Oregon EJC Retreat Summary

September 4, 2026

Facilitator: Kearns & West, Ben Duncan

Notetaker: Hoang-Van Nguyen, EJC Policy & Program Coordinator

Attendees:

EJC Members

Chair Rajagopal, Vice Chair Brannon, OCHA Liaison Herencia, Youth Representative MacFarland, RJC Liaison Molina, RJC Liaison Soh, EJC Member Murray, EJC Member Sanchez, EJC Member Vincent

State Staff

EJC Policy & Program Coordinator Hoang-Van Nguyen, OHA EJ Mapping Lead Eric Main

Purpose

The Oregon Environmental Justice Council (EJC) held its 2026 retreat to strengthen relationships among Council members, reflect on current ways of working, clarify the Council's roles and responsibilities, and identify opportunities to increase its impact on environmental justice across Oregon.

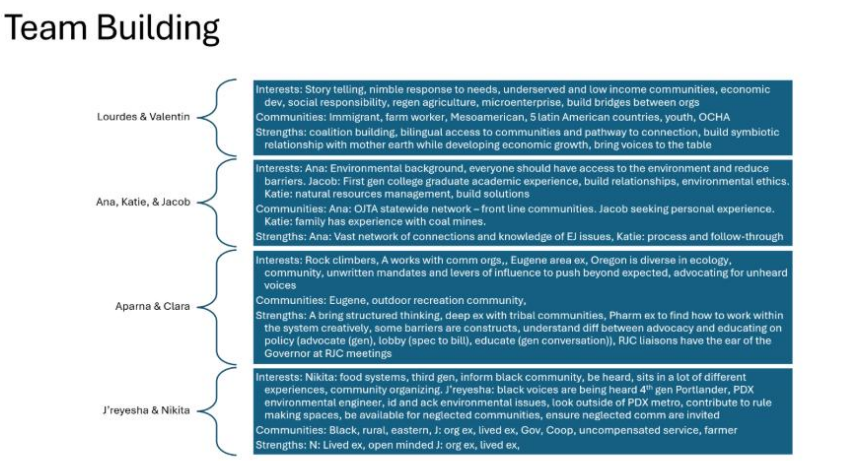
The retreat created space for Council members to consider how the EJC can better fulfill its statutory responsibilities and strengthen connections with communities, state agencies, the Governor's Office, the Racial Justice Council (RJC), Oregon Advocacy Commissions, and other partners.

The discussion highlighted a shared interest in creating greater clarity, consistency, and community connections and relationships, while maintaining the flexibility needed to respond to emerging environmental justice concerns.

Building on the Council's Strengths

The retreat began with team building and reflection on the perspectives, experiences, and strengths members bring to the Council.

Members identified a broad range of lived and professional experiences, including issue, community and geographic expertise in: environmental justice, natural resources, community organizing, storytelling, food systems, agriculture, coalition building, Tribal engagement, immigrant and farmworker communities, rural Oregon, and connections to communities of color.



Members also highlighted strengths including relationship building, bilingual and community access, lived experience, structured thinking, understanding of government systems, process and engagement design, and the ability to bring underrepresented voices into decision making spaces.

The conversation also surfaced opportunities to strengthen representation on the Council, including greater geographic diversity in Eastern Oregon, rural Oregon, and coastal communities, as well as expertise related to utilities and other environmental justice issues. Members noted barriers to participation, including limited community capacity, language access, lack of compensation, and Tribal capacity constraints.

Clarifying the EJC's Role and How It Creates Impact

The retreat provided an opportunity to step back and consider how the EJC can maximize its impact within its statutory responsibilities.

The Council's responsibilities include advising the Governor and state agencies, developing a biannual report, identifying and meeting with environmental justice communities, defining environmental justice issues, and consulting with state agencies when requested. The EJC also has responsibility for developing the Oregon Environmental Justice Mapping Tool.



Members identified a need for greater clarity about:

- How information comes to the Council;
- When and where Council input is needed;
- How the Council provides advice to state agencies and the Governor's Office;
- How emerging issues are elevated;
- How workgroups are formed and operate;
- How recommendations are developed and tracked; and
- How the Council distinguishes between advocacy, lobbying, education, and formal advice.

There was also interest in strengthening the EJC's ability to respond rapidly to emerging environmental justice concerns while maintaining focus on statutory responsibilities.

