



CITY OF  
**Vancouver**  
WASHINGTON

# Integrating Environmental Justice into Your Projects

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Center Environmental Justice Salon

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# Overview

- What is Environmental Justice?
- Effective Communication
- Common Challenges
- Mapping Tools
- Behavior Change Programs
- Mature Tree Preservation
- Applying EJ to Your Program
- Looking at Success



# What is Environmental Justice?





# Definition

The EPA defines environmental justice as:

**Environmental justice (EJ)** is 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.

**Fair treatment** means no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from industrial, governmental and commercial operations or policies.

This means all people receive the same protection from environmental and health hazards



# Definition

The EPA defines overburdened communities as:

**Overburdened Communities** are minority, low-income, tribal, or indigenous populations or geographic locations in the United States that potentially experience disproportionate environmental harms and risks.

This risk is amplified in communities with preexisting social and economic barriers and environmental risks





# Environmental Justice is a State Priority

## A coordinated state agency approach to EJ

- In 2021, Washington passed the Healthy Environment for All (HEAL) Act based on recommendations from the Environmental Justice Task Force
- This law requires seven state agencies to identify and address environmental health disparities in overburdened communities.
  - These agencies must set a goal of 40% of spending to go toward impacted communities
- The HEAL Act established the Environmental Justice Council, 16 members appointed by the governor, to create a coordinated approach to EJ.

Chapter 70A.02 RCW  
ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE



# Environmental Justice Principals

By the Environmental Justice Task Force

- I. Achieve the highest attainable environmental quality and health outcomes for all people.
- II. Adopt a racial justice lens.
- III. Engage community meaningfully.
- IV. Be transparent.
- V. Be accountable.

**Environmental Justice Task Force**  
*Recommendations for Prioritizing EJ in Washington State Government*  
Fall 2020



# Effective Communication







# Building a Connection

To help these communities, we need to connect with them

- Simply targeting environmental issues won't address the disproportionate hazards impacting overburdened communities
- We must interact with these communities if we want to help them
- An important factor of environmental justice is connecting with overburdened communities





# Reducing Barriers

Meet people where they are

- Develop effective messaging
  - Understand your audience so the pitches hit the mark
  - Get culturally relevant information
- Minimize travel requirements when asking for public comment
- Reduce paperwork
- Provide compensation



# Effective Messaging Example

## The Clean Rivers Coalition's Hispanic/Latinx Community Research Report

- 2021 research project on engaging Latinx families in Oregon and SW Washington.
  - surveys
  - community listening session (35 people)
  - focus group (9 people)





# Rebuild Lost Trust

We've historically failed these communities, so why should they work with us now?

- Many overburdened communities have lost trust in the government
- Be prepared for limited response to your outreach efforts
- We are working to build a relationship with these overburdened communities, plan for change to take a long time
- Avoid tokenization

“Change happens at the speed of trust.”





# Provide Compensation

Compensation is challenging, however, pathways will likely develop in future policies

- Currently difficult to gain approval for compensation
- Other cities compensate through grants with a line item for compensation, then use consultants to distribute funds

Bill 5793 - Effective 6/9/2022

Concerning stipends for low-income or underrepresented community members of state boards, commissions, councils, committees, and other similar groups.

**Revised for 2nd Substitute**: Allowing compensation for lived experience on boards, commissions, councils, committees, and other similar groups.

-[Washington State Legislature](#)



# Common Challenges





# Public Outreach

Connecting can be time-consuming and difficult

- Messages aren't reaching overburdened communities
  - Connecting with these often “invisible” communities is challenging
  - There's no “right way” as each community is different
- Department support for doing what we've always done
  - This results in no change
- EJ work rarely produces quantitative results





# Gentrification

## City projects can displace residents

- A progressive project, such as planting trees and adding bike lanes can create rampant gentrification
- City projects can drive up property values and displace low-income residents
  - Communities exposed to health hazards may not benefit from a project
- City projects have resulted in disrupted social networks and stress.

Take time to identify who will benefit from changes made to the City early in project/program development.



