



### Written comments from EJ Summit on January 16, 2023

Thanks to everyone who participated in the Iowa Environmental Justice Summit. Below are notes gathered from each table conversation, followed by a complete list of the discussion questions.

#### Question 1: Personal stories and history

Summary: There are a wide variety of personal stories among Iowans. Iowans whose ancestors were enslaved and have a tenuous relationship with our land, Native peoples whose land was taken, and Iowans with European ancestry, many of whom have personal connections to agriculture, either from growing up with it or through their families. This connection is deteriorating as more people grow up in cities disconnected from the land that provides food, which changes how we see our environment. Following the history of European immigration to Iowa, we now rely on recent immigrants to fill important jobs.

- Rural, agricultural roots
- Farm in IL following Great Migration
- Foraging in the woods for food – berries, poke
- Wastewater, creosote plant near Black neighborhood
- Immigrants from Europe, but childhood experiences shape attitude – Maine forests, working on family farm
- Disconnection from land and where food comes from
- Ag background meant focus on preserving soil
- OK, TX, oil extraction; early school lessons on Native American history (sanitized) about using all parts of bison
- History of European immigrants – formed on Native land – and ties to contemporary wave of immigration → rural communities have and only thrive with immigrants (Iowa Turkey Federation focused on immigration; Marshalltown, Storm Lake have lots of thriving immigrant businesses)
- Family farm practices continuing, for better or worse
- History of Christianity, Enlightenment → how shape human view relationship to environment
  
- Black ancestors captured and enslaved – relationship to the land is one of tension, not owning the land we worked, not allowed to own land later, pushed out of areas (redlining and gentrification)
- All Black people are my ancestors
- Land is survival, but also used against us constantly
- White ancestors were farmers, but I grew up in the city
- Homesteaders in Montana
- Disconnection from the land, where your food comes from, our effect

- Growing up on a farm vs. growing up from farmers vs. city dwelling
- Gas/natural non-renewables as people's livelihood growing up

## Question 2: Inequities in Iowa's environmental challenges

Summary: Participants shared a range of problems with inequitable effect: odors, drinking water quality (relating to source water and infrastructure like lead pipes), air quality, loss of natural landscapes, and effects of extreme weather like flooding, heat waves, and derechos. These intersect with social inequities like rental housing quality, transit access, and exclusionary siting practices (NIMBY, or not in my back yard).

- Industrial plant smells
- Old infrastructure less sustainable
- Animal agriculture
- Factory smell issues
- Extreme weather
- Stormwater flooding
- What % of 20k lead service lines are in BIPOC communities?
- Distrust in public water
- Corn and soybean monoculture/monocrops
- Riverine flooding
- Heat indexes and heat waves
- Air quality in neighborhoods
- Loss of prairie/overabundance of grass
- More black people in rentals and slumlords / out-of-state landlords
- Those in power don't share conditions of those in need (doesn't affect me)
- Water quality in an ag state – it's a crime the degradation of water
- Wind storms
- NIMBY + taking action to change that mindset
- Better DART routes and more encouragement to ride the bus
- Access to clean water
- #1 priority: drinkable water in Des Moines – how to fix?
- Water infrastructure / old, outdated pipes

## Question 3: Climate change and climate justice in Iowa

Summary: Participants recognize that Iowans are affected by climate change, and we need data and storytelling to spread knowledge and inspire united action for policy changes. We need leaders at all levels of government to hold corporations accountable. Participants debated whether we need large solutions or many small changes to address the problems in Iowa; we could start by providing resources to older neighborhoods and supporting renters while working together in coalitions.

- Data and storytelling both needed
- Uplift and empower emerging leaders

- All levels of government are responsible
- Corporations contributing to pollution also hold some responsibility
- Policy helps to unite work and the people doing it
- We need more direct action
- Pork producer/solar example of good coalition building
- Does a massive problem require massive solutions? Or can lots of small changes drive change?
- A solution – government can prioritize upgrades to older neighborhoods
  - Example of first responders not being trained to respond to people with limited mobility, limited English, etc.
- Coalition-building is key
- Iowa gave back millions of dollars in rent relief funds

#### Question 4: Dr. Bullard's research on spatial segregation and EJ

Summary: Participants identified many examples of local disparities in environmental burdens. Low-income neighborhoods have food deserts that lack healthy, affordable food; these neighborhoods also lack the parks, playgrounds, and tree canopies, and have to deal with waste disposal areas, bad smells, and lead pipes for drinking water. People noted that immigrants may not be counted. . Highway have been placed through Black-owned communities. Safe car-free transportation benefits from walkable neighborhoods, bike infrastructure, and appropriate transit policing (not just in Black/brown neighborhoods).

