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Environmental Protection Agency**

FISCAL YEAR 2024

**Justification of Appropriation
Estimates for the
Committee on Appropriations**

Tab 02: Cross-Agency Strategies

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**Environmental Protection Agency
2024 Annual Performance Plan and Congressional Justification**

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Cross-Agency Strategy 1: Ensure Scientific Integrity and Science-Based Decision Making

Deliver rigorous scientific research and analyses to inform evidence-based decision making.

EPA's ability to protect human health and the environment depends on the integrity and quality of the information, data, and evidence that secure the scientific foundation for Agency decision making. Identifying and implementing effective strategies, including strategies to adapt to the changing climate, advance environmental justice and equity, and protect children at all life stages, require that decisions be grounded in the best available science and evidence. EPA's Cross-Agency Strategy 1 in the *FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan* will strengthen scientific integrity, advance the delivery of rigorous and independent scientific evaluation and analyses, and ground EPA's actions in the best available science.

Cross-Agency Strategy 1, Ensure Scientific Integrity and Science-Based Decision Making is directly supported by the following long-term performance goals in the *FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan*:

- By September 30, 2026, increase the annual percentage of Office of Research and Development (ORD) research products meeting partner needs to 95% from a baseline of 93% in FY 2021.¹
- By September 30, 2026, implement 126 actions for scientific integrity objectives that are certified by Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials in each EPA program and region.

Science touches all parts of EPA and plays an integral role in informing a range of environmental decisions. EPA program and regional offices support this strategy through a commitment to science as foundational to decision making, scientific integrity, rigorous quality assurance, appropriate peer review, the timely release of scientific information, and transparency in decision making.

As part of this commitment, the Agency will ensure an effective scientific integrity program. Scientific integrity results from adherence to professional values and practices when conducting, communicating, supervising, and developing and implementing science. It ensures objectivity, clarity, reproducibility, and utility, and it safeguards against bias, fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, outside interference, censorship, and inadequate procedures and information security. EPA will advance and strengthen a culture of scientific integrity across the Agency by ensuring adherence to the scientific and ethical standards outlined in EPA's Scientific Integrity Policy. To support employees, contractors, and officials, EPA will provide Agencywide training on scientific integrity. Employees, contractors, and officials have access to the Scientific Integrity Official and staff and a network of Deputy Scientific Integrity Officials on whom they can rely for advice or to report allegations of a loss of scientific integrity.²

¹ ORD is tracking environmental justice and climate products as annual performance goals. Please see the annual performance plan table in the President's Budget (<https://www.epa.gov/planandbudget/cj>) for more information.

² The Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 promotes a culture of evaluation and continuous learning that ensures agency decisions are made on the best available evidence including developing an Evaluations and Other Evidence-

EPA's research and science programs support this strategy through the delivery of rigorous scientific research and analyses. The primary mission of the Agency's Office of Research and Development and Regional Lab Enterprise is to provide leading-edge research to meet near-term and long-term science needs of the Agency and inform EPA decisions. This research portfolio also supports the emerging needs of tribal, state, and community partners. Scientific research and development will support: 1) tackling the climate crisis by addressing the causes and consequences of climate change and developing more resilient communities; 2) addressing current, emerging, and long-term water resource challenges; 3) developing scientific and technical approaches to enhance the Agency's ability to evaluate chemicals and their risks; 4) accelerating the pace of cleanups at contaminated sites so they can be returned to beneficial use; 5) revitalizing and protecting the most vulnerable communities and groups; and 6) conducting environmental risk assessments to better inform policies for protecting human health, particularly for children at all life stages. The Agency's regional laboratories provide essential expertise and scientific data for a wide array of media needed to make local decisions. In FY 2024, regional laboratories will analyze scientific data to inform immediate and near-term decisions on environmental conditions, emergency response, compliance, and enforcement.

In FY 2024, the Agency will continue critical research on the highest priority issues. EPA will focus on addressing lead issues associated with the Superfund and childhood lead exposure. The Agency also will continue to emphasize per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) research to increase understanding of PFAS exposures, human health and ecological effects, and technologies for reducing PFAS in the environment. In addition, the Agency will continue to advance the Administration's science-based approach to improve wildfire readiness by enhancing wildfire data and communications related to air quality and helping communities become "smoke ready."

