



A RIVER FOR ALL

Inclusive Environmental Action

January 2024

The Elizabeth River Project recognizes that marginalized communities historically have borne an unfair burden of pollution without the full benefits of river access on the Elizabeth as around the nation. Environmental justice, or addressing this imbalance, is recognized as a necessary component of environmental leadership today.

Engaging marginalized communities to address one or more of their environmental needs, and/or reducing your company's environmental impact affecting nearby communities as well as improving the inclusiveness of your business practices, all can strengthen your standing as a River Star Business. Documentation of at least one significant effort in inclusive environmental action, commensurate to the size and nature of the organization, is expected for recognition of new Model Level applicants in 2024. Participants achieving Model Level in previous years will need to meet this criteria when recertifying.

Here are three ways to get started. You can begin with one or all three:

1. Get to know the marginalized communities near you and improve communication and engagement.
2. As part of engagement with a marginalized community, consider a project in the community reflecting needs residents helped identify.
3. Achieve more equitable business practices in your operations.

ENGAGE MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Come to know the marginalized communities near your business and the concerns of their residents related to the environment. Consult a mapping tool to understand relevant data such as the Elizabeth River Environmental Justice Mapping Tool - [Environmental Justice Mapping Tool - Elizabeth River Project](#) (Virginia Institute of Marine Science). Contact Jamie Melvin, jmelvin@elizabethriver.org for help using the tool to identify neighborhoods near you and for help engaging communities effectively. Elizabeth River Project can share lessons learned from successful engagement in marginalized communities.

The effectiveness of inclusive environmental action depends on the degree to which the affected community is engaged, heard and involved in your decision-making. Approaches could include:

- Collaborate with impacted communities to identify community environmental concerns and one or more ways your business can help. Examples of how to collaborate might be establishing a community advisory board or resource group to work with your business, participating on a civic league, or holding a listening session in the community at a popular gathering spot.
- Develop or support educational programs that raise awareness about environmental issues in low-income communities. These programs can include workshops, seminars,

and school partnerships to empower residents with knowledge and tools to address environmental challenges.

- Form partnerships with local environmental justice organizations, nonprofits, and community groups to collaboratively identify and address the specific needs of underserved communities.
- Consider public facing communication with the community such as a newsletter, social media, events, etc.

COMMUNITY PROJECTS

Here are examples of potential projects you could discuss with a marginalized community to determine if residents would find them beneficial. Be sure to engage in this meaningful dialogue before proceeding:

- Collaborate with local communities to create or improve access to the river, or create or enhance green spaces, parks, and recreational areas in underserved neighborhoods.
- Plant native species in the neighborhood. Consider native trees in intensely developed areas to help reduce the heat island effect.
- Invest in renewable energy projects in disadvantaged areas. This can help reduce energy costs for residents, create local jobs, and decrease reliance on fossil fuels.
- Establish training programs that provide skills and opportunities for community members to participate in the green economy. This could include training in fields like renewable energy installation, sustainable agriculture, and environmental restoration.
- Collaborate with local organizations to implement waste reduction and recycling initiatives in communities facing waste management challenges.
- Develop or support affordable housing projects that incorporate sustainable building practices, energy-efficient technologies, and green infrastructure. This can improve living conditions for residents while minimizing environmental impact.
- Partner with local farmers and food cooperatives to improve access to fresh, healthy, and locally sourced food in underserved neighborhoods. This can address food deserts and promote sustainable agriculture.

EQUITABLE BUSINESS PRACTICES

- Promote environmental justice, equity, inclusion, and diversity in your strategic plans and policies.
- Conduct equity impact assessments for all environmental initiatives to identify potential disparities and ensure benefits are distributed equitably.
- Reduce air emissions affecting the surrounding community with practices such as no idle policy for trucks, improving traffic flow to reduce congestion in the neighborhood, and other general air quality controls.
- Address legacy contamination which may be impacting surrounding areas.
- Reduce fugitive litter and debris from your business. Consider regular cleanups, street sweeping, and other Best Management Practices (BMPs).

- Supplier diversity and equity-centered procurement goals:
 - Establish supplier diversity programs that actively seek partnerships with minority-owned and socially responsible businesses.
 - Establish clear procurement goals that emphasize both SWaM participation and environmental justice considerations.
 - Prioritize contracts that align with sustainability and promote the well-being of marginalized communities.
 - Ensure fair evaluation and selection processes for suppliers to encourage inclusivity.
 - Host supplier diversity fairs or networking events that highlight eco-friendly SWaM businesses.
- Diverse hiring and inclusion:
 - Actively recruit from the community and include community representation in your business leadership.
 - Establish diverse hiring practices to ensure a representative workforce across all levels of the organization.
 - Implement blind recruitment processes to minimize unconscious bias during candidate selection.
- Diverse leadership development:
 - Implement mentorship and sponsorship programs to support the growth of underrepresented employees into leadership roles.
 - Create leadership development initiatives that intentionally seek out and nurture diverse talent.
- Consider partnering with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) to offer black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) internships or scholarships relating to the environment. Such internships could have focus areas such as:
 - Equitable Sustainability Planning Intern - Develop organizational sustainability plans that are inclusive and considerate of marginalized groups.
 - Equity in Supply Chain Intern - Offer internships that evaluate the company's supply chain for equity and environmental impact. Interns could research suppliers, assess their labor and environmental practices, and recommend changes to ensure a fair and sustainable supply chain.
 - Diversity and Inclusion Intern - Develop internships focused on enhancing diversity and inclusion within the company's environmental initiatives. Interns could contribute to developing strategies to attract diverse talent, creating inclusive workplaces, and promoting diverse voices in decision-making.



More information and application forms for shining as a River Star Business can be found at www.RiverStarBusinesses.org or contact Pam Boatwright at pboatwright@elizabethriver.org, 757-828-5422 or 757-288-1379 (cell).