Participants talked about these disparities resulting in sacrifice zones. People in these zones miss out on developments and feel left behind, which leads to cultural resentment.

- Cultural differences in community events/celebrations – getting together in public spaces
- Food deserts in Des Moines
  - Difficult to get to grocery stores
  - Public transportation challenges
  - Convenience stores fill gaps – more expensive
- Make neighborhoods more desirable to draw in good stores and keep population there
- Recreation – playgrounds, parks
  - Cleanliness
- Perception of violence and crime – keeps good stores out
- Can dollar stores start offering produce?
  - Organic food available, but it's processed
- Parks and green spaces – how are they distributed?
  - Ingersoll road work – putting in bike lanes and space for trees
- “Bottomlands” – areas of historical waste → unusable but open; needs cleanup
- Long drives getting to parks
- Increase public transit to parks
- More parks in every neighborhood
- Hubbell Ave – healthy food access

- Convenience stores
  - Liquor stores
  - No healthy grocery stores / fresh food
- Dollar stores – also in rural communities; loss of grocery stores
- Ethanol plants? Rural
- Lead pipes – older public schools (typically more diverse)
- Suburbs are growing and getting amenities and new development
- Undercounting in rural Iowa of immigrants – hidden population afraid to be counted
  - Children of immigrants acting as interpreters
  - Taking place of what should be community services
- River Bend – redlined
  - Lack of investment in infrastructure
  - Low tree density
  - Resilient, individual adaptation
- Rural Iowa – water quality, ag, who has access?
- Environmental services
- Farmers with additional income streams => opportunity
  - Draw people into rural Iowa
- Addressing food insecurity is not equal to addressing food deserts
  - Food insecurity is a global challenge
  - Farming on a smaller scale has other challenges – margins, high value products
- Depopulation => sacrifice zones
  - People get left behind → Cultural resentment
- EJ challenge – adversity to regulation; individual responsibility isn't the solution
  - Nuisance laws
  - CAFO regulations
- IA turkey federation – driving progressive labor values, helping worker – rural investment and revitalization
  
- Smell pollution
- Proximity of coal plants to indigenous communities
- Green spaces in affluent areas, not equally distributed
- Real emerging data we can use
- Intersectionality in the space
- Des Moines freeway
  - Neighborhood breakup – Black-owned business district / community
- Tree canopy % in Des Moines – lesser in less affluent neighborhoods
- Access to fresh produce
- Connecting children with nature
- Walkable communities!!!
- Use of space
- Mixed use neighborhoods
- Rethinking our use of space and transportation use

- Compounding issues – lack of tree canopy, light pollution, sound pollution
- Tree canopy increase emphasis – vital
- Emphasis on trails is west; south, east seem ignored
- Killed the trolleys
- Bicycle infrastructure segregated public transit also
- Policing at public transit hubs in low income and Black/brown neighborhoods
- Building trails in floodplains – only for recreation

## Question 5: Participation and process

Summary: Low-income and BIPOC residents are most likely not to be heard in a public decision-making process. Those processes benefit from partnerships with community-based organizations that people already belong to. The processes need to follow through, not just seek input once and move on.

Participation is more effective when people organize into groups, which can help track the steps of the process and when to act. The process also needs to allow participation people who don't work normal hours. We need to educate young people that their voice matters and teach them how to get involved. Environmental groups need to engage people beyond their older, white membership.