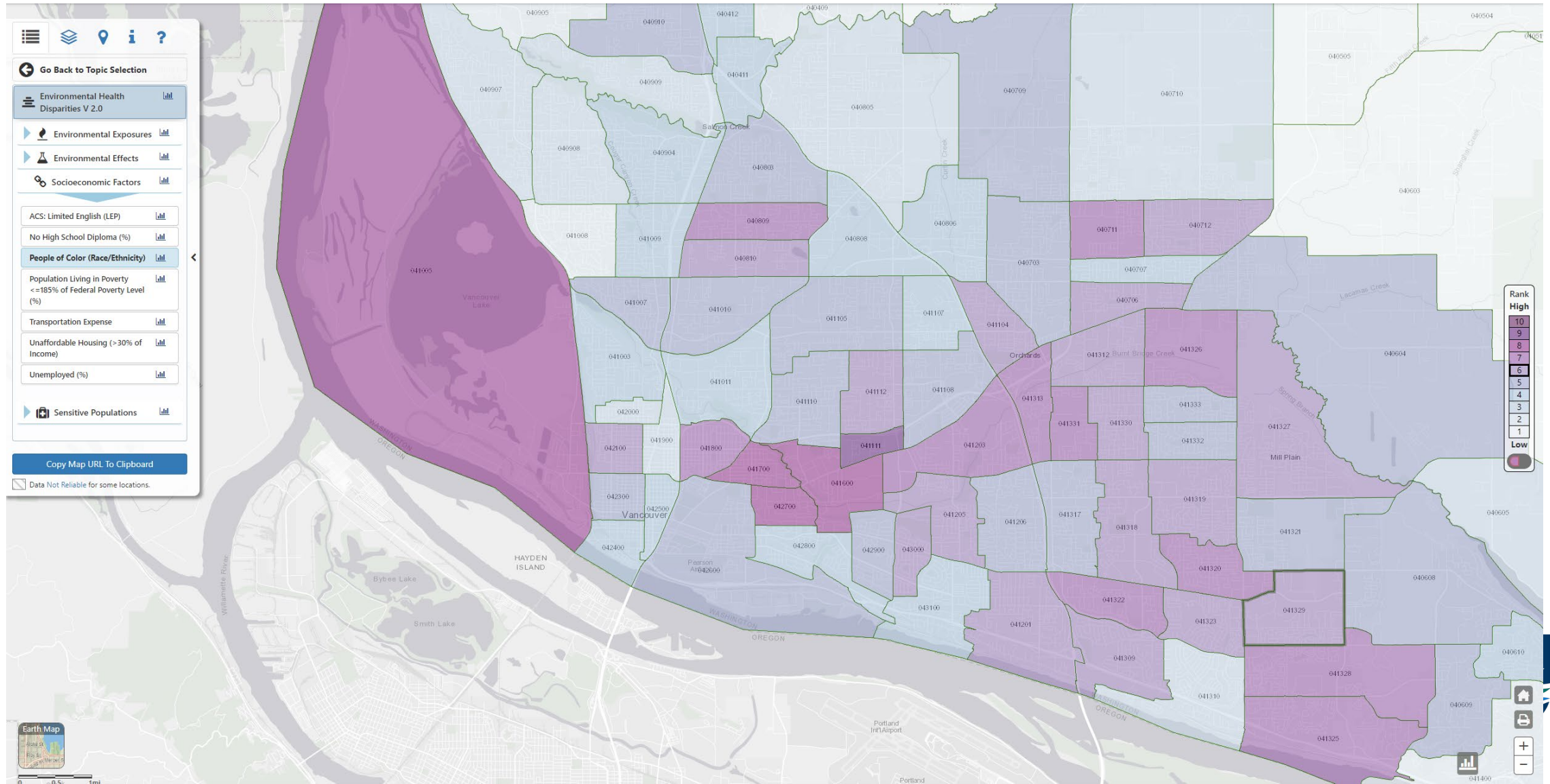


# Mapping Tools



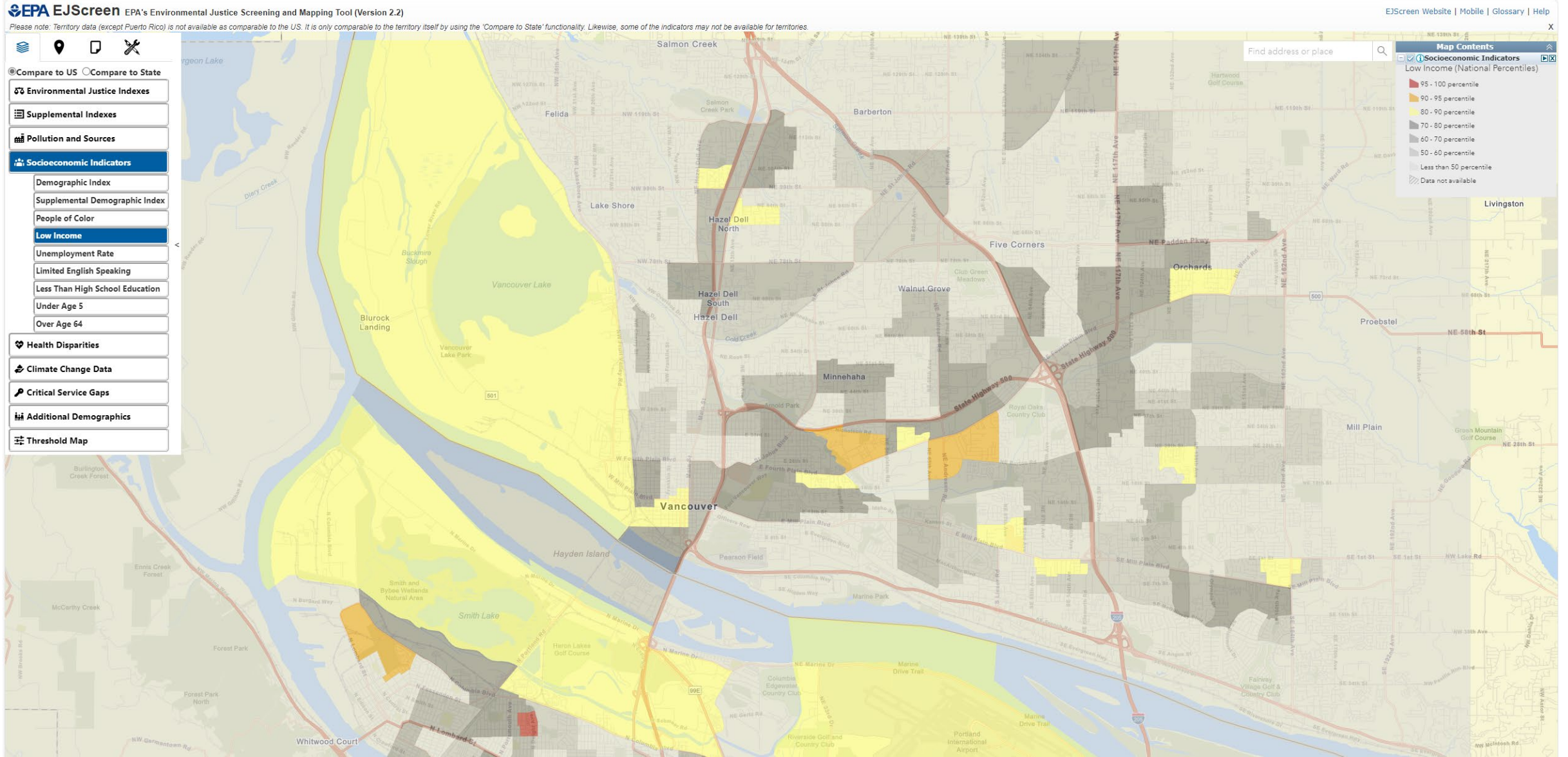
# Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map