Strengthening Internal Operations

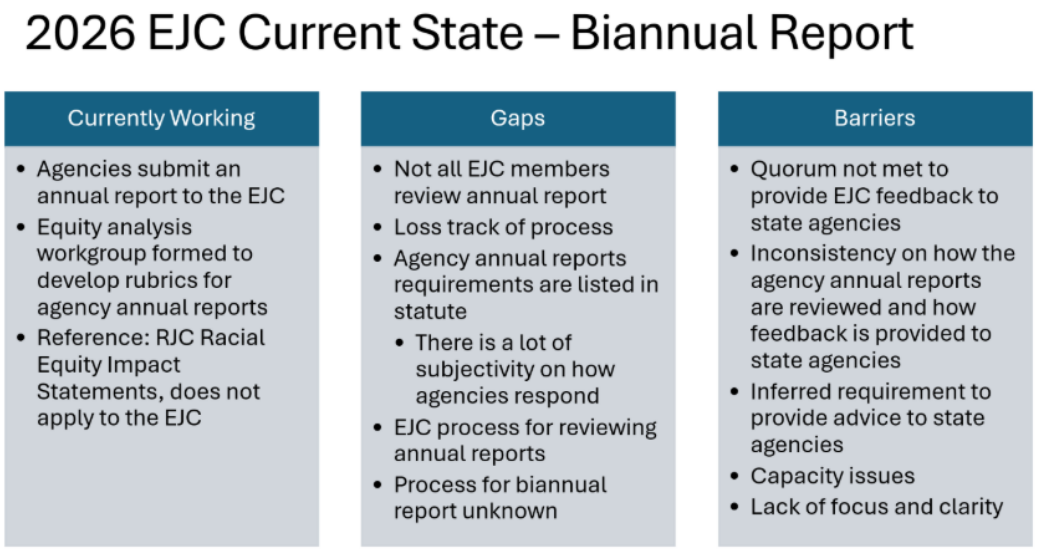
Members identified several operational challenges that can limit the Council's ability to maximize its impact. Current challenges include inconsistent review of agency annual reports, a need to strengthen and align on a vision for the biannual reporting process, challenges for efficiently providing agency feedback, capacity constraints, and a lack of clarity about roles and processes.

The retreat identified opportunities to create a more consistent operating structure, including:

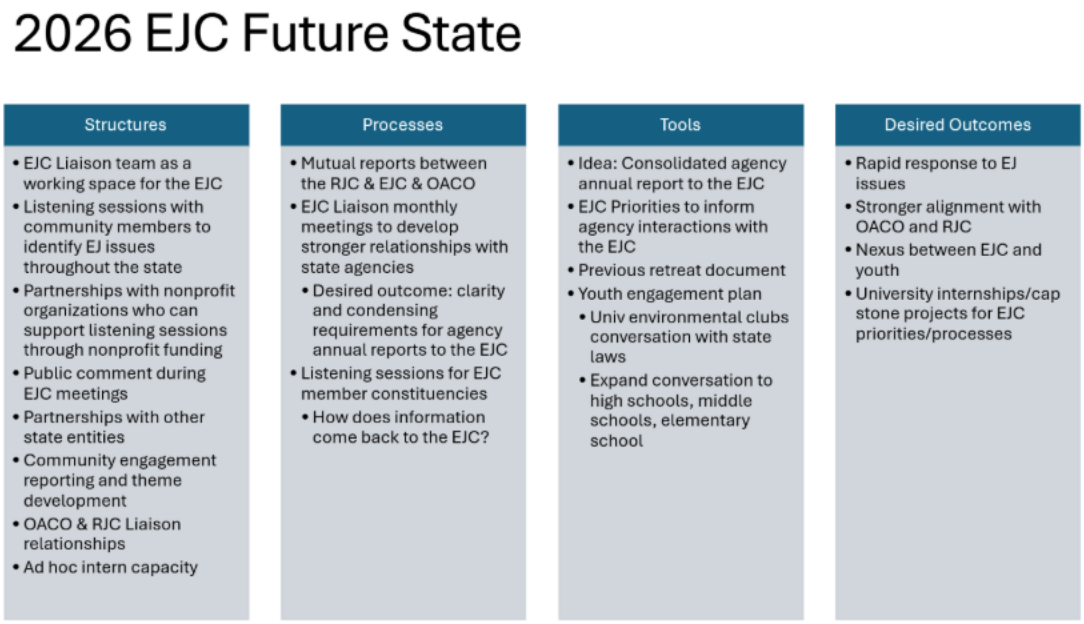
- Consistent protocols for reviewing agency reports;
- A consolidated agency annual report;
- Timelines and sequencing of topics to ensure advisory and consultation is meaningful
- Clearer workgroup structures, particularly focused on purpose, scope and timelines
- Better tracking of recommendations and milestones; and
- More effective use of available Council and staff capacity.