- Partnerships with community-based organizations
  - Need to meet people where they are now, not make them join a new group
  - Not just people with 9-5 jobs
- Individuals feel like they have no power – being part of a group (formal/informal) helps
  - Helps people understand the process and when/how to act
- Empower youth
  - Teach from a young age that their voice matters
  - Need to show that it does matter
- Follow through after seeking input, don't just ask and leave
- Overcome insularity
  - Environmental and outdoors-focused groups typically are older and white
  - Need to draw in others – have programs to educate, proactive outreach to engage more people
  - Kids in the city may not have access to natural spaces – not nearby, hard to get to
- Education – people don't know about problems and what they can do
  - Need to educate about how to get involved
  - Need to reach the people directly affected
- Political barriers – discounting issues related to energy/electricity

## Question 6: Politics of climate and EJ

Summary: Many people are marginalized: those who do frontline jobs, face discrimination, immigrated to the US, or are people of color – and these people feel the impacts of climate change more directly. White people often have the privilege of not being directly affected – marginalized communities can see that others aren't affected. People are more interested in engaging in local issues that directly affect them. We need everyone at the table, including those directly affected, to make progress in addressing

inequities. One approach is to work with groups who don't do environmental work, such as churches, and to do the work outside of political/campaign season.

- Work at local level
- Landfills in neighborhoods
- Disparities didn't just happen
- Have to go where people are / having relatable info
- If it's not in your backyard, you don't think about it
- People need access to understanding/exposure
- Fight more for something that impacts you directly
- Engage/start with the youth
  
- Will Iowa take the money to address climate?
- People most impacted have least ability to do more
- Marginalized communities are seeing what everyone else is getting
- People of color are disproportionately impacted
  - Impacts they (POC) see
- For white people, the privilege to not be on the front lines
- Minority groups recognize everyone needs to be at the table
- Need to bring in groups that don't just do environmental work
- Meetings like this need to happen when/how people can go – providing child care
- Start in your churches – not in political season (AMOS)
- Diverse group makes it everyone's work
  
- People who do frontline jobs
- People get pushed out of the pipeline due to discrimination
- Lots of places to get involved are unpaid
- People of color feel the impacts first, don't get enough response
- Give more respect to lived experience
- Connecting with immigrant communities
- Get involved at the local level
- Can be harder in rural Iowa to get diversity
- The people it impacts the most should be in the room
- Hard to get people to move to Iowa

## Question 7: MLK and EJ

Summary: Decision-makers are often white men, based on their economic status and leadership positions. They may not think about race, but that itself is a privilege. We depend on workers in industries like meat packing, garment production, utilities, and other essential workers every day, but rarely think about them or whether their work is safe and dignified. We can act by generally being more aware of the sources of our consumption, and choosing to eat local foods, buy local products, and show gratitude for the workers we don't often think about.

- Who's at the table? White men. Why?
  - Local demographics
  - Leadership roles held by white men
  - Financial (to take time off)
  - Expand engagement/connection
- "I don't think about color – cultural differences – rather see all people through a human lens"
- Access to the outdoors – it's a privilege to "not see color"
  
- Who are some of the people we depend on every day?
- Pork sausage – Iowa 85% (over)
  - Packing industry floor workers – what is the % of white workers doing this work?
  - Iowa has become a kind of colony
  - Is this work safe or dignified?
- Garment workers
- Utility workers
- Essential workers
- How do I leverage my position to make change?
- Power grid: where power comes from... electricity went out → how do I connect to friends and family now?
- Heaters, gas pumps
- Fresh water
  - Bottled out of state?
  - Plastic waste
  - Need to filter because it's polluted
- Water as navigation
- Food security and sovereignty – more local choices versus coffee, bananas, out-of-season foods
  - Can control what you buy and who you buy it from
- Urban sprawl destroying our soil
- School food and nutrition
- Waste we throw away
- Locally sourced food
- Truckers and shipping
- "Global majority"
- BIPOC
- What *can* we do?
  - Reduce food waste
  - Spirit of gratitude
  - Buy local

## Question 8: Indigenous Perspectives on EJ

Summary: We need to build more partnerships to empower communities beyond time-limited grant opportunities. We need messengers who can explain complex problems in simple terms.

