



## Lessons Learned from a Collaborative Partnership to Create Washington State Environmental Justice Map

### Front and Centered: Building Voice, Capacity, and Power in Communities of Color for Climate and Environmental Justice

Communities of color, people with lower incomes, and indigenous people are on the frontlines of climate and environmental change. Front and Centered builds and amplifies a more powerful movement by engaging and bringing leaders together, building capacity; and providing coordination and technical support to make change. We believe climate and environmental change can only be addressed when equity for the communities first and worst affected are at the center of the solutions.

Front and Centered is a statewide coalition of more than 60 organizations and groups rooted in communities of color and people with lower incomes. We know organizations that are led and based in communities have the grassroots relationships, knowledge, and expertise to create change. We also believe this requires leaders from communities of color and people with lower incomes to lead efforts to create change. We amplify community voices and build capacity and power for a more powerful movement by engaging and bringing leaders together and providing coordination and technical support.

Through the coalition model, Front and Centered responds to community needs through a bottom-up approach. We do this by listening and building solutions that are responsive to community needs and confirm our work at every step of the way. Front and Centered members are grassroots groups with membership from communities of color, indigenous people, and people with lower incomes who are organizing to address issues in their communities. Members must meet at least three of the following criteria to be a part of F&C coalition: 1) Have equity and justice in their mission or vision 2) Be comprised of a majority people of color (board/staff) 3) Serve and empower communities of color and people with lower incomes 4) Actively work for racial equity and making people of color front and center. As part of the membership, the Steering Committee directs the work of Front & Centered, shaping the work plan, setting goals, and providing guidance to the coordination team. Steering Committee members are accountable to community and come from communities most impacted.



## Washington State Environmental Justice Map and Partnership

The Washington State (WS) Environmental Justice (EJ) Map project goal is to capture the cumulative impacts of environmental injustices that result in poorer health outcomes in Washington, which are products of systemic inequities. WS EJ Map displays environmental hazards and exposures by census tract, a measure of population, to identify communities burdened by multiple environmental injustices. The WS EJ Map integrates environmental exposure and hazards (e.g. concentration of PM 2.5, proximity to hazardous waste sites) to capture the burden of pollution on a community. Population characteristics, including data on sensitive populations (e.g. prevalence of asthma) and socioeconomic factors (e.g. poverty status), are also integrated into the WS EJ map. The pollution burden and population characteristics are integrated into a single composite score to display the cumulative impact of various pollution burdens and vulnerabilities in a map. While there are tools and models that provide some information on environmental justice nationally, this map of cumulative impact of the pollution burden and population characteristics is unique to Washington State.

The WS EJ Map is a product of a collaboration between Front and Centered, University of Washington (UW) Department of Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences (DEOHS), the Puget Sound Clean Air Agency (PSCAA), the Washington Tracking Network (WTN) at the WS Department of Health, and the WS Department of Ecology. These partner organizations established a workgroup, which meet monthly to advance the project. Front and Centered has been in the center of the project, bringing together various stakeholders, and driving the conversation to be most relevant to the communities of Washington. Having the people most impacted in a decision-making position is critical to equity. Staff from Front and Centered and member organizations also identify and implement strategies to integrate community voice into the project as it evolves. UW DEOHS has been leading the research effort, conducting literature reviews, and examining various ways to model pollution burden and population characteristics. PSCAA staff offers advice on mapping air quality and modeling vulnerabilities. Staff from the Departments of Health and Ecology provide insight on data housed in the respective departments and operate the platform that will display the environmental justice map.

### Bringing Together Communities of Washington

The development of the indicators in the WS EJ Map is guided by feedback received from participants of community listening sessions held throughout Washington and by members of the workgroup. One of the first steps to the WS EJ Map project was to 1) listen to concerns of communities across Washington in order to prioritize concerns and EJ issues and 2) compile the visions of a healthy community. Front and Centered offered the opportunity for its member groups to talk to their communities through a request for proposals. The primary audience for engagement was communities who the literature indicated are likely to be identified as disproportionately vulnerable, particularly communities of color, immigrants, refugees, households with lower incomes, and linguistically isolated groups.

Members convened 11 listening sessions across Washington with 178 participants from July to November 2017. The community listening sessions were funded through The Russell Family Foundation, the Rose Foundation, and the Seattle Foundation. Community and organizational leaders convened & facilitated listening session and Front and Centered provided for support for foods, interpreters, notetakers, and childcare. Front and Centered staff and a DEOHS graduate student attended many of the listening sessions as observers, to listen to the conversation first-hand in addition to the notes and written products generated by the facilitators.

Notes gathered from the listening sessions were pulled together in report. The graduate student assisted in analyzing the themes. The draft findings were reported back to the host organizations with a request for comments. In addition, Front and Centered and DEOHS graduate student hosted an online seminar to share the findings and solicit feedback.