By the Washington State Department of Health



# EJScreen: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping Tool

## By the Environmental Protection Agency



# Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool

## By the Council on Environmental Quality

Location not found or unknown. Please try a different search.

Search for an address, city, state or ZIP

**Tract information**  
 Number: 53011041108  
 County: Clark County  
 State: Washington  
 Population: 6,364

**Tract demographics**  
 Race / Ethnicity (Show v)  
 Age (Show v)

Identified as disadvantaged?  
**YES**

This tract is considered disadvantaged because it meets more than 1 burden threshold AND the associated socioeconomic threshold.

Send feedback

- Climate change +
- Energy +
- Health +
- Housing +**
- Legacy pollution +**
- Transportation +
- Water and wastewater +
- Workforce development +

Methodology version 1.0

**Housing**

**Housing cost** **92nd**  
above 90th percentile  
 Share of households making less than 80% of the area median family income and spending more than 30% of income on housing

**Lack of green space** **87th**  
not above 90th percentile  
 Amount of land, not including crop land, that is covered with artificial materials like concrete or pavement

**Lack of indoor plumbing** **99th**  
above 90th percentile  
 Share of homes without indoor kitchens or plumbing

**Lead paint** **13th**  
not above 90th percentile  
 Share of homes that are likely to have lead paint

**AND**

**Low income** **72nd**  
above 65th percentile  
 People in households where income is less than or equal to twice the federal poverty level, not including students enrolled in higher ed

**Legacy pollution**

**Abandoned mine land** **No**  
 Presence of one or more abandoned mine land within the tract

**Formerly Used Defense Sites** **--**  
missing data  
 Presence of one or more Formerly Used Defense Site within the tract

**Proximity to hazardous waste facilities** **76th**  
not above 90th percentile  
 Count of hazardous waste facilities within 5 kilometers

**Proximity to Risk Management Plan facilities** **64th**  
not above 90th percentile  
 Count of Risk Management Plan (RMP) facilities within 5 kilometers

**Proximity to Superfund sites** **91st**  
above 90th percentile  
 Count of proposed or listed Superfund (or National Priorities List (NPL)) sites within 5 kilometers