- Ingredients of a cake
  - Some people don't like the cake
  - [Note: Is this the EJ metaphor about allowing real participation? I.e., you need to solicit and consider real input before the cake is fully baked]
- Break down and make it simple so they can explain it
  - Build more "messengers"
- Technical advisors are the note-takers
- Co-partners with the community, empower themselves
  - Grants
  - Decision-making
  - Partnerships last beyond grants
- Relationships: "aggressive and pushy"

## I learned...

- Ag areas (from Neil Hamilton)
- Lots of us thinking deeply on this work, I'm not as alone as I feel
- So many people are about the environment – but small numbers active
- This is everyone's issue
- History of major environmental issues
- Programs are evolving to help future generations, i.e. Drake environmental programs
- East & South side tree cover and parking, temperatures in Des Moines are 2.9 degrees higher than surrounding area
- What are the ways to identify the action to bring change – collaboration
- There are a lot more people in this space than I thought
- There is a huge empathy problem
- The thought process of how heritage influences one's relationship with environment
- How much racism was/still is rooted in environmental issues
  - We don't learn about this in school when taught about the environment
- DM urban temp is 2.9 degrees higher than outside the core
- NACCP – ag outreach
- Spend more time on connecting future leaders
- The history of the environmental justice movement and role played by Dr. Bullard
- Be Pushy!
- Difference between environmental justice and climate justice
- The connection of not "seeing" behind the scenes people who help make our society function
- New connections! League of Women Voters
- More info on what IEC does
- Youth may be uncomfortable in the outdoors
- Legacy of MLK extends to environmental justice



## Action Steps

- Be a voice, through Clive Council & otherwise
- Support groups in our neighborhood who are working for environmental issues
- Check on water quality issues on SS and in Black/brown neighborhoods
- Land access for food sovereignty
- Continue to work on recognizing my privilege and consider how issues I see have a greater impact on lower-income or communities of color
- Educate myself on environmental issues
- More collaboration with the collective disadvantaged community – don't work independently
- I will work to broaden my networks and amplify the work of others
- Support a community farmer - purchase a CSA
- I definitely want to attend the 11th annual MLK Prayer Breakfast and invite someone to come with me
- Include a focus on environmental justice in the planning for our Iowa Nature Summit for November
- Soul Fire Farms
- Concern re lead pipes in schools
- Corporations' tactics
- Partner with neighborhood organizations
- Be more aware of local food options

## Questions from each table:

### 1. Personal stories, past and present.

- Do you know how your ancestors first arrived in America?
  - Were they indigenous, enslaved, indentured servants, immigrants, refugees?
  - How do you think this shaped their relationship to land and the environment?
  - Are there ways you see the continued legacy of that personal history in your relationship with the environment?
  - How do you imagine the relationship with the environment in Iowa might be different for other people and groups with a different history than yours?
  - How do you/do you feel responsible for the actions of your ancestors? How does your relationship with their legacy impact your life and choices today?
- Have you noticed particular changes in the environment where you live? (Or have lived?) What kind of changes, if any? How do you feel about those changes?

### 2. Inequities in Iowa's environmental challenges

- What do you think are some of the main environmental challenges in your community, or in Iowa more generally?

- Share some specific examples, like: climate change, extreme weather, drought, flooding, agricultural pollution, sprawl, gentrification, air pollution, water pollution, habitat loss, declining biodiversity, etc.
- How do you see Iowa's environmental challenges impacting different groups of people differently, especially different minority groups? Can you think of examples in your neighborhood, or your community? What about in other neighborhoods or communities in the state?
- What do you wonder about impacts on others and other communities? What environmental injustices do you think we need to learn more about?

### 3. Climate change and climate justice in Iowa

- Climate Change is sometimes presented as primarily a futuristic, scientific, "parts per million" problem, more than a problem that is impacting people right now. If we were going to humanize this issue in Iowa, what would change about the stories we tell? Who would be the right messengers to communicate about the human impacts of climate change in Iowa? What different groups need to be represented?
- Iowa has had several notable examples of extreme weather over the past several years, including floods, droughts, derechos, extreme cold, and extreme heat. Can you think of ways these climate events are impacting diverse communities in different ways? Think about communities of color, or those that might be rural, low-income, elderly, have limited transportation options, have limited English, have insufficient housing or food or health care.
- We know from these extreme weather events that climate change has costly and dangerous impacts. Whose responsibility is it to prepare our communities for these impacts and lead the response and recovery? Who should be held responsible for covering the costs of climate change in Iowa?