A key principle was to focus on statutory priorities first, while creating enough flexibility to respond to emerging issues.

Current State



Future State



Strengthening Community Engagement and Listening

A central theme of the retreat was the need to create stronger and more meaningful pathways for community voices to inform the EJC's work.

Members discussed conducting listening sessions across regions and communities, with engagement approaches tailored to specific communities and accessible in relevant languages. The Council identified the importance of reaching communities that may not traditionally participate in state-level advisory processes and reducing the risk of an "echo chamber."

Potential engagement approaches include:

- Regional and statewide listening sessions;
- Community-specific and language-accessible listening sessions;
- Rural Oregon conversations;
- Youth listening sessions;
- Tribal engagement;
- Black and other affinity-based listening spaces;
- Engagement with immigrant and farmworker communities;
- Partnerships with trusted community-based organizations;
- Local government/community engagement partnerships; and

- More accessible public comment at EJC meetings.

The Council also discussed using participation and public comment as indicators of whether the EJC is successfully creating opportunities for community engagement.

Community compensation, language access, capacity, meeting accessibility, and timing were identified as important barriers to participation. The goal is to ensure a feedback loop connecting what the council hears from community to how community voice impacts EJC priorities and actions.

Building Partnerships and Additional Capacity

The Council identified partnerships as an important strategy for expanding its reach and capacity.

Members discussed continuing to build relationships with community-based organizations that have trusted relationships with communities, particularly organizations that can help support listening sessions and elevate community-identified issues.

Potential partnerships and capacity-building opportunities include:

- CBO-supported listening sessions;
- Partnerships with local governments;
- Collaboration with the RJC on community conversations;
- University environmental clubs;
- Student internships;
- University capstone projects;
- Ad hoc intern support to synthesize engagement information and data; and
- External funding to support community engagement.

The Council also identified an opportunity to strengthen the connection between the EJC and youth, including expanding engagement beyond universities to high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools.

Strengthening Relationships with State Agencies and the Governor's Office

The retreat identified opportunities for the EJC to establish more proactive and consistent relationships with state agencies and the Governor's Office.

Potential improvements include:

- Establishing an EJC liaison team as a working space for the Council;
- Regular monthly liaison meetings with state agencies;
- Developing clearer expectations for agency annual reports;
- Creating a consistent framework for EJC review and feedback;
- Consolidating agency reporting;
- Establishing EJC priorities to inform agency interactions;
- Strengthening communication with the Governor's Office; and
- Developing a process for advising the Governor's Office.

The Council also discussed stronger coordination among the EJC, RJC, and Oregon Advocacy Commissions, including mutual reporting and opportunities for the RJC and EJC to collaborate on community conversations and advise the Governor on EJ issues and concerns.

Where appropriate, the EJC may also consider alignment with the Governor's broader priorities, including areas such as housing and behavioral health, while maintaining an environmental justice focus.

Focusing the Council's Policy Impact

Members discussed the importance of identifying a limited number of priority issues where the EJC can have meaningful influence.

The retreat identified an opportunity to develop priority policy issues, informed by both community input and the Council's statutory responsibilities. Potential areas discussed included:

- Food systems and food access;
- Water;
- Farmworker issues;
- Wildfire;
- Land access; and
- Other issues identified through community listening and engagement.

Food systems emerged as a potential policy area for further consideration, including opportunities to examine food access and the roles of agencies such as DEQ, ODA, and OHA. Members also discussed the opportunity to align, where appropriate, with broader state priorities such as housing and behavioral health. The EJC expressed a desire to have the Council's priorities reflect a process through which community-identified issues,

environmental justice concerns, statutory responsibilities, and opportunities for government influence informs the Council's policy agenda.

