand with community engagement, a pivotal role of the EJTF is to raise awareness of various elements of the regional planning process, including opportunities to get involved, ways to support implementation of Commission plan recommendations, and how to access resources available to EJ communities. In addition, the EJTF works with Commission staff to increase awareness of the Commission's EJ work, along with awareness of the EJTF and its role in the regional planning process.
- **Identify analyses and studies:** The EJTF suggests quantitative and qualitative information and issues regarding the population groups it represents for the Commission to consider in its planning activities. The EJTF can also recommend additional research or studies for the Commission to consider undertaking.
- **Provide input:** The EJTF reviews and comments on regional plans as they are being developed, with a specific focus on the effects of plans on the population groups represented by the EJTF and whether and how the benefits and burdens of those plans are shared. The EJTF also makes recommendations to the Commission and its advisory committees related to the regional planning program. Commission staff relays EJTF input and recommendations to committees, as appropriate, but certain Commission committees (e.g., Regional Transportation Planning Committee and Transportation System Planning and Programming Committee) also include a liaison to the EJTF. The liaison's role is to ensure that EJTF feedback is shared with and considered by the committee, and that any feedback from the committee is relayed back to the EJTF. Whether a member of the EJTF or the committee, the liaison is allowed to fully participate in each meeting. As appropriate, the EJTF also identifies potential representatives of EJ organizations who could be invited to serve on Commission advisory committees created for new planning efforts. In addition, Commission staff will discuss the work of the EJTF at least annually with the Commission.
- **Evaluate effectiveness:** The impact of the EJTF is evaluated on an ongoing basis. Commission staff tracks suggestions and requests from EJTF members (during or between meetings) in an action item list, which is discussed at each meeting. Staff also tracks whether recommendations, either from the EJTF or from the Commission's regional plans, are being implemented by the various agencies responsible for implementation. Staff regularly reports to the EJTF on this progress along with measures related to whether outcomes for EJ populations are improving (e.g., improved access to jobs by transit, increased income levels, decreased housing cost burden).

- **Increase staff diversity:** EJTF members are encouraged to take an active role in generating applicants of a diverse background for open positions at the Commission, including sharing position announcements with their communities and reporting back to the EJTF and Commission staff on how they are sharing the positions.

\* \* \*

BRM/EDL/NNP/JBS/mid  
#263334-7  
4/14/23