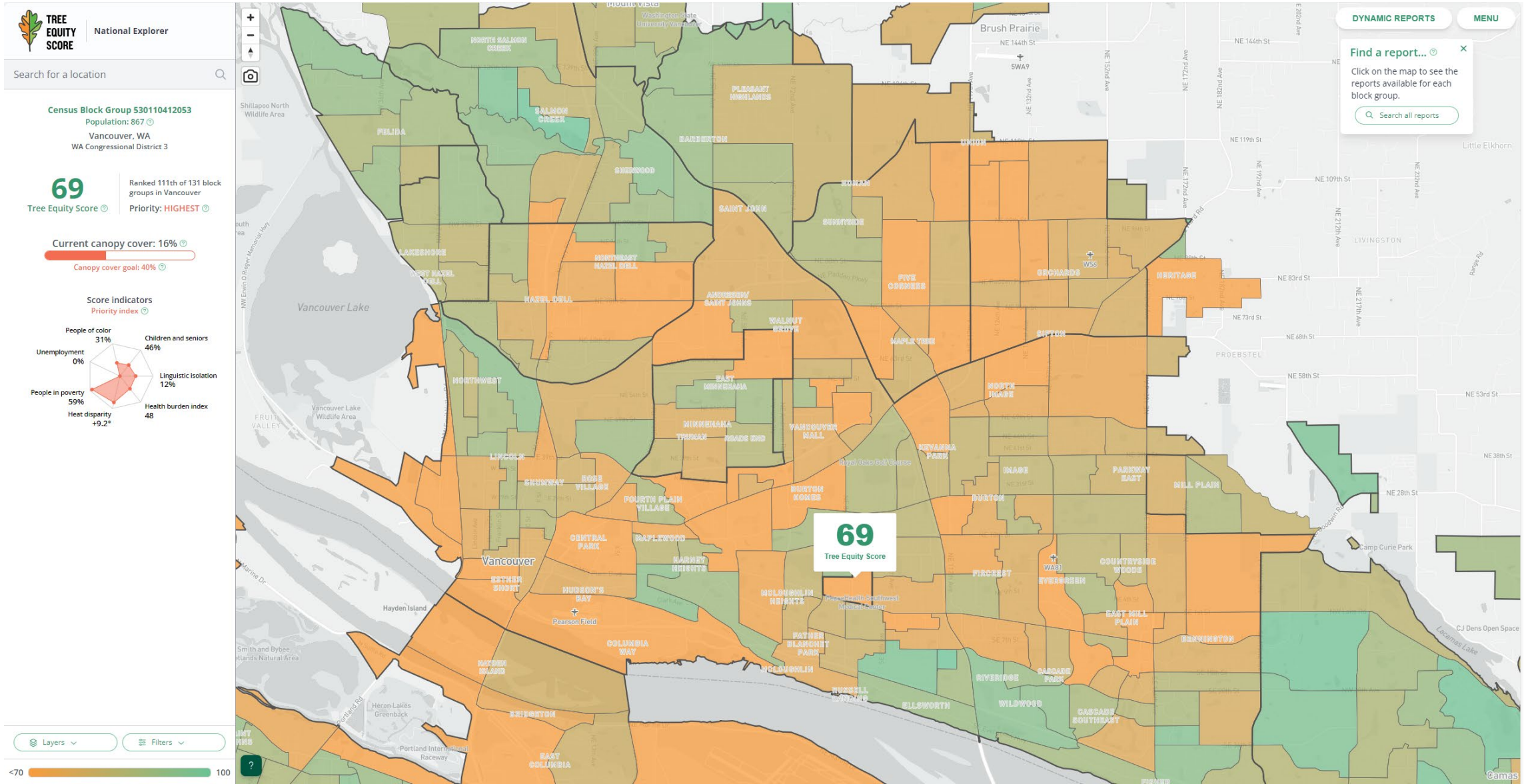
**AND**

**Low income** **72nd**  
above 65th percentile  
 People in households where income is less than or equal to twice the federal poverty level, not including students enrolled in higher ed



# Tree Equity Score

## By American Forests





# Advantages and Limitations

## What to consider when using mapping tools

### Advantages

- Helps us assist the community and make informed decisions
- Gives us a tool to evaluate programs geographically
- Will help us track changes in disparities over time
- Helps to support grant writing

### Limitations

- Screening tools do not, by themselves, determine the existence of EJ issues
- Map does not reflect community experiences and should not be used to replace engagement



# Using Mapping Tools Correctly

Use maps to support your project's positive impact

- Identify which issues drive the scores. Issues should be related to your project.
- You should be able to make a case for how your project helps the identified overburdened community.



# Behavior Change Programs







# Behavior Change Programs

Consider barriers when implementing a behavior change program

## Common Barriers

- Upfront costs
- Knowledge barriers
- Homeowner barriers
- Paperwork

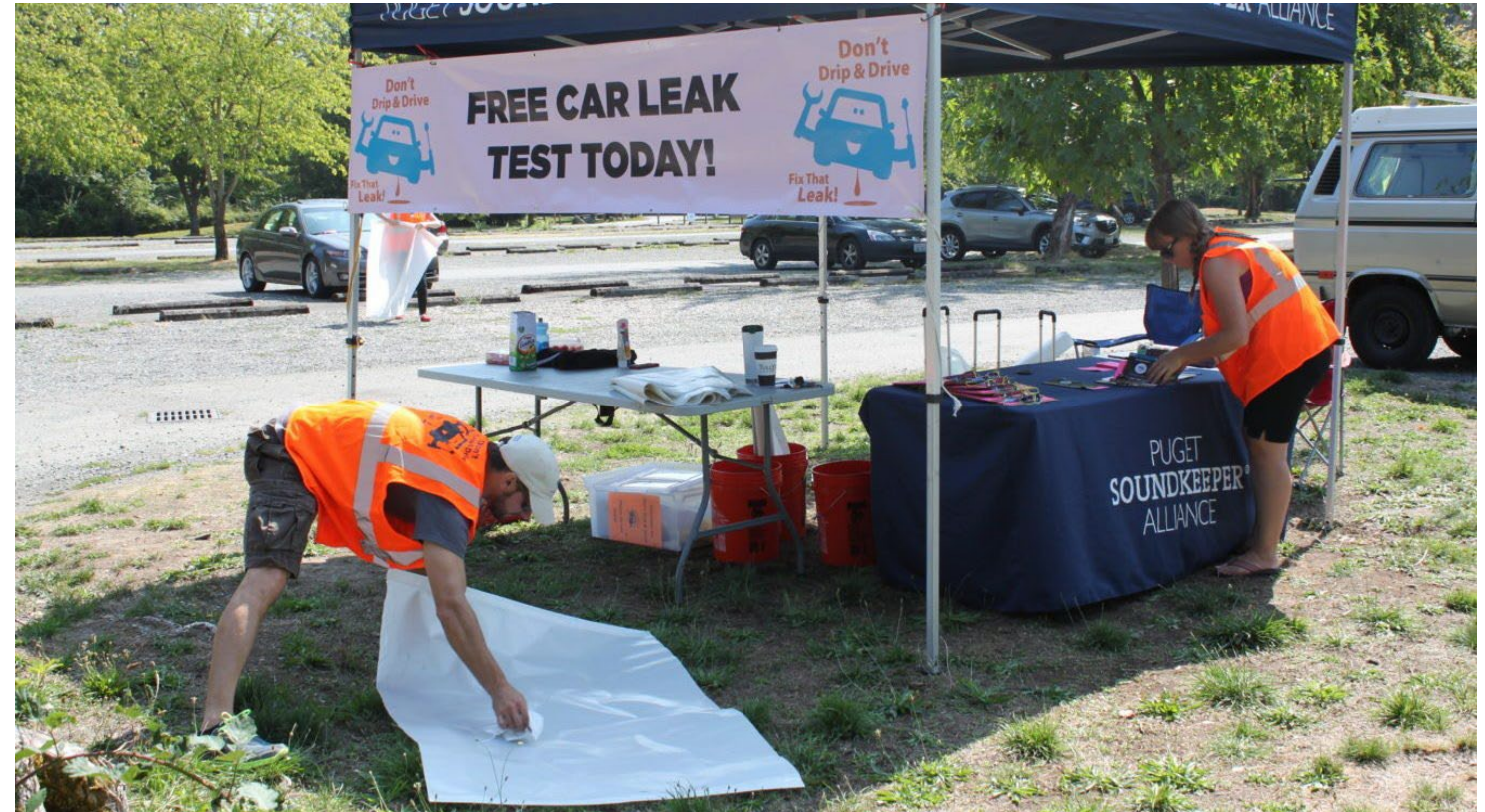
Incentives are often targeted to those with existing interests and fail to excite a new audience.