Cross-Agency Strategy 2: Consider the Health of Children at All Life Stages and Other Vulnerable Populations

Focus on protecting and improving the health of children at all life stages and other vulnerable populations in implementing our programs.

EPA's programs will apply and promote the use of science, policy, partnerships, communications, and action to protect children at all life stages and other vulnerable populations from adverse health effects resulting from exposure to pollution and the impacts of climate change. EPA also will take actions to protect children and other vulnerable populations in underserved communities where socioeconomic determinants of health exacerbate the harm caused by these environmental stressors.

Children's environmental health refers to the effect of the environment on children's growth, wellness, development, and risk of disease. EPA actions will be informed by two important considerations: first, the scientific understanding of childhood as a sequence of life stages, and second, the recognition that protecting children's health is necessary to protect human health, because every adult was once a child. The effects of early life exposures may become apparent during childhood or may not arise until adulthood or in later generations.

Cross-Agency Strategy 2, Consider the Health of Children at All Life Stages and Other Vulnerable Populations is directly supported by the following long-term performance goal in the *FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan*:

- By September 30, 2026, assess and consider environmental health information and data for children at all life stages for EPA actions that concern human health.³

To best protect children's environmental health at all life stages and vulnerable populations, EPA will identify, assess, develop, and promote the use of science to support its policies, decisions, and actions, including regulations and voluntary programs. EPA also will ensure that Agency toxicity, exposure, and risk assessments consider all relevant and available science to address the unique vulnerabilities of children and vulnerable populations, including disproportionate impacts related to race, ethnicity, income, existing health problems, or other social determinants of health.

In FY 2024, EPA's Children's Health Program will continue its core work to:

- Coordinate and advance the protection of children's environmental health across EPA by assisting with development of regulations, improving risk assessment and science policy, implementing community-level outreach and education programs, and tracking indicators of progress on children's health.
- Coordinate two plenary meetings of the Children's Health Protection Advisory Committee,⁴ including delivery of expert responses to additional charge questions related to high priority children's environmental health issues.

³ Changed from "By September 30, 2026, assess and consider environmental health information and data for children at all life stages for all completed EPA actions that concern human health."

⁴ For additional information, please visit: <https://www.epa.gov/children/chpac>.

- Tackle the climate crisis and advance environmental justice by following up on recommendations from the National Academy of Sciences, which highlighted the latest scientific advancement and challenges to protecting children’s health, and continue to implement the *2021 Policy on Children’s Health* to ensure that EPA consistently and explicitly considers early life exposures and lifelong health in all human health decisions.⁵
- Support health care professionals via the Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units to better address risks from childhood exposures, particularly in communities with environmental justice concerns.
- Partner with the Department of Health and Human Services to lead the cross-federal President’s Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children.⁶

To continue to implement Executive Order (EO) 13045: *Protection of Children from Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks* in FY 2024 EPA also will:

- Support the EPA Administrator to convene the President’s Task Force on Environmental Health Risks and Safety Risks to Children. The focus of this work will be on protecting children from adverse consequences of climate change and disasters, addressing disparities in asthma among children, and reducing childhood lead poisoning.
- Take actions to protect children in underserved communities who suffer disproportionately from the effects of pollution exposures exacerbated by socio-economic determinants of health.

⁵ For additional information, please visit: <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25466/vibrant-and-healthy-kids-aligning-science-practice-and-policy-to>.

⁶ For additional information, please visit: <https://ptfcehs.niehs.nih.gov/>.

Cross-Agency Strategy 3: Advance EPA’s Organizational Excellence and Workforce Equity

Foster a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce within an effective and mission-driven workplace.

