

Environmental Studies Program: Studies Development Plan | FY 2023–2024

Title	Piloting an Approach to Community-Informed Characterization of Environmental Justice (EJ) Communities Potentially Impacted by BOEM-Authorized Activities (NT-23-05)
Administered by	Office of Environmental Programs
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Procurement Type(s)	Contract, Inter-agency Agreement, Cooperative Agreement
Conducting Organization(s)	TBD
Total BOEM Cost	TBD
Performance Period	FY 2022–2025
Final Report Due	Spring 2025
Date Revised	March 31, 2021
PICOC Summary	-
<i><u>Problem</u></i>	Environmental analyses at BOEM could provide better support for decision-making with more specific information on the EJ communities that may be affected by BOEM-authorized activities. Sections within National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documents currently discuss potential EJ impacts in a general sense. To present analysis on potential impacts on communities, it is critical to first characterize communities so that impacts can be analyzed within local contexts, and ideally with local input.
<i><u>Intervention</u></i>	Develop and conduct a pilot application of an approach to utilize existing data in conjunction with community-provided input to produce short community characterization summaries.
<i><u>Comparison</u></i>	Without community characterizations, NEPA assessments will likely continue to describe communities generally and may fail to acknowledge local contexts and impacts to EJ communities, including overlooking impact nuances between communities.
<i><u>Outcome</u></i>	A collection of brief EJ community characterization summaries for approximately 10 communities within three chosen study areas, a subset of which would include targeted community input.
<i><u>Context</u></i>	A pilot study of selected areas representing various stages of BOEM’s energy-related processes

BOEM Information Need(s): Various Federal statutes, including NEPA, require BOEM to examine the social and economic impacts of BOEM-authorized activities at the community level. Additionally, policy and guidance related to environmental justice calls for meaningful engagement and access to decision-making processes for EJ communities (E.O. 12898, E.O. 13985, E.O. 14008, U.S. EPA 2016). BOEM’s planning and engagement efforts, and NEPA documents, could be improved with more detailed information about EJ communities. Sections on EJ in some environmental impact statements speak broadly about entire regions or discuss generalized impacts, rarely including information linked to a

specific community context. Baseline information to support community characterization is available but has not been effectively applied in analyses to identify local contexts. With short summaries readily accessible, BOEM analysts could better understand the affected environment and potential impacts and could include select language from summaries or incorporate by reference into environmental analyses. Furthermore, conducting community-informed research could advance earlier community awareness of BOEM activities and support building foundational and trusted relationships. Gaining first-hand information will help “ground-truth” some of the existing information that would be collated into the community characterization summaries. Considering the scale and pace at which energy planning, leasing, and development (especially offshore wind) is expected to occur over the next decade, BOEM may be well served to explore efficient yet meaningful approaches to understanding and describing EJ communities that can be implemented as needed.

Background: There is a substantial amount of data currently available and accessible to inform the EJ community characterization summaries, including indicators on poverty, population composition, and personal disruption. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries maintains the Community Social Vulnerability Indicators (CSVIs), which is a national effort to develop indicators to uniquely characterize community well-being and evaluate vulnerability and resilience of coastal communities to disturbances (regulations, sea level rise, etc.). Other related information includes climate change indicators (sea level rise risk, storm surge risk), economic indicators (labor force structure, housing characteristics), and gentrification pressure (housing disruption, retiree migration, urban sprawl). Efforts to create EJ community characterization summaries would build upon all existing data or information on communities. However, community characterization summaries would focus on issues and concerns directly related to BOEM-authorized activities, particularly offshore wind, and engagement efforts with communities in collaboration with other agencies such as, but not limited to, the U.S. Department of Energy’s Wind Energy Technologies Office, NOAA, and Sea Grant. This effort will also look at what indicators or other considerations should be expanded to better address new information needs or to meet the evolving guidance on EJ or best practices for assessing impacts and engaging with EJ communities. NOAA Fisheries and BOEM both recognize overlapping elements between equity and EJ and will work closely to shape this research to fully consider intersections with energy justice and other types of justice. NOAA Fisheries’ subject matter experts have provided support to BOEM in identifying EJ research needs and will continue to work with BOEM to shape this research, recognizing the importance of a collaborative study to gain knowledge and fill knowledge gaps about EJ communities. NOAA Fisheries is working to update their fishing community profiles and can reference and use the information collected in BOEM’s study to better characterize EJ concerns. This pilot study can also inform approaches for future data collections important to fulfilling both BOEM and NOAA Fisheries goals of understanding equity and EJ concerns.