# Behavior Change Example

## Challenges during Don't Drip & Drive

- The Don't Drip & Drive campaign provided free leak inspections
- Offered coupon for \$50 off repair at participating mechanics
- An organizer shared that communities of color were afraid to provide their information.



[Don't Drip and Drive - Puget Soundkeeper Alliance](#)



# Mature Tree Preservation



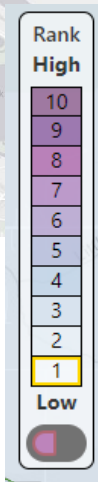
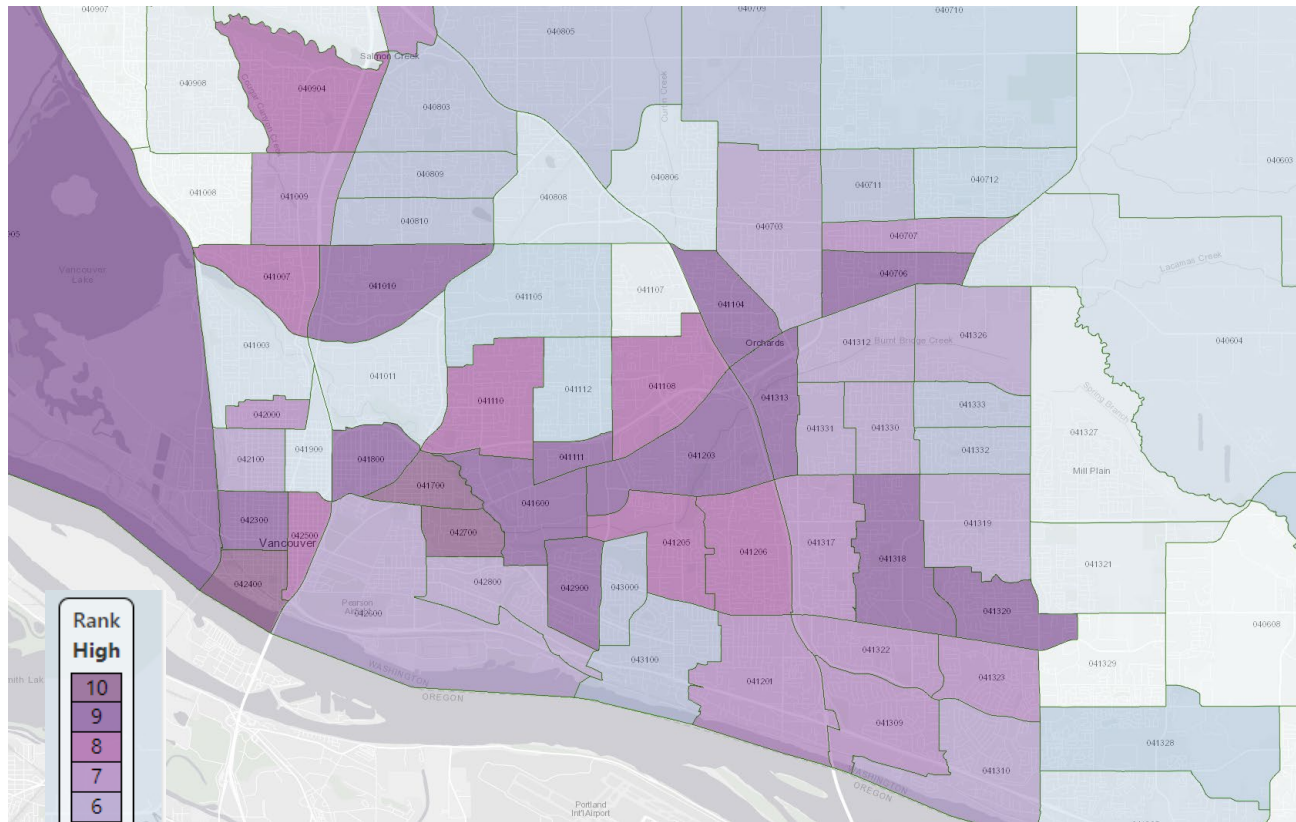
# Mature Tree Preservation

