



## PROGRAM ON THE ENVIRONMENT

UNIVERSITY *of* WASHINGTON

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### FROM THE GROUND UP: HOW TO INCORPORATE COMMUNITY VOICES ON ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE INTO THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT

Session Day 2, In-Person

Lucy Toner, @lucyjtoner

Program on the Environment, Law, Societies & Justice, University of Washington

Site Supervisor: Arthur Bachus, Seattle Subway Foundation

Faculty Advisor(s): Lawrence Watters, Guest Faculty in Environmental Law, University of Washington

Socioeconomic inequities frequently result in environmental injustices ranging from fewer parks and natural space to a lack of clean drinking water sources. These kinds of environmental injustices are directly influenced by the types of development projects in the area. Since the rise of the Environmental Justice (EJ) movement in the mid to late 20th century, the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) has been a vital tool for incorporating EJ into all development considerations. The aim of this study is to understand how communities would like to see EJ considered during federal and state development. To research this I worked with Seattle Subway Foundation on community outreach, which included interviews with community leaders in South Park Seattle, surveys from local residents, and attending community events such as Neighborhood Association Meetings. This research resulted in three main findings. First, community members were unclear on language – both how to define EJ and the language used in project descriptions – which contributed to a lack of confidence in providing their opinions. Secondly, community members want to be brought into the planning processes earlier when there is more flexibility in identifying harmful practices and providing the space for community members to advocate for alternatives. Finally, many community members suggested utilizing active community organizations, such as Neighborhood Associations, to reach the general population through established and trusted community groups directly. Overall, clear language, starting involvement earlier, and utilizing long-standing community connections are all vital to positive community development and preventing new or continued inequality.