Objectives:

- Characterize EJ communities, using existing information, to expand BOEM’s knowledge of communities and populations that may potentially be affected by BOEM-authorized activities and associated onshore infrastructure.
- Pilot an approach to developing locally informed summaries that will highlight unique contexts and concerns of EJ communities around offshore energy planning and activities.
- Improve early engagement with EJ communities in offshore wind planning and incorporation of community information and data into environmental analyses.

- Record preliminary ideas on additional information, data, or decision tools needed in the future to more fully evaluate potential impacts on EJ communities.

Methods: This study would pilot an approach to develop community characterizations. These characterizations would involve several components, beginning with a discussion between the principal investigator and BOEM to select 3 areas and identify approximately 10 communities in each area in which to conduct pilot community characterizations, for a total of approximately 30 community characterizations. The study would consolidate, review, and analyze the representation of existing data from multiple sources into a readily available format. BOEM and the principal investigator would then identify a small subset of communities, approximately three to five communities total, to collect primary information. The principal investigator would contact community leaders, key informants, and community organizations to request review of and local input into the characterizations of their community.

An important source of data will likely be NOAA Fisheries' CSVI Toolbox. NOAA Fisheries would provide support on best practices for using this data. Other data sources to consider include EPA's EJScreen, the Economics: National Ocean Watch (ENOW) data set, the U.S. Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and other sources of relevant information (including qualitative, written, or oral information). For primary research on the small subset of communities, the contractor shall fund and facilitate stipends to compensate community organization leaders or other selected key informants for their participation, modeled after contracts for BOEM's tribal engagement efforts. This research will identify specific vulnerabilities (e.g., displacement, gentrification), needs (e.g., resources to engage), preferences (e.g., desire to change jobs, cultural values), adaptive capacities (e.g., job training), barriers to engagement (e.g., languages, accessibility), or any other information deemed relevant through study planning or preliminary discussions. After conducting primary research, the community information would be coded and analyzed to develop a thematic analysis and identify where views aligned or were different.

Community summaries will highlight characteristics that identify vulnerabilities, themes, issues, or concerns of each community. Each community summary would include relevant history, demographics, economics, coastal and marine resource use, coastal land use including existing facilities, outreach approaches that are locally appropriate for that specific EJ community, identification of key community leaders and organizations, and other baseline conditions that will enable BOEM analysts to better incorporate specific community interests into environmental reviews and the decision-making process. These summaries would be accompanied by a methodology document describing summary objectives, methods, data sources, definitions, and other relevant information.

Specific Research Question(s):

1. What are the social, economic, and cultural characteristics of each identified EJ community, as reflected in available secondary data?
2. What additional insights and characteristics can be gained through community-provided information?
3. When is the best time within the planning, leasing, or development process to conduct community summaries for BOEM use?
4. Based on knowledge gained during this research, what are some additional data gathering efforts or decision tool developments that could be useful to develop in the future for assessing impacts on EJ communities?

Current Status: N/A

Publications Completed: N/A

Affiliated WWW Sites:

Webtool: <https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/data-and-tools/social-indicators/>

Methodology: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/socioeconomics/social-indicator-supporting-information>

References:

NOAA Fisheries Office of Science and Technology. 2019. NOAA Fisheries Community Social Vulnerability Indicators (CSVIs). Version 3. Silver Spring (MD): National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Office of Science of Technology; [updated 2020 Dec 21].
<https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/socioeconomics/social-indicators-coastal-communities>

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 2016. Promising practices for EJ methodologies in NEPA reviews; report of the Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice and NEPA Committee. Washington (DC): U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. 56 p.