Mature trees have a major role in combating health disparities identified in EJ definition

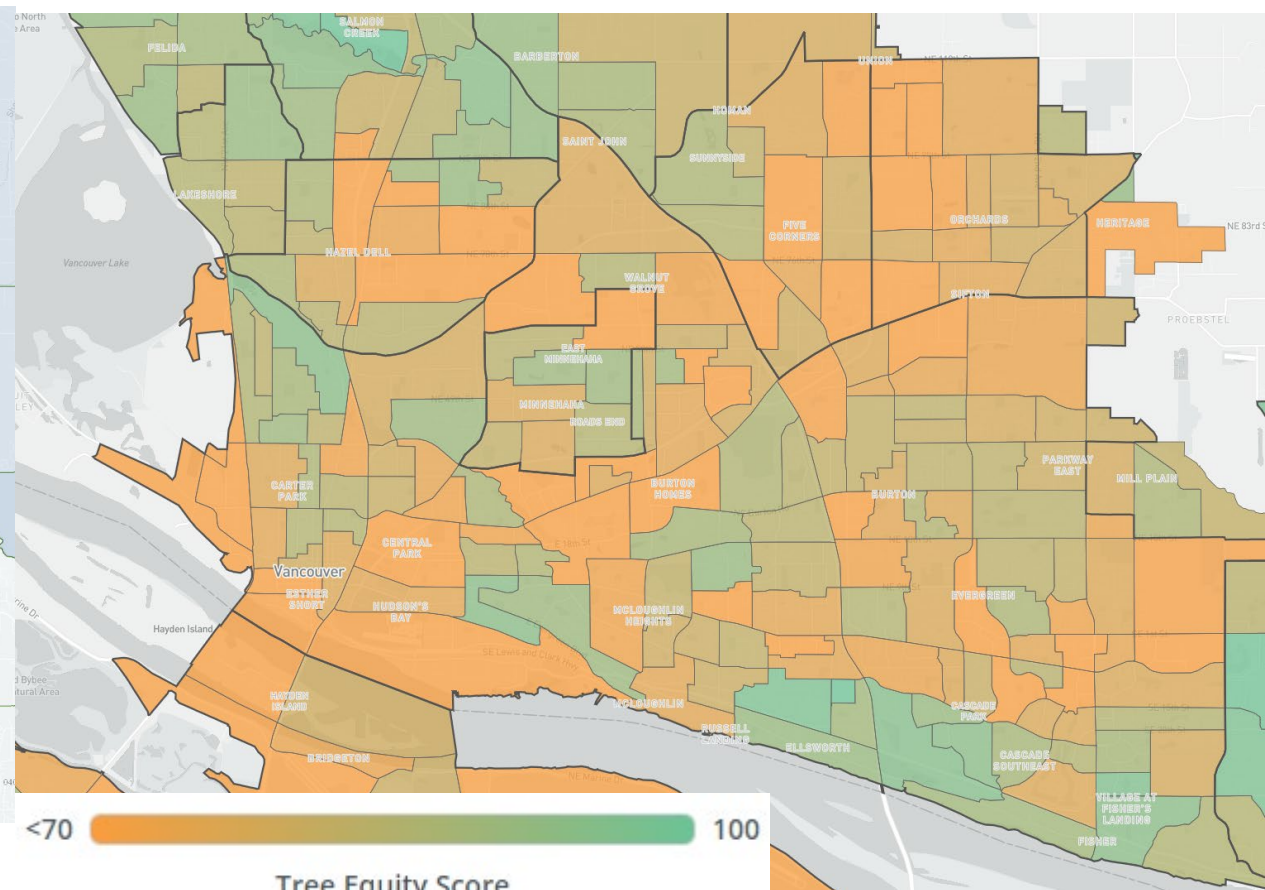
- Tree canopy improves population health, well-being, and health equity in urban settings
- Trees enhance air quality, mitigate the urban heat island, aid water management
- Research has linked exposure to green spaces and trees with improved mental health, reduced stress, reduced loneliness, lower all-cause mortality, and lower rates of obesity and chronic diseases.



