



119 Washington Avenue, Suite 1G  
Albany, NY 12210  
518.432.1405  
[info@aceny.org](mailto:info@aceny.org) | [www.aceny.org](http://www.aceny.org)

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## [Climate Justice Working Group Update](#)

March 24, 2021

*By Jeff Jones*

The Climate Justice Working Group met March 24th to continue its mandated work to develop the criteria for defining disadvantaged communities under the CLCPA. Consultants continued to report on modeling using a threats and vulnerabilities framework and to draw lessons from similar programs, including the California EnviroScreen, DEC EJ community air quality variables and federal EJ screens. Working group members continued to raise questions to clarify and narrow the criteria being developed.

The California model has 20 evaluative measures. The New York list, which has yet to be filtered, currently has 76. “We are really in the weeds right now,” reported consultant Amanda Dwelley.

One emerging Issue is how best to use census track data. Several working group members noted issues that do not surface with the census track model. For example, access to public transportation. And, despite the large number of criteria currently under consideration, more examples are expected during upcoming public comment sessions.

Criteria such as proximity to utilities, especially peaker plants, national and state Superfund sites, and remediated brownfields and vapor intrusion are all hazards to consider. Consultants are also recommending evaluating climate-specific concerns such as sea-level rise and coastal flooding.

Working group member Eddie Bautista urged consideration of broader cross-threats impacting community resilience such as storm surge overlaid with the city’s industrial manufacturing map.

Other issues raised included heat and premature births (Sonal Jessel), how heat-related deaths are quantified (Bautista), and the use of ER asthma admission statistics. The consultants reported that discussion about how to use income data are still to come.

Potential problems for a recommended scoring mechanism were discussed. On a hazard and vulnerability scale, for instance, ocean front communities in the Hamptons could achieve high scores due to the threat of sea-level rise to multi-million dollar homes.

Rahwa Ghirmatzion raised additional issues related to the use of census tract data and regionalization, noting that the City of Buffalo should be viewed on its own and not as part of Western New York or even Erie County. White flight and industrial offshoring have left Buffalo the state's 3rd poorest city, with a population that is 42% African American.

Continuing the discussion of how to develop the disadvantaged community screen, working group member Elizabeth Yeampierre raised, again, the issue of race. "It's not just about income," she said, noting the history of racism in New York and the nation. "We have the opportunity to create a new model," she said.

Next steps for the working group were not clear. April meeting dates will be announced.