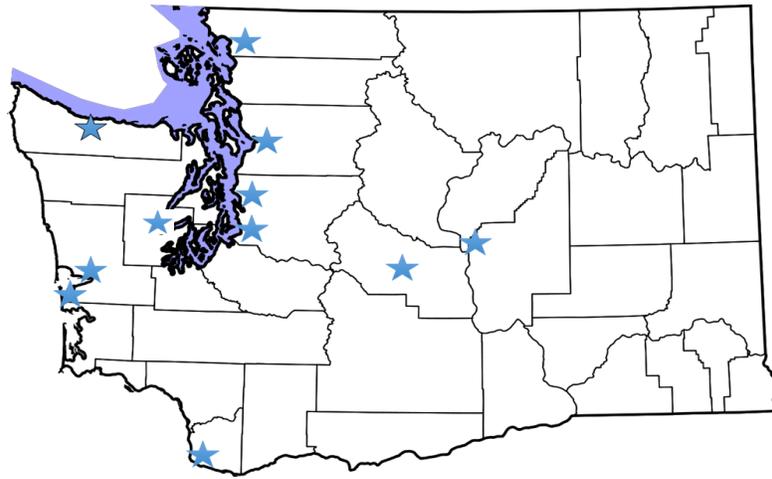


Figure 1. ★ Locations of the eleven community listening sessions in Washington from July to November 2017.



Figure 2. Image from selected listening sessions.

In February 2018, we held a symposium and public forum to bring together these voices and thoughts, and to share the impact of environmental injustices affecting our communities. The event was hosted by Front and Centered, DEOHS, and the PSCAA, in collaboration with the Departments of Health & Ecology. More than fifty people from around the state participated in the symposium, a day-long working session aimed at identifying and illustrating the communities most impacted by pollution and climate change. Symposium participants represented a range of perspectives — from community-based organizations to academia to government agencies — and discussed methods for determining the illustrating the severity of health and economic impacts on communities across the state. They flagged often overlooked concerns like accounting for undocumented and indigenous people and identified the need for data that is actionable

and information contextualized by local communities and events. The findings from the listening sessions and feedback from symposium participants continues to inform the WS EJ Map project on the burdens of pollution, and vulnerabilities Washington communities, and visions of wellbeing. Detailed report from the listening sessions can be found at [frontandcentered.org/research](http://frontandcentered.org/research) and the symposium report is available at [frontandcentered.org/putting-environmental-justice-on-the-map/](http://frontandcentered.org/putting-environmental-justice-on-the-map/)

The following table summarizes some of the pollution burdens impacting the health of communities.

Industrial drift	Pesticide drift	Air traffic	Gas leaf blowers	Repatriation
Illegal dumping	Mutation of native species	Secondhand smoking	Noise pollution	Smoke/pollutants from wildfires
Ventilation	Extreme heat	Housing condition	Drinking water contamination	Pesticide runoff

Noise pollution, for example, is an emerging concern for communities near major roadways or on a flightpath to airports. Living or working near major roadways may lead to higher exposure to noise, vibration, local land use changes in addition to higher exposure to air pollution. Currently, the workgroup is investigating ways to quantify noise pollution through data such as traffic density and flight patterns.

Asthma from air pollution was also brought up in multiple communities. Smoke and air pollution from wildfires over the summer of 2017 came up as an emerging concern across communities. The workgroup is currently integrating concentrations of particulate matter 2.5pm (fine dust particles) as one of the indicators to measure pollution burden. The workgroup is also exploring ways to integrate a new Department of Health surveillance program called Rapid Health Information Network (RHINO) to measure asthma-related emergency department visits.

## Challenges that Provide Opportunity

The WS EJ Map project has presented a challenge and unique opportunity to work across different sectors and priorities through dialogue, trust, and relationship building. Working with multiple sectors and representatives inherently presents a challenge. Each partner has different sets of priorities, organizational missions, and vocabulary. This project launched a new relationship among all the partners in the workgroup that had not existed prior to the project. Communication has been key to understanding all partner’s objectives and creating a common goal and mutual understanding for the WS EJ Map project. The first three meetings of the EJ workgroup were spent discussing the goals and objectives for the WS EJ Map for the workgroup and agreeing on the process and timeline for the project.

Being clear of the strengths of each partner and what each partner brings to the table has been key to this partnership's success. For example, it has been natural for Front and Centered to convene listening sessions and community members while DEOHS to take lead on the research and modeling efforts.

The project was initiated by community, which is both a blessing and a challenge. While the project has deep purpose in responding to community needs, there was no defined funding source from the inception of the project. This has allowed the workgroup to shape the WS EJ Map to fit the vision of the communities and partners. However, having limited time, capacity, and funds creates an inherent challenge for people who are most impacted by environmental justice issues to participate in the conversation.

Through this project and the partnership, there has been growing interest from government agencies in using the EJ tool to make more equitable investments. In addition, the opportunities presented with this project have brought momentum and energy for communities to shape their own future. We are optimistic that there will be movement towards environmental justice in state policy that will improve the health in communities and we believe this tool can support and assist program managers and policymakers in understanding and developing effective strategies.