



2025 Michigan Environmental Justice Conference: Dialogue and Strategy Sessions

Conference attendees who remained onsite for the morning were invited to participate in dialogue and strategy activities. Participants gathered at tables to discuss one of five topics. Each topic and the discussion prompt questions are listed below. Participants were asked to share their “top takeaways” from each discussion table to an online form from the Office of the Environmental Justice Public Advocate. Responses to that form are included below, with some minor edits for clarity.

Moving Policy to Achieve Environmental Justice

Prompt questions

- **Where are the pressure points for moving Michigan’s EJ protections forward?**
- **What exists now that we can build on to put pressure on those points, and what else do we need to build?**

One group responded to the two prompt questions specifically:

Where are the pressure points for moving Michigan’s EJ protections forward?

- Politics (stopped programs that are needed, make-up of the house doesn't look like they'll pass anything right now).
- Lack of coordination between agencies.
- Lack of leadership in collaboration/communication.
- Lack of laws requiring EJ (what exists is through executive orders and policies).
- Lack of funding.
- Old infrastructure.
- Increased sprawl; lack of deliberate re-use of property that was previously developed.

What exists now that we can build on to put pressure on those points, and what else do we need to build?

- Existing statutes in other states that MI could adopt/ use as an example.
- Potential to apply pressure during planning whenever public funds are used for a project.
- EJ screen is a beginning for data. Could continue to improve.
- Use site use permitting process to push EJ/ cumulative impacts assessments.
- Interagency coordination - example is upgrading water infrastructure while doing roads.
- Change policies that prevent re-allocating funds from communities with more revenue/less need to communities with less revenue/more need.
- Brownfield funding - exists but needs to be expanded.
- Re-allocate fines that are collected to those areas that are impacted rather than state level funds.
- Collaborative policies needed.
- State resilience offices need more impact.
- MI Healthy Climate Plan exists, but missing key components.

- Use of air quality monitors needs to be coordinated.
- Environmental Justice plans needed for communities with broad planning.
- Need inter-country communication near the Canadian border.

Another group offered these policy ideas:

- Data centers and climate migration are threats to Environmental Justice.
- County policy could be used more in an EJ context.
- If we are going to have polluting industries, they should pay a ton in taxes.
- We need better regulation for polluting industries.
- We need requirements for more than 30 years of cleanup costs that covers higher potential costs.
- We can follow models of successful grassroots pushback against harmful facilities.

Intergenerational Collaboration for Environmental Justice

Prompt questions:

- **How do different generations approach EJ work differently?**
- **What do those differences mean for getting things done?**

One group agreed the benefits of intergenerational collaboration are numerous and included:

- Role modeling leadership to teach leadership skills and build capacity; show don't just tell.
- Archiving storytelling in ways that allow elders to impart wisdom, without directly engaging them in areas that may not be culturally sensitive (e.g., one participant noted wanting to learn the critical skills of farming without involving her grandmother, a migrant field worker, in doing the work directly that may be a triggering event for her).
- Establishing connections between orgs to build relationships, avoid duplicating work, and strengthening efforts - especially among groups who have similar goals or similar events occurring in overlapping time frames.

The same group agreed that a collaborative strategy is required to engage intergenerational effectively. Some concepts or tactics discussed include:

- Engaging generations requires meeting members of those generations where they are.
- Reframing "time sacrifice" to get involved as a way to meet community members' needs. One participant described how she brings her son to events so he learns directly from her and her peers, while also pooling resources from other participants to offer programming for children or secure childcare at events so parents can maximize their time while taking care of their kids.
- Moving away from individualistic, isolated, phone-oriented lifestyles will require people to interact more and ask each other: "What do you need?" And clarifying upfront "This is what I or my org can offer."
- Working on these topics as a "day job" can be informed by learnings from initiatives in which one participate as an engaged community member, and vice versa. Multiple perspectives are critical! (From one person or by assembling more people.)

- Bring young people to events and ask them what's important to them. Don't assume or pay lip service.

One individual shared their thoughts on this topic:

- Strategically offering the sacrifice of my time and finding ways to engage in grassroots activities will return the biggest reward personally and for my community.

Another group offered these points on intergenerational EJ work:

- Expose youth early to getting involved in projects.
- Loyalty and strategy needed as of previous generations.
- Value of partnerships.
- There is energy when things are most challenging.
- Bringing individual groups together in a common space.
- Consistency builds relationships- being present.
- Bringing your skills to the table
- Sacrifice of time.
- Intergenerational connections over food, games, and activities.
- Asking "what can I do for you?"

Using Data and Research to Advocate for Justice

Prompt questions:

- **What data actually moves decision-making?**
- **How do the different venues of decision-making affect how data should be gathered, analyzed, and presented to advance EJ?**
- **What data tools in 2025 help serve EJ goals?**

One group provided these thoughts:

We considered how poetry, art, and other forms of storytelling can be considered data. These can be just as important as qualitative data when it comes to influencing decision-making. Trust was also discussed as the most important part of community science. Data being full circle, so data gathered with specific community members gets back to them in an accessible and helpful way. Lack of engagement can skew data.

Another group shared these points:

Grass roots local matters, important to equip people for advocacy, people's lived experience matters, and important for people to see themselves in the work and issues.

Vision and Strategies for Driving Environmental Justice Forward Now and in the Future

Prompt questions:

- **What do we see emerging in the Michigan EJ context over the next 12 – 18 months?**
- **What do we need to pay attention to?**
- **What sort of strategies will keep driving EJ forward in that context?**

One of the groups offered these thoughts:

- Infrastructure investments (public transit).
- Emergency preparedness and climate change.
- Air pollution.

A second group discussing this topic shared these points:

- Using partnerships and fiduciaries to support your work.
- Advocating for policy change.
- Staying true to your mission.
- Membership-based funding.
- Networking all the time.
- Online presence.

Strategies for Funding the Fight for Justice

Prompt questions:

- **What resources are needed for you to sustain the work you do for environmental justice?**
- **How are you using partnerships and collaborations as assets in funding your work?**
- **How have the recent ups and downs of Environmental Justice funding impacted your work?**

One group submitted their perspective on this topic:

- Funding relies on building good partnerships including financial and grant partnerships.
- Funding is a long game, and you need to plant seeds now for years down the road.
- "Don't ask people for money" ask to be their friend.
- Transformation Power Fund has grants coming soon.
- People do not want to compromise values for funding.