How We Organize

Environmental Equity from the Ground Up
Lesson Overview

1) Community Agreements (5 min)
2) What is Environmental Justice? (5 min)
3) Roots of Injustice (5 min)
4) Public health and the Environment (10 min)
5) Environmental Organizing (5 min)
6) Activity (45 min)
   a) Overview and scenario (5 min)
   b) Individual group breakouts (10 min)
   c) Mini forum breakouts (10 min)
   d) Shared solutions discussion (15 min)
   e) Questions and concerns (5 min)
Community Agreements & Guidelines

1) We agree to hold ourselves and each other with care.
2) We agree to respect confidentiality.
3) We agree to calling each other in as we are able, and calling out when necessary.
4) We agree to be mindful and respectful of time.

GUIDELINES:
- Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.
- Practice self-focus.
- Listen generously.
- Try on.
- Beware of intent of impact.
- Believe in this process.
What is Environmental Justice/Equity?

The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.
Roots of Injustice
Capitalism

- A race for productivity, no matter the means
- Under capitalism:
  - Slavery
  - Genocide
  - Law-based discrimination
  - Massive wealth inequality
- Capitalism, in its historical human context, exists only in the context of an exploitation of a people
  - Surplus value is pocketed by the top
    - Ex. Disneyland
  - Peoples’ worth becomes based on what they can produce, in many cases it’s their very lives.
  - Third parties, often with historical power, influence the “free market” → corruption results
  - Privatization of services/institutions
    - Ex. Private companies that are incentivized to profit from incarceration that creates a market for wrongful arrests
Results of Capitalism

- Wage gap
- Gentrification
- War
- Left vs. Right
- White-centric movements
- Systemic obstacles
- Psychological trauma
- Hazardous living conditions
- Environmental Racism
Public health and the Environment

CLEAN AIR EQUALS KIDS STAY IN SCHOOL

1. 62% of residents living within 6 miles of a petroleum refinery, cement plant, or power plant are people of color.

2. African American children in California are four times more likely to be hospitalized for asthma compared to white children.

3. In 2009, there were an estimated 1.1 million school days missed due to asthma in CA.
Drought and poverty

Drought Intensity
- Exceptional drought
- Extreme drought
- Severe drought

Poverty
- Percentage below the poverty line
  - 20%-29%
  - 10%-19%
  - 0%-9%

*Poverty thresholds in 2012: $23,283 for family of four, $11,945 individual under 65.

62% of migrant workers work in drought-affected areas.

Texas cattle ranchers are experiencing lowest cattle and calf levels since 1867.

90% of residents in California’s Central Valley rely on groundwater for drinking.

The water of 1.5 million Californians is unsafely contaminated each year.

Sources:
- droughtmonitor.unl.edu
- www.nytimes.com
- American Community Survey,
- www.ers.usda.gov, California Department of Public Health

Deseret News Graphic
What do we do about it? We organize!

Why is organizing important?

- Grassroots
  - Born from affected communities themselves
  - Formed from a more or less direct “threat”
  - Organized by “everyday folks”
  - First hand knowledge
- Large established organizations
Grassroots - California Environmental Justice Alliance (CEJA)

- CEJA is a coalition of grassroots Environmental Justice organizations aiming to achieve environmental justice by organizing in low income communities and communities of color and by pushing for federal, state, regional, and local policy that protect public health and the environment
- Combination of grassroots organizing and strategic policy advocacy
- Some participating organizations:
  - Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice (CCAEJ)
    - Works with Latino residents in Richmond and San Bernardino to revitalize the community through food justice, recreation equity, and land use planning
  - People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Rights (PODER)
    - Works in SF’s Mission, Excelsior, and SE areas to address environmental injustices through community based campaigns and projects
Grassroots - Students for Environmental Justice for Underrepresented Communities (EJUC)

- Context: Environmental Policy and Environmental Sciences majors required course load, prior to graduation
- Stimulus: lack of any required environmental justice education in the majors
  - Environmental Justice is mentioned in one class period in one elective, and is one of several topics in another elective.
  - You can effectively graduate with a major in one of these without ever being exposed to what this term entails
- Action: Gathered students both in these fields and in related fields to create a list of demands, hold space to share and educate others, and express these demands to faculty and staff
National Resources Defence Council (NRDC)

- United States-based, non-profit international environmental advocacy group
- Headquarters in NYC and offices in Washington, D.C.; San Francisco; Los Angeles; New Delhi, India; Chicago; Bozeman, Montana; and Beijing, China
- Founded in 1970, 2.4 million members and a staff of about 500 lawyers, scientists and other policy experts
  - The **Latino Outreach Program** or *La Onda Verde de NRDC* works to inform and involve Spanish-speaking Latinos in the environmental issues on which NRDC works.
  - The **Health Program** works on issues involving drinking water, chemical harm to the environment, and other environmental health threats with the goal of reducing the amount of toxins released into the environment.
Game