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[Climate Justice Working Group Update - April 21, 2021](#)

By Jeff Jones

The Climate Justice Working Group met for two hours on April 21st, continuing its efforts to develop a working definition of disadvantaged communities (DACs) as required by the CLCPA. While many Advisory Panels are wrapping up their work and sending final recommendations to the Climate Action Council (CAC), the CJWG is struggling to gather essential data it needs. Guided by consultants from Illume, who have relevant experience with the development of the California EnvrioScreen, the working group is still addressing the most basic questions of its mandate: What proportion of the state will be designated as DACs? Will there be regional distribution or a New York City focus? Can consensus be achieved on what indicators will be used in the final recommended definition?

One illustration of the difference between the working group meeting and the advisory panels was the introduction of Sameer Ranade, a climate justice activist from Washington State. He has been hired to provide strategic advice to the CAC on incorporating the CLCPA's requirements for clean energy investments for disadvantaged communities within the scoping plan. Ranade will be moving to New York shortly after working for Front and Centered, a coalition focused on advancing racially and economically just solutions to pollution and climate change in Washington State.

Before consultants Amanda Dwelley and Alex Dunn began their presentation introducing a mapping exercise in development to identify DACs, working group members raised questions both about the adherence of other advisory panels to CLCPA goals and the definition of their purpose. Group member Eddie Bautista identified a potential difference in interpretation between investments and benefits under the law. While this potential difference was not resolved, it indicates a potential zone of conflict/interest as the focus shifts in the coming months to the CAC.

For the consultants, effort has gone into interpreting various indicators. One threat/vulnerability scenario, for example, could lead to some CLCPA benefits/investments going to upscale shorefront communities threatened by sea-level rise. Another scenario focused particularly on income would see most of the DAC-influenced resources going to New York City. How to balance vulnerability and indicator threats with needs in other parts of the state remains an unresolved topic of the group.

In addition, in order to develop more complete maps to consider, the consultants said they are still waiting for working group members to finish ground truthing the communities with which they are most familiar to help define what should define a DAC. They are also waiting for more data on the following topics:

- Climate, including flood risk, storm surge and sea level rise;
- Health, including premature death and low birth rate;
- Environmental hazards, including proximity to state permitted/regulated facilities;
- Distance to health care facilities.
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