

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE (2014, R2022)



Policy Statement

The American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) believes that all persons have the right to healthy environmental and community assets so that no group of people bears a disproportionate share of the negative consequences resulting from public or private development, operations, or policies. Moreover, ASLA recognizes the presence and needs of vulnerable populations and works to ensure that all people's concerns and challenges are equitably addressed.

ASLA supports:

- Community and stakeholder engagement that provides fair and meaningful public participation opportunities for all communities.
- Environmental and community planning and design that equitably assesses and balances the socioeconomic impacts of proposed environmental and land-use decisions.
- Planning and design decision-making processes that not only acknowledge past inequitable and harmful policies and practices, but also provide a road map to equitable decisions.
- Scholarships and initiatives that support and empower minority and Black and Indigenous People of Color (BIPOC) communities within landscape architecture and affiliated fields.^{1,2}

Justification

Landscape architects are trained 1) to approach all communities as having the right to a healthy environment and 2) to provide a shared platform for a diverse assemblage of voices throughout the design process. Landscape architects create environments where all people enjoy the same degree of protection from environmental and health hazards. Additionally, landscape architects prioritize equal access during the decision-making process. This equal access is critical for meaningful and equitable representation and involvement by all persons. Landscape architects are continually working to improve the design and engagement processes in order to address past environmental injustices. Landscape architects also act to diversify representation and perspectives on environmental justice within the industry through identification of scholarships, collaborations, and professional opportunities.

Issue

Historically, economically disadvantaged communities and disenfranchised groups have been disproportionately exposed to environmental hazards and harmful environmental conditions. Case studies have shown that neighborhoods with lower income and

¹ ASLA DEI Initiatives

² LAF DEI Initiatives

education levels are likely to have greater air pollution exposure. Unless addressed, these issues will continue to cause long-lasting harm to affected communities.

These communities historically were not afforded equitable participation in the decision-making process, and today, these communities have disproportionately less access to environmental benefits, such as parks, green amenities, recreational opportunities, transportation services, health care facilities and healthy food options. In response, the environmental justice movement has utilized grassroots activism focused on the rights and liberties of people of color and low-income communities that bear a disproportionate burden of industrial pollution and regulatory negligence.

While master planning and urban greening projects have benefited cities, there is evidence to suggest that they also play a role in eco-gentrification. Planning and design practices to improve the landscape are subject to the risk of potential displacement of existing communities as a result of rising land values. With an increased interest in urban greening projects by both the private and public sector, designed green spaces have the opportunity—for better or worse—to greatly impact communities. Appropriately applied designs that address environmental justice can provide benefits to a community far beyond the initial planning and implementation process.

Resources

“Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.” American Society of Landscape Architects.

<https://www.asla.org/dei.aspx>

Environmental Justice Definition. The United States Environmental Protection Agency.

<https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice>

“Learn About Environmental Justice.” EPA, Environmental Protection Agency.

<https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice>

Vulnerable Populations Definition. National Collaborating Center for Determinants of Health. <https://nccdh.ca/glossary/entry/vulnerable-populations>

“LAF Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Resources.” Landscape Architecture Foundation.

<https://www.lafoundation.org/resources/2020/12/dei-resource-guide>.

Related Policies

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| Air Quality | Vegetation and the built environment |
| Invasive Species | Water quality and conservation |
| Open Space | Waterways |
| State, regional, and local parks and trail systems | |

Additionally, all the policies in the Public Affairs subcategory of ASLA Public Policies have a relationship with Environmental Justice.