

Guiding Principles

This section describes eleven Guiding Principles that serve as a starting point when preparing to conduct evaluations involving communities and issues of environmental justice. The Guiding Principles are intended to inform those leading and participating in environmental justice evaluations about what evaluation is, why it is useful, how it can be done in an appropriate manner, and how evaluation results can be used to empower those participants involved. Emphasis is primarily placed on the need to be transparent, open, and sensitive to community needs and concerns when working with communities involved in any aspect of an environmental justice evaluation. Although, these principles are meant to reference Interagency environmental justice projects since it is the analysis of these projects (via case studies) that will form the basis for evaluating the environmental justice collaborative model, we hope that these principles will be used and modified by other organizations engaged in environmental justice evaluation efforts in the future. We expect that as the evaluation progresses, the Guiding Principles will need to be refined to reflect lessons learned. The eleven principles are listed briefly below and are explained in more detail on the following pages.

Guiding Principles

1	Evaluation is a learning experience. Evaluations are conducted to hear about the successes AND shortcomings of projects so that interested parties may better understand which efforts deserve duplication and which could benefit from change.
2	Evaluation should proceed from a sound understanding of the conditions, issues, and goals of the community that the project is seeking to serve.
3	Evaluation should be flexible –custom fit to the scope, time frame and objectives of the project.
4	Evaluation should closely involve all participants in each step of the evaluation process to the greatest extent feasible.
5	Evaluation should be regarded as an opportunity for project participants to advance existing relationships between partners and develop new ones with evaluators
6	The evaluator shall respect the needs and concerns of the interviewee.
7	Evaluation should allow for data to be collected and shared in ways transparent and understandable to those participating in the evaluation.
8	The evaluation should collect data using both quantitative and qualitative measures of success and ask project coordinators how they are measuring success.
9	Evaluation efforts should engage project participants in critical dialogues before, during and after the evaluation to discuss how evaluation results can be used.
10	Evaluation provides data that can help inform government agencies and their partners how to effectively address environmental justice issues at the local level.
11	Evaluation can identify and explore the value of new approaches and innovations.

1. Evaluation is a learning experience. Evaluations are conducted to hear about the successes AND shortcomings of projects so that interested parties may better understand which efforts deserve duplication and which could benefit from change. Evaluation and case study development should be viewed as a unique opportunity to learn valuable information about a particular project. Evaluation can help participants better understand the successes and shortcomings of their project. The goal of an evaluation is not to determine success or failure but rather to determine how well a project is addressing and remedying the problems it originally sought to address. It should be expected that evaluation of any project will describe aspects that have worked well and aspects that have proven problematic. Rather than view any problematic area as a failure, identification of these areas should be seen as an opportunity for project improvement. In addition, the lessons learned through an evaluation may prove valuable to others involved in similar efforts in other communities.

2. Evaluation should proceed from a sound understanding of the conditions, issues, and goals of the community that the project is seeking to serve. Evaluation of an environmental justice project should proceed with the understanding that the impacted community is the focal point. Any study whose evaluators do not ground their analysis by first working hard to develop a deep understanding of the participating community's conditions, issues, and goals will do a disservice to all those seeking to benefit from the evaluation.

3. Evaluation should be flexible –custom fit to the scope, time frame and objectives of the project. When developing an evaluation every effort should be made to ensure that the questions asked will enable participants to provide the information needed to properly characterize their project. Special attention should be placed on a project's scope, timeframe, and objectives. No two environmental justice projects are completely alike. For example, one project may have as its objective a discreet series of activities such as workshops conducted over a relatively short period of time aimed at influencing an immediate, focused, policy decision. Another may seek to achieve more broad, long-term objectives, such as encouraging sustainable development at the local level. To properly clarify important distinctions between projects, case studies will often be needed in addition to straightforward analysis.-

4. Evaluation should closely involve all participants in each step of the evaluation process to the greatest extent feasible. Evaluation is a cooperative exercise that should closely involve all project participants in each step of the evaluation process—evaluation development, data collection, and communication of results—to the greatest extent feasible. Participants have the greatest understanding of a project's objectives and must be consulted in order to develop questions that will enable interviewees to provide the most useful information.

Project participants must also be involved to collect data and to share their experiences. Evaluation involving only a handful of participants will not provide a comprehensive account of a project. Involving participants in questionnaire development, data collection and information sharing will not only provide for a more effective evaluation but will also help pave the way for greater acceptance of the evaluation regardless of the evaluation results.

