Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool: Frequently Asked Questions

Q: How does the tool identify and define disadvantaged communities?

As set forth in [Executive Order (EO) 14008](#) on *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, disadvantaged communities are those that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution. In line with this Executive Order, the beta version of the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEJST) uses a methodology and datasets that identify communities that are economically disadvantaged and overburdened by pollution and underinvestment in housing, transportation, water and wastewater infrastructure, and health care. A community qualifies as "disadvantaged" if the census tract is above the threshold for one or more environmental or climate indicators and the tract is above the threshold for the socioeconomic indicators.

In the absence of a comprehensive, national database or index that measures or reflects the full breadth of burdens that communities experience, the beta version of the CEJST relies on publicly-available, nationally-consistent data on income, education, environmental burdens, health, and other economic and environmental factors.

It is important to note, however, not all disadvantaged communities are easily identified on a map. Some disadvantaged communities, such as migrant workers, are geographically dispersed; the [Interim Implementation Guidance](#) on the Justice40 Initiative notes that Federal agencies should also consider geographically dispersed disadvantaged communities when implementing the Justice40 Initiative.

Q: How does the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool compare to EJScreen? Will EPA use EJScreen or this tool?

The beta version of the CEJST, the creation of which was directed by [EO 14008](#), applies lessons learned from the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) [EJScreen](#).

EJScreen is an environmental justice mapping and screening tool that provides EPA with a nationally-consistent dataset and approach for combining environmental and demographic indicators. The EPA, Federal agencies, and other partners, such as state

and local governments, will continue to use EJScreen for a broad array of screening, outreach, and analytical purposes related to EPA program implementation (in alignment with CEJST where appropriate) and policy development.

In contrast, the CEJST was specifically developed to provide a uniform whole-of-government definition of disadvantaged communities for Federal agencies to target Justice40 investment benefits. The CEJST supports consistency and uniformity across all Federal agencies as they implement their Justice40 covered programs in the areas of climate, clean energy and energy efficiency, clean transit, affordable and sustainable housing, training and workforce development, the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution, and the development of clean water infrastructure. The CEJST methodology was developed with these Federal resource allocation purposes in mind.

EJScreen and CEJST complement each other – the former provides a tool to screen for potential disproportionality at the community level, while the latter defines and maps disadvantaged communities for the purpose of informing how Federal agencies guide the benefits of certain programs, such as the Justice40 Initiative.

Q: How does this tool compare to state screening tools?

There are several states that have developed or are in the process of developing environmental justice screening data and tools. For example, CalEnviroScreen is an environmental justice screening tool developed for use in California. Other states, like New York and Michigan, are in various stages of developing data and screening tools as well. The beta version of the CEJST incorporates lessons learned from these efforts. An important distinction between state-based tools and the CEJST is that state tools are able to utilize state agency data that is not available nationally. As a national tool, CEJST requires data that are nationally-consistent.

Q: Will this tool be used to inform decisions relating to investments in infrastructure projects?

Federal infrastructure programs that are covered by the Justice40 Initiative, including new and existing programs in the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, will use the CEJST to help identify the communities that receive the benefits of these programs. This includes programs that involve grants, loans, and direct payments or benefits to individuals in the seven key areas covered by the Justice40 Initiative.

Q: How does this tool relate to the Justice40 Initiative?

The CEJST will provide important information for the Justice40 Initiative. The goal of the Justice40 Initiative is to ensure that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments in seven keys areas flow to disadvantaged communities. The seven key areas are: climate change; clean energy and energy efficiency; clean transit; affordable and sustainable housing; training and workforce development; the remediation and reduction of legacy pollution; and the development of critical clean water infrastructure.

The Justice40 Initiative is a critical part of the Biden Administration's whole-of-government approach to advancing environmental justice, and the CEJST will help identify and define disadvantaged communities for the purposes of the Justice40 Initiative.

Q: How can the public provide feedback on this tool?

Members of the public can explore the beta version of the map and data and provide feedback. This feedback will be used to help refine the tool. To provide feedback on the beta version of the CEJST or raise support issues, please visit https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/contact, or fill out the survey at https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/cejst-survey.

CEQ also published a Request for Information (RFI) in the Federal Register to solicit input and feedback on the beta version of the CEJST. The RFI can be found here.

Q: When will the final version of the tool come out?

CEQ is currently seeking feedback on the beta version of the tool during a 60-day comment period. CEQ will review these comments and suggestions. Federal agencies will use the CEJST to inform their implementation of the Justice40 Initiative once revised guidance is issued after the completion of the beta phase.

Q: Did the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council (WHEJAC) provide recommendations for this screening tool?

The WHEJAC provided recommendations on the CEJST and the CEJST incorporates several of these recommendations. The WHEJAC's published recommendations can be found here.

CEQ also conducted outreach to solicit ideas and recommendations from environmental justice leaders, agency staff, researchers, and other stakeholders.

Q: Is race included as an indicator?

The CEJST does not use racial demographic data as an indicator to help identify disadvantaged communities. The tool relies on array of climate, environmental, and socioeconomic indicators to identify communities that are shouldering a disproportionate share of environmental burdens and climate risks and that have suffered from underinvestment. It is well-documented that communities of color suffer disproportionately from some of these burdens. Although the tool does not include race as an indicator, the CEJST endeavors to create a map that reflects on-the-ground burdens and realities that disadvantaged communities face.

Q: Does the tool include Tribal Nations?

The tool covers all U.S. census tracts, including those located within Tribal Nations, to the extent that data is available (see the CEJST Methodology & Data page). CEQ will engage in consultation and coordination with Tribal Nations on the beta version of the tool to provide Tribal Nations with meaningful opportunities for input, consistent with [CEQ's Action Plan for Consultation and Coordination with Tribal Nations](), President Biden's [Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](), and [EO 13175]() on Consultation and Coordination With Indian Tribal Governments.

Q: How should agencies use the CEJST if they have already created their own tools or criteria to identify disadvantaged communities?

The Justice40 [Interim Implementation Guidance]() released on July 20, 2021 directs agencies to develop interim definitions of disadvantaged communities until updated Justice40 guidance is issued. Agencies have been working diligently to develop indicators that are appropriate for their programs and may continue to use their interim definitions during the beta-phase of the CEJST. When updated guidance on the Justice40 Initiative is issued, the CEJST methodology will be used by all agencies.

Q: Does this tool identify environmental justice communities?

As outlined in EO 14008, the CEJST was created to identify and define disadvantaged communities that are marginalized, underserved, and overburdened by pollution for the purposes of Justice40 Initiative.

The Justice40 Initiative is a critical part of the Administration's whole-of-government approach to advancing environmental justice and supports the Administration's comprehensive approach to advancing equity and justice for all.

Q: How are disadvantaged communities in the territories being identified? Are all territories included in the tool?

Not all data included in CEJST (see the CEJST Methodology & Data page) are available for all U.S. territories. The beta version of the CEJST uses the following approach to addressing data limitations in the territories:

Puerto Rico: The U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey data from 2015-2019 are used for all fields in the Training and Workforce Development category to identify disadvantaged communities in Puerto Rico.

American Samoa and the Northern Mariana Islands: The Decennial Census data from 2010 are used to identify disadvantaged communities in American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands. The beta version of the CEJST uses the following data indicators for these territories: unemployment, poverty, low median income, and high school degree achievement rate in the Training and Workforce Development category.

Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands: Work is underway to identify reliable data for Guam and the U.S. Virgin Islands in order to identify disadvantaged communities.