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[Climate Justice Working Group - Thursday, October 1, 2020](#)

(Summary by Jeff Jones, Communications Consultant)

In addition to the six advisory panels set up under the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) to support and inform the Climate Action Council (CAC), the law also led to creation of the Climate Justice Working Group. The CLCPA includes the requirement that 35% of investments made to fight climate change must be in disadvantaged, impacted frontline communities. With resources expected to run in the hundreds of millions over the life of the plan, a working definition of such communities is crucial. This defines the work of the Climate Justice Working Group, which met for a second time on October 1, and will continue to meet monthly, at least until it delivers its report to the Council. Indeed, in a slide presentation, Working Group members were told by the conveners that the “Long term approach to incorporating geo-based eligibility will depend on final definition of a Disadvantaged Community from [the] Climate Justice Working Group.”

Working group members heard from several social and environmental justice mapping experts, including Amanda Dwelley from IllumE, a woman-owned consulting firm that worked on a similar project for the state of California. Known as CalEnviroScreen 3.0, it looks at a range of criteria. It also demonstrates how difficult, and important this element of CLCPA implementation will be. Obvious categories to be mapped include poverty-defined census tracts, state-designated Opportunity Zones, potential environmental justice areas, and proximity to existing environmental hazards such as Superfund sites, Peaker plants and neighborhoods with high asthma rates. In addition, Working Group members raised other possibilities related to public health and pockets of poverty within wealthier communities.

Several working group members referred to another [California study](#), which documented increases in criteria pollutants in environmental justice communities after the first three years of the state’s cap-and-trade program for reducing carbon emissions. Focused on the years 2013-2015, the [study](#), found that during the first three years of California's cap-and-trade program, public health endangering criteria pollutants did increase in communities identified in the CalEnviroScreen, while carbon emissions were reduced in predominantly white and wealthier communities. It attributes this to the California law's offset program, which allowed many of the worst polluters to claim their carbon credits by investing in forest and agriculture programs in other states, or by reducing the amount of coal-fired electric power they imported to California. As a result, the pollutants that disproportionately cause air and water pollution in disadvantaged communities were not reduced.

Starting with NYS-level lists cataloguing 20 environmental indicator datasets and 17 socio-economic indicator datasets, the working group will pursue an ambitious meeting schedule to achieve its goal of providing the required definitions to the Climate Action Council next year. Presentations and notes from past Climate Justice Working Group meetings can be found [here](#).