Finally, project participants must be involved in communication of results and case studies. Participants have a keen understanding of the impact the evaluation results may have on their

project and can provide valuable information in determining how results should be communicated to ensure that results are used in the most constructive manner. In addition, letting participants know up-front they will be involved in the communication of results should enhance support for the evaluation.

5. Evaluation should be regarded as an opportunity for project participants to advance existing relationships between partners and develop new ones with evaluators. Environmental justice projects are unique in that they often involve stakeholders at many levels to address cross-cutting issues. Collaborative efforts often face many difficult hurdles. As such, the evaluation of a project should be viewed as an opportunity for project participants to advance existing relationships between partners and to develop new ones with evaluators. The dialogue that emerges from interaction between participating groups throughout the evaluation experience will ultimately serve to enhance the final evaluation product and lay the groundwork for future evaluation within the community.

6. The evaluator shall respect the needs and concerns of the interviewee. The evaluator should keep several points in mind when preparing for and conducting interviews. First, the interview process must not be cumbersome. An interview process that is disrespectful of the interviewees' time or overly complex will only serve to impede the discovery of information and sour the communicative relationship between the evaluator and interviewee. The evaluator should also take pains to ensure that the interview setting does not intimidate the interviewee. Care regarding this should be considered on two levels—the physical environment and proximity during the interview to individuals with whom the interviewee does not have amicable relationships. Finally, privacy concerns of the interviewee must be respected. As an evaluator, it may be necessary to keep certain information private both (1) as a matter of courtesy and common sense—as some things are simply inappropriate to release to the public—and (2) as a means to obtain the most accurate information possible. The evaluator should address privacy concerns with the interviewees throughout the interview process.

7. Evaluation should allow for data to be collected and shared in ways transparent and understandable to those participating in the evaluation. Data will be collected and shared in an open and honest manner. When conducting an evaluation, project partners should be informed at the beginning of the evaluation what the evaluation is and why it's being performed, what information will be needed, who will be contacted to provide that information (to the extent privacy concerns are not violated), how that information will be analyzed, and how the results of the evaluation will be communicated to the public.

Every effort should be made to effectively document thoughts, experiences, and concerns of the project participants and other community members. In addition, every effort should be made to document changes in the evaluation process, as it occurs, to avoid misunderstandings, overlap, and ambiguity and minimize frustration for those conducting and/or participating in the evaluation.

Finally, in regards to sharing results, care should be taken to ensure that results are clearly communicated. Participants should then be given adequate time to review and provide feedback on them. In turn, the evaluators should give focused attention to feedback on evaluation results

received from participants and clearly explain to them if, in certain instances, their comments do not influence the final product.

8. *The evaluation should collect data using both quantitative and qualitative measures of success and ask project coordinators how they are measuring success.* In evaluation, an inherent tension exists between quantitative and qualitative analysis. In some situations it is appropriate to have both statistical data and subjective interpretation. The evaluation should attempt to strike a healthy balance between collecting both types of data, yet recognize that many of the key elements of these projects will be hard to capture quantitatively. In addition, the evaluation should ask project coordinators how they're measuring project success. Information regarding how projects are measuring success should be used to inform the data collection needs and enhance the findings of the formal evaluation.

9. *Evaluation efforts should engage project participants in critical dialogues before, during, and after the evaluation to discuss how evaluation results can be used.* To go beyond simple assurances that the evaluation will indeed be helpful, before and after the evaluation is conducted, agency leads and other participants should engage in substantive dialogues about specific ways the evaluation results can be used.

10. *Evaluation provides data that can help inform government agencies and their partners how to effectively address environmental justice issues at the local level.* Government agencies and their private partners are constantly trying to improve how they develop and enact policies to address pressing economic, social, and environmental problems. However, it can be difficult to begin developing policies if there is a lack of data that can justify them doing so. Evaluation data on environmental justice projects can help inform Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies and their community partners how to effectively address environmental justice problems at the local level. Evaluation data on environmental justice projects can also inform Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies on ways to improve Federal, State, Tribal and local environmental protection policies.

11. *Evaluation can identify and explore the value of new approaches and innovations.* Many environmental justice projects are engaged in new, innovative approaches to environmental problem solving. Evaluation can play an important role in validating the importance of new approaches to solve pressing economic, social, and environmental problems. New problem-solving initiatives often receive several questions about whether such initiatives are producing the intended results. This is especially the case for local problem-solving initiatives involving multiple stakeholders. Evaluating environmental justice projects can provide the data needed to properly characterize the value of these new approaches and determine whether these approaches should be expanded in the future.