

# Our Coast, Our Future



## Focusing on the Frontlines

### An Introduction to Climate Justice

Due to the systemic racism, oppression, and disenfranchisement that exists in the United States and policies implemented under these systems including (but not limited to) redlining and the forced migration of indigenous peoples from their ancestral lands,

Frontline Communities are more often BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) dominated. While we fully recognize this unit does not have the capacity to explore these systems in depth, it is important to emphasize that dismantling these systems are at the core of climate justice and explore this with your students in an authentic way.

Additional resources are included to support you in this work.

Let's explore the concept of climate justice through the lens of two barriers that members of our community are facing and think about how our community might be able to overcome or remove these barriers. ***We encourage you to try and cover both of the barriers below, but should you only have time for one please choose the one most relevant to your students (10).***

- **Language Barriers**

- Planning meetings and public hearings where policy is made become inaccessible to people who don't speak English if interpretation is not provided.
- Language barriers can make it difficult for immigrant communities to get early information about incoming storms or weather disasters.
- They may be unable to communicate effectively with first responders in the midst of an evacuation order.
- Signage may need to be in multiple languages and include symbols or icons to let people know where public resources like parks, libraries, and shelters are located.

- **Economic Opportunity**

- The voices of lower-income communities are often left out of community planning meetings and discussions.
- People with lower incomes may also be less likely to afford flood or fire insurance, rebuild homes, or pay for steep medical bills.
- They are also more likely to be unable to afford to relocate outside of flood plains and areas impacted by sea level rise.
- They may be unable to work from home or take a day off of work in case of extreme weather and be at risk of commuting during unsafe conditions.
- Green space access for cooling and recreation may not be located nearby and the cost to take transit there is too high or unavailable.

- As heat wave frequency increases, some people may be unable to afford air conditioning or the increased utility cost.

Using these examples, what are some ways we might be able to overcome the barriers in the short term or remove barriers in the long term?

**It is important to emphasize that we cannot solve every issue with a “snap of the fingers” and one solution. Reaching real justice (removal of all barriers) takes time, but that does not mean we should not give people and communities tools to overcome those barriers (equity) in the short term while continuing to work towards completely removing them in the long term. The same applies to our climate change solutions.**

- As you move through this exercise, do not dismiss any answer as “wrong” but rather point out where students might be thinking of very short term or potentially unrealistic solutions and whether or not their solution is really “justice”. For example, a student might say **“Give everyone a million dollars!”** Point out this is a short-term solution. Does everyone actually need a million dollars or the same amount of financial support? Can they modify their idea to ensure it is able to ensure justice for those who truly need it?
- Examples for Language Barriers include:
  - Have interpreters available during public meetings, community planning meetings, press conferences, etc.;
  - *This is an example of **equity. Justice** would ensure that actively involved in those meetings are community members who reflect all members of the community, includes languages, so an interpreter would not be needed as there would always be someone involved in the process who speaks the language*
  - Have all emergency information in multiple languages (making sure to cover the ones we know are spoken in the community)
  - Provide translators / interpreters for communications, evacuation orders, etc. in areas we know have a dominant language other than English
  - Create an app or website that gives a map and information in multiple languages to important community resources.
- Examples for Income/Economic Opportunity include:
  - Make an extra effort to include lower-income communities which historically have been left out of community planning in meetings and planning discussions.
    - This might involve holding planning sessions and hearings in different locations, or inviting people to them through community groups.
    - Provide services that help people participate in meetings such as childcare and transportation and ways to show appreciation for participation

- Hold meetings at various times of the day, so that people with a variety of work/school schedules can participate.
- Increase affordable housing options
  - Often affordable, low-income housing is located in floodplains and other areas vulnerable to extreme climate impacts. How do we ensure this doesn't continue to happen?
- Increase the amount of public transportation
- Provide funding to help people relocate away from areas we know will be impacted by sea level rise
- Establish cooling shelters in areas with the most at risk from heat related health emergencies

**Closing Question:** What other barriers might exist in our communities we should be aware of as we continue on in this project (5)?