

# Input from those affected by environmental burdens must be incorporated into environmental justice tools

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Because environmental justice screening tools will affect community members impacted by disproportionate environmental burdens, soliciting input from the environmental justice community is crucial to developing and using screening tools, according to a new study from the University

of Michigan.

A key takeaway from the research is that meaningful input from those affected by [environmental pollution](#) needs to be at the center of the decision-making process and incorporated into environmental justice screening tools, which help identify communities disproportionately impacted by [environmental hazards](#).

"Obtaining the input of affected communities, whose expertise in environmental justice issues has developed over decades of advocacy, will be key as state governments set out to address environmental injustice and consider the development of EJ screening tools," said Delia Mayor, one of the study's co-authors and a graduate of the U-M School for Environment and Sustainability.

"Without their input, states risk creating tools that don't accurately reflect the challenges of impacted communities and don't address environmental injustice as experienced by affected residents."

In March, the state of Michigan released the draft Michigan Environmental Justice Mapping and Screening Tool (MiEJScreen), which is based on a prototype developed by Mayor, Laura Grier and Brett Zeuner when they were U-M master's students.

In the new study, which used Michigan as a case study, the researchers partnered with the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition to conduct 30 in-depth interviews with environmental justice advocates in the state of Michigan, including affected [community members](#), professionals and academics.

The researchers sought community views about the relevant environmental, socioeconomic and health-related challenges that impacted communities across Michigan, and how screening tools would

best reflect those challenges. They also wanted to understand what environmental justice advocates perceive to be the [potential benefits](#) and concerns of a Michigan-specific environmental justice screening tool.

"Through our interviews, we heard that members of low-income and nonwhite communities live through disproportionate levels of pollution, and they experience the impacts of pollution on top of other socioeconomic and health-related challenges," including emotional and [psychological effects](#) like stress, burnout or depression, said Grier, one of the study's co-authors, who is also a graduate of the U-M School for Environment and Sustainability.

These environmental, socioeconomic and health-related challenges are not always accurately reflected in advocacy and decision-making tools that are currently in use, Grier said. Therefore, "developing state-specific environmental justice screening tools is one opportunity to reflect the cumulative impacts of environmental exposures and incorporate cumulative impacts into advocacy efforts and environmental decision-making processes."

Mayor said their research can serve as a model for other states considering an environmental justice screening tool.

"We use Michigan as a [case study](#). However, the findings we present are relevant to any state interested in developing a tool, while the [research process](#) we used can serve as a model for gathering community input," she said. "Interviewees were clear that a screening tool needs to be accompanied by strong policy in order to advance [environmental justice](#), so we are eager to see how Michigan (and other states) puts their screening [tool](#) to use."

The findings were published online June 1 in the Environmental Law Reporter. The other co-authors are Zeuner and Paul Mohai, a professor

at the U-M School for Environment and Sustainability.

**More information:** Community Input on State Environmental Justice Screening Tools. [www.elr.info/sites/default/files/2022-06/Screening%20Tools%20-%20Community%20Input%20on%20State%20Environmental%20Justice%20-%20General%20-%2052.10441.pdf](http://www.elr.info/sites/default/files/2022-06/Screening%20Tools%20-%20Community%20Input%20on%20State%20Environmental%20Justice%20-%20General%20-%2052.10441.pdf)

Provided by University of Michigan

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