

Evaluation of the 2013 NCEJN Summit

There were 146 registrants including 99 females and 47 males. Of 112 registrants for whom race was known, 49% were African American, 46% were white, and 5% were other race. At least 22 students attended the Summit representing four in-state and one out-of-state colleges and universities. Overall, Summit attendees represented 23 environmental and social advocacy groups, 14 citizen and community groups, 9 colleges and universities (4 out-of-state, 5 in-state), 5 law groups, 2 federal agencies, 1 state agency, and 1 religious group. Federal agency representatives who had planned to attend, including several from NIEHS and EPA, could not attend due to the federal government shut-down.

Key Results:

- 40 of 42 respondents to a survey of opinions about the Friday sessions agreed that research presentations increased their understanding of environmental justice issues, and 39 of 40 agreed that the research session effectively promoted interactions between community members and researchers.
- 30 of 47 respondents to a survey about the Saturday session said that 2013 was their first Summit. All 47 agreed that the Summit accomplished its objectives to increase understanding of environmental justice issues and strengthen relationships among community members.
- 44 of 45 respondents agreed that the Summit accomplished its objective to strengthen relationships between researchers and community members, and 38 of 44 respondents agreed that the Summit facilitated communication between community members and government officials.
- 45 of 56 respondents agreed that the Summit accomplished its objective to “Appreciate the role of both youth and elders in the environmental justice movement.”
- 43 of 43 respondents stated that they, their community, or their organization benefitted from attending the Summit.
- 43 of 44 respondents were satisfied with clarity of Summit materials and presentations, and 40 of 43 respondents were satisfied with

responsiveness of Summit organizers to their needs, questions and concerns.

The following quotations from post-Summit emails, evaluation forms, and interviews with 2013 NCEJN Summit participants support the survey results and illustrate the value and impact of the Summit on people's lives, work and communities:

I attended the Summit to get insight on how to organize and promote more communication about the problem in our community. I got better ideas about how to organize.... I learned we have to get more people involved. We can't do this alone.... It was encouraging to hear that other people have gotten where they are, and that it will take time.

- Community member, western NC

I've attended the Summit since 1999. It has been so enlightening and educational to me. It gave me some power. I learned about things I didn't know we had a right to know. I met people and organizations that could help. I learned things to bring back to my community and formed our [community] group. The next year, two from my community went [to the Summit]. After that, five attended for several years. If they ever go one time they will have the desire to continue to go. As long as I am up and well I will always go to the Summit.

- Community member, northeastern NC

Participating in the work of the perceptive people who are fighting for their communities and the scientists allied with them was transformative for all of us. I began to revise my syllabi while still at the conference. Since we returned, the three students involved have engaged their peers in awareness and action.

- College instructor, NC

The dissertation process . . . can be very isolating. It was great . . . to see my work again in the context of everyday life [and] get feedback from people who experience the issues I am researching and writing about each day. . . . the EJ summit provides, promotes, and sets forth expectations that EJ research is a collaborative effort with academics and community members. I also found all of the sessions extremely well organized and helpful both for research purposes and for bringing community members,

academics, lawyers, and others together as people working on issues as teams.

- Graduate student, MA

The NC EJ Summit provides the opportunity for community members to be heard and the chance to express their concerns to multiple agency representatives at once (as opposed to having to contact separate divisions or departments). The agency representatives have the opportunity to hear the concerns and to consider how they can work together to address the community issues.

- Panelist, North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources

I left the 2013 EJ Summit feeling much more informed and energized about the power of engaged communities and the potential for making a difference in the environmental health [for] all people. For one thing, I was deeply impressed by the range and the sheer bandwidth of practical knowledge, wisdom and activism among people living in rural areas that were unfamiliar to me. It was refreshing to get a grassroots "pulse" on hog farms, environmental justice, food deserts and lots of other pressing issues that are rarely touched on by large scale environmental groups. Of course, I live in the Chicken belt and so the awful problems with massive Hog farms are less familiar to me--but that's the point. This is information that will help me make a difference! The depth of passion and righteous anger about this and other problems and disparities is formidable and it deserves to be heard by a much wider pool of people and communities. I was proud and honored to be present. Moreover, I've been told for years the myth that people of color do not care so much about the environment and I am pleased to see tangible evidence that this is not the case at all. That the energy, commitment, knowledge and practical wisdom shared at the Environmental Summit are not only making a difference, but clearly it is helping to create justice both for people and the planet while mentoring leadership on these issues for the future. Incidentally, I think part of the power and value of the Summits is that they are planned, executed and populated by the grassroots instead of being led by professional environmentalists. This really makes the information being shared a lot more accessible and much more likely that it will genuinely make a difference....

- Environmental organization director