To support its mission to protect human health and the environment, EPA will make significant progress in FY 2024 to advance organizational excellence and workforce equity. The Agency will strengthen workforce planning of mission-critical positions and support succession management for the next generation of workers while emphasizing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). EPA will modernize information technology systems, enhance the physical workplace for a hybrid workforce, support employee-friendly work policies, and transition to a paperless work environment. EPA will focus on implementing efficient and effective processes across the full range of Agency efforts, utilizing proven continuous improvement techniques and training to equip staff to solve problems and enhance our ability to accomplish our mission. Additionally, EPA will continue to safeguard against cybersecurity risks to protect Agency assets and infrastructure from potentially malicious attacks. Further, EPA will be a leader in the federal government in advancing the sustainability of facilities and operations while developing resiliency to respond to the risks of climate change. EPA will eliminate barriers to its procurement processes through greater diversification of the Agency’s vendor base, increasing engagement and technical assistance, and enhancing the Agency’s contracts with new vendors, including with small and underserved businesses and targeting businesses located in Historically Underutilized Business Zones (HUBZones).⁷ EPA will continue to provide resource stewardship to ensure that all agency programs operate with fiscal responsibility and management integrity, financial services are efficiently and consistently delivered nationwide, and programs demonstrate results.

Cross-Agency Strategy 3, Advance EPA’s Organizational Excellence and Workforce Equity is directly supported by the following long-term performance goals in the FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan:

- By September 30, 2026, EPA will achieve the highest Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DEIA) Maturity Level of “Leading and Sustaining” as defined by the November 2021 *Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA in the Federal Workforce* and achieve all EPA goals identified in the Agency’s Gender Equity and Equality Action Plan.
- By September 30, 2026, improve 1,000 operational processes.
- By September 30, 2026, initiate all priority climate resiliency projects for EPA-owned facilities within 24 months of a completed facility climate assessment and project prioritization.

⁷ For additional information, please consult the Small Business Administration’s HUBZone Program webpage: <https://www.sba.gov/federal-contracting/contracting-assistance-programs/hubzone-program>.

- By September 30, 2026, EPA will be in full compliance with the five high-priority directives in Executive Order 14028 - *Improving the Nation's Cybersecurity*.
- By September 30, 2026, award 4% of EPA contract spending to small businesses located in HUBZones compared to the FY 2018-2020 average annual baseline of 2.2%.
- By September 30, 2026, automate the major EPA permitting programs.
- By September 30, 2026, automate all priority internal administrative processes.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to implement the Agency's DEIA Plan to advance progress towards recruiting and maintaining a workforce representative of the American public that promotes a culture of inclusion and accessibility within the Agency. By the end of FY 2024, EPA will have achieved at least the Level 2: Advancing Outcomes maturity level as defined by the November 2021 Government-wide Strategic Plan to Advance DEIA in the Federal Workforce.⁸

In FY 2024, EPA will make progress towards equity goals by eliminating barriers in its procurement processes and increasing the amount of spending on small and disadvantaged businesses. EPA will provide technical assistance to small business vendors on navigating federal contracting requirements and ensure that new EPA procurements are accessible in scope and requirements for small businesses to successfully compete. This work will yield an increase in contract spending awarded to small and disadvantaged businesses, including those located in HUBZones.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to implement its Future of Work plans that will re-envision both the workforce and the physical workspace of the Agency. Activities will include modernization and transformation of collaborative spaces across several Agency facilities to encourage seamless engagement of a hybrid workforce, leveraging the latest collaboration and productivity IT tools and software, and a continued investment in IT infrastructure to sustain the increase in telework, remote work, and operational readiness. Additionally, EPA will continue to manage flexible workforce policies and procedures that maximize productivity to support a hybrid workforce and enable EPA to be a model employer.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to pursue information technology systems and infrastructure modernization, innovation, and automation of internal administrative forms and processes to achieve a paperless work environment. To support the Agency's Cybersecurity posture, EPA will continue to accelerate cloud adoption. In addition, EPA will continue to increase adoption of Multifactor Authentication, encryption for Agency systems and data, adoption of a Zero Trust Architecture, and meeting advanced logging requirements to accomplish Executive Order (EO) 14028: *Improving the Nation's Cybersecurity*.

In FY 2024, in support of EO 14008: *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, EPA will conduct climate resiliency assessments at six EPA-owned facilities. These assessments will include identifying potential projects the Agency can implement to increase facility resiliency

⁸ For more information, please refer to: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategic-Plan-to-Advance-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-and-Accessibility-in-the-Federal-Workforce-11.23.21.pdf>.

against the impacts of climate change, such as roofing stability, building envelope, and emergency power projects. Following completion of a climate assessment, EPA will initiate high-priority projects within 24 months. Further, EPA will continue progress towards achieving carbon-pollution free energy use and net-zero emissions in line with Administration sustainability goals.

