Tackling Multifaceted Environmental Justice Issues: The Importance of Community Engagement and How to Create It

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Background
- Environmental justice is the principle that all people and communities are entitled to equal environmental protection under the law
- Community engagement has had profound impacts on the environmental justice movement and is critical for creating social change
- Generating this type of engagement in low-income and multi-ethnic communities can be challenging, as such communities often face more immediate needs
  - Ex: community surrounding North SeaTac Park in SeaTac City
- My research aims to determine productive and effective ways of communicating environmental hazards to low-income and multi-ethnic communities with a goal of creating and enhancing community engagement

Internship
I interned with the South Seattle Climate Action Network, and was focused with one of their partners, the Defenders of North SeaTac Park as a campaign outreach intern. I addressed these problems concerning community engagement by using North SeaTac Park as a case study.

Methods
- Literature review: effective communication methods & value of community engagement.
- Outreach: in the community, on social media, and via traditional marketing, such as flyers and fact sheets
- Commented at Port of Seattle and King County Council public hearings to raise government awareness

Results (Outreach Methods)
- In-person outreach was found to be the most effective tool in communicating multifaceted environmental problems, as it presents the least amount of obstacles (Figure 2)
- In-person outreach should occur in places where the community gathers, such as North SeaTac Park or Burien Farmers Market
- Outreach should be done with materials that are visually pleasing, comprehensive, and make engagement feasible, such as physical copies of a petition for people to sign in the moment

Results (Government Interaction)
- Having a channel of communication with the local government is vital to encouraging community engagement
- Policymakers should acknowledge the valuable contributions, ideas, and leadership capacity of residents in low-income communities to implement environmental initiatives

Significance & Next Steps
- I propose using a three-step framework I created after thorough analyzation of my methods and results to generate community engagement
- The three steps are utilized to identify the important networks of communication that should be established, the most productive outreach platforms to communicate goals and information, and the materials needed to effectively deliver campaign messages when outreaching
- Using my findings and this proposed framework can enhance community engagement in any given community
- Increased community engagement can drive social change, lead to more equitable and sustainable decisions and, overall, improve the livability of local communities

Research Questions
- Which outreach methods (in-person, digital, traditional) encourage the most community engagement?
- How does interaction with local government affect community understanding, awareness, and action?

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