# Tree Canopy and Income: Vancouver



Percentage of the population living in poverty

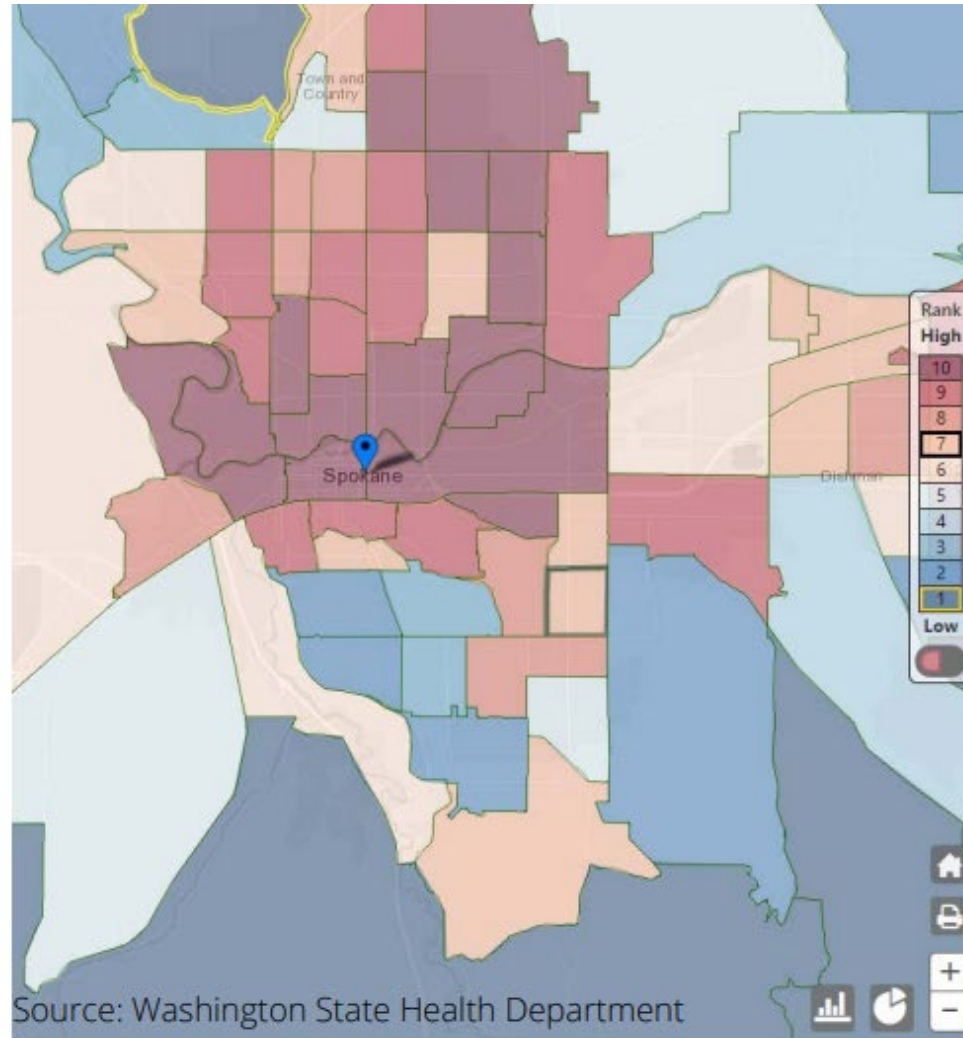


Tree Equity Score

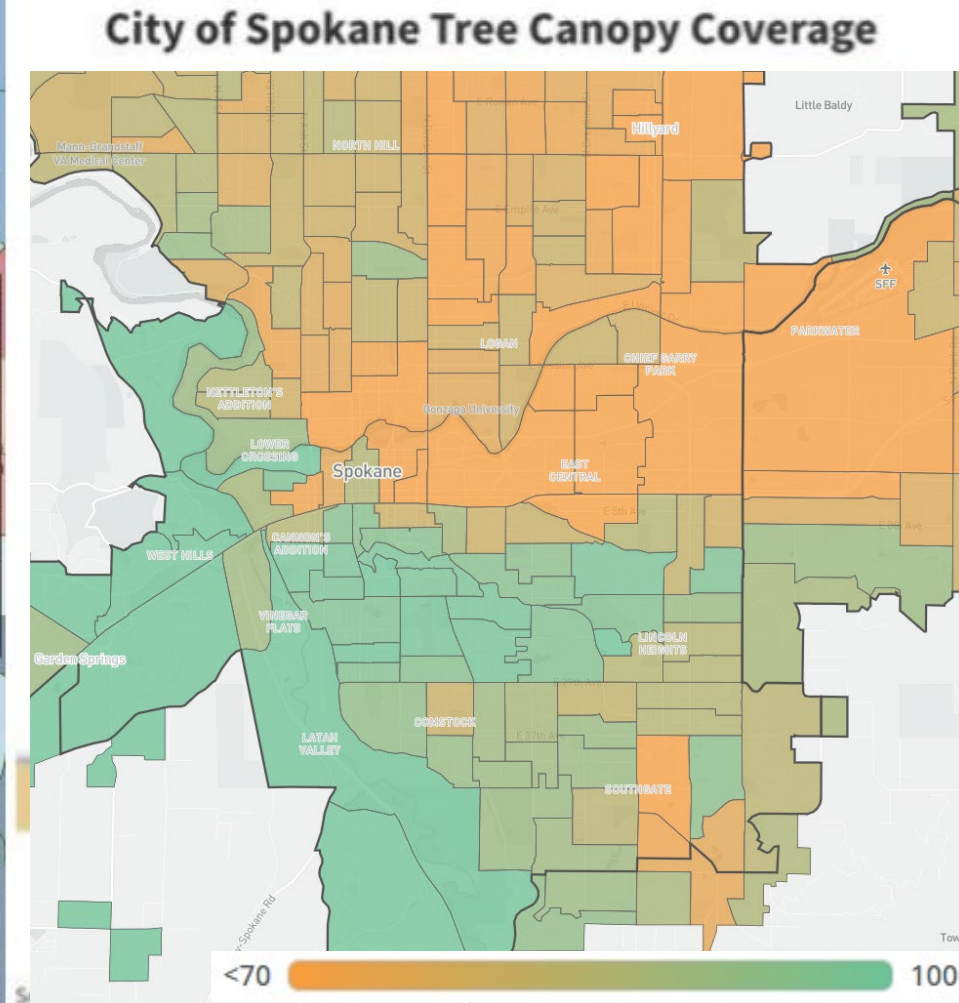
Percentage of tree canopy



# Tree Canopy and Income: Spokane



Percentage of the population living in poverty



Percentage of tree canopy





# Mature Tree Preservation

Tree inequity create a health inequity for overburdened communities



- Low-income neighborhoods have less tree cover and hotter temperatures
- The Nature Conservancy found that 92 percent of low-income blocks in the US have less tree cover than high-income blocks.
- The Tree Equity Score map shows neighborhoods with a majority of people of color have 33% less tree canopy than majority white communities.

For projects in low-income neighborhoods or areas with a majority of people of color, preserve the trees, especially trees over 12 inches in diameter.



# Applying EJ to Your program





# There's No One Right Way

If you're trying to reach these communities, you're making progress!

For every new project and program:

- Identify applicable overburdened communities
- Meet these communities where they are
- Involve these communities in a way that's meaningful for them
- Involve communities early when feedback can still shape your project/program

Don't forget to reflect

- Take time to reflect on what communication types were well received by these communities.
- Share these successes with your coworkers





# Listen and Learn

Value the input and conversations from overburdened residents

- Start having conversations whenever the opportunity arises.
- If someone reaches out to you, value their time and their lived experiences.
- Practice meaningful engagement.





# Strive to Achieve the 5 EJ Principals

The Environmental Justice Task Force developed these principles for Washington State

1. Achieve the highest attainable environmental quality and health outcomes for all people
2. Adopt a racial justice lens
3. Engage community meaningfully
4. Be transparent
5. Be accountable





## Environmental Justice Principles

### I. Achieve the highest attainable environmental quality and health outcomes for all people.

- Prioritize health of the land, humans, animals, air, water, and marine ecosystems.
- Create sustainable systems for production, consumption, processing, and distribution.
- Recognize the ecological unity and the interdependence of all species.
- Ensure the ethical, balanced, and responsible uses of land and resources in the interest of a sustainable Washington.
- Commit to actions that ensure all children have opportunities to reach their full health and life potential.

### II. Adopt a racial justice lens.

- Commit to identifying and disrupting racism embedded in your organization, policies, protocols, practices, and decision-making.
- Dismantle all forms of racism, including environmental racism, by meaningfully partnering with communities to eliminate environmental and health disparities for Black people, Native and Indigenous people, and people of color.
