



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

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OFFICE OF
INTERNATIONAL & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Marina Brock
Chair, U.S. Governmental Advisory Committee
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Dear Ms. Brock:

On behalf of CEC Council member, Administrator Michael S. Regan, thank you for the Governmental Advisory Committee's (GAC) letter of advice dated January 20, 2023. We appreciate the GAC's dedication and commitment to undertaking your charge and providing us with your valuable advice. In particular, we appreciate the GAC's comprehensive advice on the challenges and ways to engage with early warning systems for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation actions; as well as how to facilitate a broader, more inclusive, and more effective engagement of key sub-national actors in North America in shaping the CEC's climate adaptation initiative.

I am pleased to offer the following responses to the GAC's recommendations to the three (3) charge questions:

(1) Engagement of Sub-Actors in North America to shape CEC climate adaptation initiative.

Thank you for your recommendation to reach out to academic groups, including universities, colleges and schools as they can assist in the CEC's efforts to engage a broader and more inclusive key players. We agree that the CEC partnership with Oklahoma University's National Weather Center was a successful example. GAC's specific recommendations of community and NGO organizations, indigenous groups, and experts provided is a valuable resource to inform the development of this initiative. Thank you also for offering your advice on how to better communicate with sub-national actors. GAC's advice complements current communication strategies by focusing on their local needs and identifying reliable communication channels to increase engagement and facilitate expertise and knowledge sharing.

We appreciate the GAC highlighting CEC's Communities for Environmental Justice (EJ) Network project as an example of a learning and information exchange resource for underserved communities, and for sharing the State of Vermont's public engagement process as an example of effective public consultation process. We agree that effectively connecting and engaging with communities and the public is essential.

(2) Develop a better understanding of barriers and challenges to ensure national and sub-national early warning systems provide the right level of awareness for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation actions.

We appreciate your detail discussion on the issues and challenges that prevent people from early warning systems or communication networks needed to get needed information at the right time. Although some challenges fall outside the scope and capabilities of the CEC's (e.g., lack of internet capabilities in rural and indigenous areas), other like engaging and building trust with indigenous communities are within the scope of EPA and the CEC. For example, EPA's Tribal program has helped federally recognized Tribes develop their own environmental programs consistent with the 1984 EPA Policy for the Administration of Environmental Programs on Indian Reservations. Additionally, EPA will continue working with Environmental Justice Tribal and Indigenous Peoples Advisors, and with our counterparts in the CEC, to implement strategies tailored to their specific needs that will protect the environment and public health of Tribes and other indigenous peoples. Since 2015, the three parties to the CEC agreed to incorporate Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) into CEC initiatives and established the CEC TEK Expert Group. The TEK Expert Group works with local and indigenous communities across North America to enhance our shared understanding of the environment and to help make more effective environmental decisions.

We also appreciate providing examples of when early warning systems have been successful and not, particularly in rural and indigenous communities, and the recommendation to use lessons learned to build on work already in progress. We appreciate sharing the experiences from the Inter-Tribal Council of Arizona to communicate with tribal communities and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in providing satellite information to be used for emergency preparedness and response efforts.

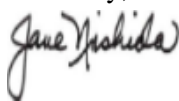
We agree that strengthening the collaboration and coordination between nations, state, tribal, regional, and local organizations that could substantially improve early warning systems, and with other federal agencies, will be crucial in developing CEC's projects and to enhance the work we implement. We would like to note that other federal agencies like the Department of Energy and NOAA have been an integral part of projects related to their mandate/areas of expertise. We expect to continue such collaborations as we develop this initiative and to share EPA examples of early warning systems such as Smoke Sense.

(3) Stimulate uptake of nature-based climate adaptation actions and community early warning systems at the sub-national level across North America.

We appreciate the examples provided to identify susceptible areas, collaborate in preparedness and response efforts, and strengthen local networks. We also appreciate the recommendation to consider language needs of the intended recipients to promote communities in accepting and implementing early warning systems, particularly for Indigenous communities and populations that speaks English as a second language. We will take in consideration these recommendations and examples when building the climate adaptation initiative.

Thank you again for your commitment to protecting public health and environment in North America and support of our trilateral work in the CEC to strengthen cooperation and climate adaptation.

Sincerely,



Jane Nishida
Assistant Administrator
Office of International and Tribal Affairs