Workgroups as a Mechanism for Action

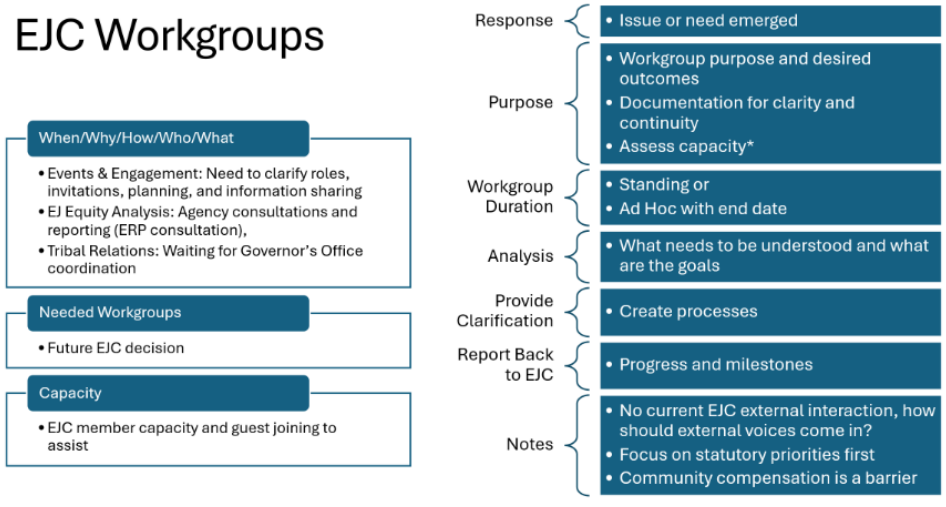
The retreat identified workgroups as an important mechanism for moving priorities forward while allowing the full Council to maintain strategic oversight.

Potential workgroup areas include:

- Events and Engagement;
- EJ Equity Analysis / Rubrics / Processes / Metrics;
- Tribal Relations
- EJ Mapping Tool
- Policy and systems change.

Members emphasized that workgroups should have a clear:

- Purpose and desired outcome;
- Scope and role;
- Membership and capacity expectations;
- Decision/reporting pathway;
- Documentation approach; and
- Timeline, either standing/ongoing, or ad hoc with a defined end date.



The Council also discussed the possibility of inviting members of the public or other experts to participate in workgroups when additional capacity or expertise is needed.

EJ Mapping Tool

The Oregon Environmental Justice Mapping Tool was identified as both a statutory responsibility and an opportunity to strengthen community and agency's understanding of environmental justice impacts.

The Council discussed:

- Piloting the tool with various user groups;
- Developing guidance and resources;
- Conducting an implementation "road show";
- Using the tool to support community conversations; and
- Connecting mapping information to the identification and prioritization of EJ issues.

The mapping tool can serve as one mechanism for connecting data, lived experience, community priorities, and policy discussions.

Moving Forward

The retreat generated a broad range of ideas and opportunities. The next step is to translate these ideas into a focused set of priorities that reflect the Council's statutory responsibilities, community needs, and available capacity.

Several themes provide a foundation for the EJC's next phase of work:

Build the internal foundation.

Create clearer structures, processes, roles, and tools that allow the Council to work effectively and maintain continuity.

Strengthen community connection.

Create meaningful, accessible opportunities for communities across Oregon to identify environmental justice issues, inform Council priorities, and hear how their input influences action.

Build stronger government relationships.

Develop more consistent and proactive relationships with state agencies, the Governor’s Office, the RJC, and Oregon Advocacy Commissions.

Focus on policy impact.

Identify priority environmental justice issues and establish opportunities for analysis, advice, action, and follow-through. This is particularly important for the EJC obligations to advise the Governor and Natural Resources Agencies on EJ issues.

Invest in partnerships and capacity.

Build relationships with CBOs and explore internships, university partnerships, capstone projects, funding, and other resources that can expand the Council's capacity.

EJC Actions Discussion Summary

The retreat concluded with a focus on determining what the EJC should prioritize in 2027, what work requires time outside regular Council meetings, and what can realistically be accomplished within existing Council capacity.

The action plan below provides a starting point for that conversation.