### 4. Dr. Bullard's research on spatial segregation and environmental justice

- For decades, Dr. Bullard's research has called attention to the impacts of segregation in where we live, work, play, and go to school. He says,

*"Decades of segregation and housing discrimination have put black Americans at greater risk of living near chemical plants, factories and highways, exposing them to higher levels of air pollutants. These pollutants have had a chronically negative impact on health, leading to conditions like hypertension and asthma. This historical pattern stands to this day.*

*And it's not just pollution. Communities of color don't get a fair share of the good stuff – parks, green spaces, nature trails, good schools, farmers markets, good stores. They get less of all the things that make communities healthy and get more of their fair share of the bad stuff."*

- Can you think of examples in your neighborhood, your city, or in other parts of Iowa of this sort of unjust distribution of environmental burdens and benefits, relative to where different people live? Where are some places you might use to show examples of this on a map of Iowa?
  - Can you think of historic examples in Iowa? Examples from cities? From rural contexts?
5. Environmental justice includes the right for people to *participate* in policy decisions and solutions.
- A key goal of environmental justice is the assurance that all people and communities are entitled to “meaningful involvement in decision-making, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies” This includes access to decision makers and access to information, and it includes opportunities to attend and participate in public meetings, serve on public boards/committees, or run for public office.
  - What are some barriers that exist right now that make it difficult for particular people or communities to participate in decision-making related to their environment and the health of their neighborhoods?
  - Whose voices do you think are most underrepresented?
  - Whose voices are most overrepresented?
  - What are some ways we can work to ensure more meaningful participation in environmental processes and policy decisions in Iowa? Think about this at multiple levels – in a particular school or business, for example, or at the neighborhood level, the city, the county, the watershed, the state, etc.
6. The politics of climate and environmental justice.
- According to 2022 polling results (<http://diversegreen.org/research/green-2-0-nationwide-voters-of-color-polling-results/>), people of color are more concerned about climate change than white Americans. Compared to white voters, a higher percentage of Americans who identify as Black, Latinx, Asian and Pacific Islander also say it is important for the U.S. to address climate change, and that climate is an important issue in choosing which candidates to support.
  - What is your reaction to this polling? Why do you think climate is such an important issue among communities of color? Why do you think it is less of a concern among many White Americans?
  - This same polling showed that overwhelming majorities of voters believe the groups and organizations working to address climate change should be racially and ethnically diverse. Why might this be important? What does this mean for environmental organizations in Iowa? What about for local, county, and state agencies tasked with environmental conservation?

- Whose voices are underrepresented in conversations about climate change and the environment in Iowa? What can we do to create a more diverse and inclusive movement here?

#### 7. Martin Luther King and environmental justice:

- Dr. King is remembered for his leadership on civil rights, and also for his ability to understand and articulate the intersections among diverse issues. Exploitation of people and exploitation of the environment are caused by the same culture of violence, domination, and greed. In his Christmas Eve sermon in 1967, he emphasized the connections among social, economic, and environmental issues, listing off how his very morning routine depends on global connections with people and the planet. Everyday items like soap, coffee, toast, and cocoa connect us to people and places near and far. “Before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you’ve depended on more than half the world. This is the way our universe is structured. It is its interrelated quality. We aren’t going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality.”
- What are some ways your daily routine connects you with different social, economic, and environmental issues?
- Who are some of the people we depend on every day in this community without appreciating our own interdependence? This could include sanitation workers, but who else comes to mind? What about our connections with our neighbors of the “more-than-human” world – the air, water, soil, and creatures around us?
- What might be different about our approach to environmental issues if we took seriously Dr. King’s sense of intersectionality, and our own awareness of interconnection?

#### 8. Indigenous Perspectives on Environmental Justice

- What do you know about Indigenous folks and environmental Justice?
- What do you know about what Indigenous folks have done here in Iowa to protect the land, the air and the water?
  - No Hearts Map
  - Maria Pearson, [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria\\_Pearson](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Pearson)
- What about what folks are doing today here in Iowa?
  - Meskwaki Nation
  - DAPL
  - Great Plains Action Society
  - Native American Coalition of the Quad Cities