

DEPARTMENT OF  
**ECOLOGY**  
State of Washington

# Equity Subcommittee Role Overview

June 29, 2026

# Purpose of the Equity Subcommittee

The purpose of the Equity Subcommittee is to make recommendations to the Advisory Council, Ecology, and the PRO on equity and environmental justice considerations related to the implementation of the Recycling Reform Act.

## Objectives

- Identify barriers and impacts affecting overburdened and underserved communities
- Inform system design to ensure equitable access to services
- Make recommendations for community engagement and education
- Use lived experience to help guide recommendations

# Broader Equity Framework

The legislature found that:

- Many residents—especially rural and multifamily populations—lack convenient or affordable recycling access.
- Extended producer responsibility (EPR) is intended to make curbside recycling available and affordable for most people.

## Why this matters:

The Legislature explicitly recognized current inequities and created the subcommittee to ensure those inequities are actively addressed as the system is redesigned. The Legislature stated that EPR programs must be implemented in ways that “minimize negative impacts to the environment” and “minimize risks to public health and worker health and safety.”

# Where the Subcommittee Fits

## **Equity Subcommittee**

Provides equity-focused recommendations on plans, needs assessments, and annual reports.

## **Advisory Council**

Receives subcommittee recommendations and advises Ecology and the PRO.

## **Department of Ecology**

Implements the law, reviews plans and reports, and ensures equity is incorporated into program decisions.

## **Producer Responsibility Organization (PRO)**

Designs and operates the statewide recycling system and must consider the Advisory Council's and Subcommittee's recommendations.

# What You Will Review



## **Needs Assessments**

Evaluate whether needs assessments accurately capture recycling access gaps for overburdened communities, rural areas, Tribal nations, and multifamily residents.



## **Submitted Plans**

Review whether plans include meaningful strategies to improve access and reduce disparities.



## **Annual Reports**

Assess whether reported progress reflects equitable outcomes in practice.

# Equity Subcommittee Perspectives



## Environmental Justice

Organizations serving overburdened and underserved communities with deep environmental justice expertise.



## Lived Experience

Individuals and groups working directly with communities disproportionately impacted by recycling gaps and environmental burdens.



## Geographic Diversity

Urban, rural, and Tribal communities statewide — including small, medium, and large eastern WA communities.



## Housing Perspectives

Multifamily and renter communities facing distinct recycling access challenges.

# Shared Environmental Justice Principles (HEAL Act)

The HEAL Act is Washington's foundational environmental justice law. It requires state agencies like Ecology to prioritize overburdened communities, reduce environmental and health disparities, and conduct meaningful community engagement. These same principles are embedded in the statutory purpose of the Equity Subcommittee.



# Environmental Justice Definitions

## Overburdened communities

A geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and includes, but is not limited to, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW [19.405.020](#).

## Vulnerable populations

Population groups that are more likely to be at higher risk for poor health outcomes in response to environmental harms, due to: (i) Adverse socioeconomic factors, such as unemployment, high housing and transportation costs relative to income, limited access to nutritious food and adequate health care, linguistic isolation, and other factors that negatively affect health outcomes and increase vulnerability to the effects of environmental harms; and (ii) sensitivity factors, such as low birth weight and higher rates of hospitalization.

# RCW 70A.208.270 – Socially Vulnerable Populations (SVI)

## Socially Vulnerable Populations

The Department of Ecology must periodically assess the availability and methodology of the CDC/ATSDR Social Vulnerability Index as it existed on January 1, 2025.

If the SVI is no longer available in substantially the same form:

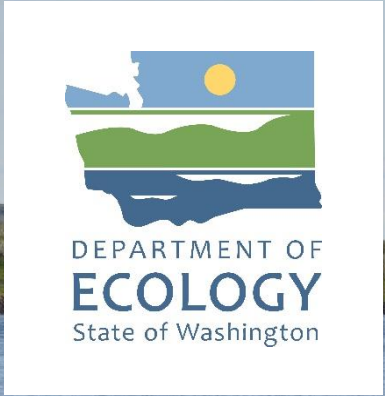
- Ecology must notify Producer Responsibility Organizations (PROs).
- Then, instead of using CDC/ATSDR SVI, agencies must identify socially vulnerable populations using the Environmental Health Disparities Map, specifically those areas ranked 9 or higher

# Examples of overburdened communities and socially vulnerable populations

- Tribal Nations & indigenous communities
- Rural communities
- Low income communities
- Communities located near industrial facilities
- Multifamily & renter households
- People with disabilities
- Communities with language access needs

# At-a-Glance Timeline





Thank you