Priority Area	Key Actions	Outcomes
1. Internal Operations & Council Effectiveness	• Clarify EJC roles, responsibilities, and decision pathways • Establish clear criteria and processes for creating and managing workgroups • Develop shared calendars, templates, protocols, and documentation • Strengthen continuity and tracking of Council actions and recommendations • Assess Council capacity and resources	• Updated bylaws • Workgroup purpose, outcomes, and scope documentation • Workgroup deliverable documentation • Templates • EJC assignment and assigned member lists
2. Community Engagement & Listening	• Conduct listening sessions across Oregon regions and communities • Develop community-specific and language-accessible engagement approaches • Prioritize rural, Black, Tribal, immigrant/farmworker, youth, and other historically underrepresented communities • Conduct youth listening sessions • Continue building partnerships with trusted CBOs • Address community compensation and other participation barriers	• EJMT Community Engagement Plan • Listening Session scoping documents including purpose, dates, targeted audiences, required resources, and assigned EJC members and staff ○ Includes outreach plan, reporting plan and other follow-up considerations • Trusted resource listing with representation references such as geography,

	• Increase accessible public comment and use participation as an indicator of community engagement • Establish a clear community-to-Council feedback loop	constituency, scopes of work, and contact information • EJC community participation memorandum to the Governor's Office and state agencies • EJC public comment tracker
3. Agency, Governor's Office & Government Relationships	• Establish a stronger EJC liaison structure and regular agency communication • Clarify expectations and processes for agency annual reports • Develop a consistent framework for EJC review and agency feedback • Develop a process for advising the Governor's Office • Strengthen communication with the Governor's Office and align, where appropriate, with Governor priorities • Strengthen coordination among the EJC, RJC, and Oregon Advocacy Commissions • Partner with the RJC on community conversations	• Annual reporting guidance for state agencies • EJC annual reporting review rubric • Governor's advice pathways documentation and processes • EJC, RJC, and OACO alignment meetings twice a year • Include RJC in community engagement outreach
4. Policy & Systems Change	• Identify 5–10 priority environmental justice issues • Develop criteria for prioritizing emerging issues	• EJC documentation clarifying advice types, purpose of each type of advice, and process • EJC issue intake form

	• Consider food systems, water, farmworkers, wildfire, and other issues emerging through community engagement • Consider alignment with broader state priorities, including housing and behavioral health, where appropriate • Create processes for analyzing issues and developing Council advice • Strengthen the EJC's ability to respond to emerging EJ issues • Track recommendations, responses, and outcomes	○ Who needs access? ○ What information is needed in the beginning for EJC consideration? ○ Prioritization process ○ How and when intakes are closed and feedback mechanisms to the requestor
5. EJ Mapping Tool	• Pilot the EJ Mapping Tool with various user groups • Conduct outreach/"road show" activities • Develop guidance and resources for use of the tool • Connect mapping work to community engagement and identification of EJ issues	• Road show schedule and agendas • Pilot schedule and agendas • EJMT Guidance Draft
6. Youth & Tribal Engagement	• Develop a youth engagement approach, including listening sessions • Explore university partnerships, student internships, and capstone projects • Consider student capacity to synthesize engagement data and information	• Youth Representative Workplan • University partnership lead tracking sheet • Governor's Office tribal engagement direction

	• Expand youth engagement opportunities • Clarify and strengthen Tribal consultation and engagement pathways • Coordinate with the Governor's Office and relevant partners	
7. Partnerships & Capacity	• Continue building relationships with trusted CBOs • Explore partnerships that can support regional and community-specific engagement • Engage rural Oregon through community conversations and partnerships • Explore external funding opportunities • Develop internship and capstone opportunities • Identify resources needed to support priority work	• Trusted resource listing with representation references such as geography, constituency, scopes of work, and contact information • External funding plan in partnership with NGO's • University partnership lead tracking sheet
8. Meaningful Involvement and Impact Tracking	• Update the EJC website, including new member information • Improve public-facing information about EJC priorities and activities • Increase accessibility of public comment and EJC meetings • Track participation and public comment as indicators of community engagement	• EJC public comment tracker • EJC public comment promotion plan • Community engagement reports and follow-up plan • EJC priority labeling on EJC projects

	• Report back to communities on what was heard and what actions followed • Track progress against EJC priorities and commitments	