- Develop public policy based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- Recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.

### III. Engage community meaningfully.

- Prioritize continuous engagement with communities who face environmental injustices and continue to be underinvested and underserved.
- Recognize that people and communities hold intersecting identities that have been subject to systemic oppression including but not limited to gender, ethnicity, and disability status.
- Focus engagement on building long-term, trust-based relationships with cultural humility.
- Adequately fund opportunities for meaningful community engagement by supporting and providing opportunities for civic voice and community capacity building that builds on existing community priorities, research, and expertise. Value different “ways of knowing”<sup>53</sup> and share power between governments, Tribal nations,<sup>54</sup> and Indigenous communities in decision-making, needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, and evaluation to find community-driven solutions that are sustainable and amplify community assets.

### IV. Be transparent.

- Ensure participation and decision-making processes are equitable and accessible.
- Make information easily accessible and relevant to the public and ensure communications are culturally and linguistically grounded.
- Engage community in processes early and often (e.g. planning, funding, policy, evaluation).
- Provide clarity on how the community engagement process informs government processes.

### V. Be accountable.

- Embed equity and the elimination of environmental and health disparities into mission, planning, goals, and measures of progress.<sup>55</sup>
- Center the community in identifying the problems, solutions, and successes.
- “Close the loop” with communities by sharing how their involvement shaped and informed decisions, and by gathering feedback on how the government can continue to improve service delivery and engagement.

Screenshot from:  
Environmental Justice  
Task Force:  
Recommendations for  
Prioritizing EJ in  
Washington State  
Government  
(October 2020)



# Applying EJ to Your Program

Your projects can make a difference



It's about people  
A component to every  
project's success is  
how people feel



Reaching someone  
new is always a win  
Don't get caught up in  
quantitative results



Set a goal for a percentage of  
project spending to go toward  
overburdened communities  
Choose an attainable goal (30%-  
50% of project spending)  
Reflect on your spending goal  
annually



# We're going to get better!

The EJ world is gaining traction, more guidance is incoming

- HEAL Act aims to develop strategies and community engagement plans
- Channels for providing a voice for disproportionately affected communities are developing
- We have agency support and state support
- We are striving for a healthier environment!



# Celebrate Your Wins!

This work is hard!



# Thank You!



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