In FY 2024, the Agency will continue to modernize its financial systems to gain greater efficiencies by improving accounting systems and retiring legacy systems. OCFO is evolving duplicative and manual work by automating and modifying business processes and enhancing the ability to generate automated reports. Robotics Process Automation (BOTS) will be a part of the overall strategy to reduce manual work, decrease error, and improve efficiency. In FY 2024, EPA will continue to expand and enhance easy to use dashboards to manage resources and track performance. Adopting Treasury's Invoice Processing Platform and G-Invoicing solution (for interagency agreements) will further standardize processes and allow for retirement of legacy administrative systems. Additionally, the Agency will leverage senior staff engagement in continuous improvement through nearly 100 executive-sponsored improvement projects annually. EPA is also applying continuous improvement tools and initiatives to support IJA implementation with an emphasis on improving processes related to hiring and grants.

In FY 2024, EPA will collaborate with the Agency's major permitting programs to establish the target number of permit processes to be automated.⁹ Automation of permit processes will reduce processing time on issuing permits, decrease the time between receiving monitoring data and engaging in enforcement actions, and foster transparency by allowing communities to search, track, and access permitting actions easily. Further, permit automation will enable the integration of climate change and environmental justice considerations into permit processes and ensure that they are addressed within the terms and conditions of the permit. For the regulated community, permit automation will allow for a simplified, streamlined, and transparent permitting process that will result in time and costs savings. For communities and stakeholders, permit automation can empower communities, especially communities with environmental justice concerns, to actively participate in the permit decision-making process and post-permit related compliance.

⁹ Broad statutory frameworks for the permitting programs are found in Sections 165, 173, and 502 of the Clean Air Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 7475, 7503, and 7661a); Section 402 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S.C. § 1342); Section 3006 of the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (42 U.S.C. § 6926), and Section 1422 and Section 1425 of the Safe Drinking Water Act (42 U.S.C. §§ 300h and 300h-4).

Cross-Agency Strategy 4: Strengthen Tribal, State, and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement

Collaborate and engage effectively with Tribal Nations in keeping with the Federal Government's trust responsibilities, state and local governments, regulated entities, and the public to protect human health and the environment.

Protecting human health and the environment is a shared responsibility of EPA and its tribal, state, and local government partners. With tribal governments, EPA also has a historic and fundamental trust responsibility. Environmental outcomes are best achieved through collaborative and effective partnerships across all levels of government, successful oversight of federally delegated programs, and robust engagement with non-governmental organizations, national and community groups, stakeholders, and the public, built on a foundation of public trust and transparency, including through timely responses to information requests. Through a renewed focus on fostering intergovernmental relationships, improving on-the-ground community engagement, delivering high-impact environmental education programs, and increasing public trust and transparency, EPA will forge stronger partnerships. As a result, EPA will be better positioned to advance durable solutions to its most pressing challenges and ensure the equitable protection of all communities, including those who have historically been underserved and overburdened.

Cross-Agency Strategy 4, Strengthen Tribal, State, and Local Partnerships and Enhance Engagement is directly supported by the following long-term performance goals in the *FY 2022 – 2026 EPA Strategic Plan*:

- By September 30, 2026, consider tribal treaty rights as part of all EPA tribal consultations that may affect tribal treaty rights.
- By September 30, 2026, eliminate the backlog of overdue Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) responses, compared to the FY 2021 baseline of 1,056.

In light of the disproportionate impact of environmental pollution on Native Americans, EPA is committed to strengthening its Nation-to-Nation relationship with American Indian and Alaska Native Tribal Nations. EPA will strive to meet its federal trust responsibility and work to integrate consideration of tribal treaty and reserved rights early into decision making and regulatory processes.

The early, meaningful, and substantial involvement of EPA's co-regulator partners is critical to the development, implementation, and enforcement of the Nation's environmental programs. With a renewed focus on climate, environmental justice, and children's health, EPA will emphasize frequent and early communication as a keystone of its partnership with tribal and state co-regulators, since EPA must thoughtfully consider their concerns and existing regulatory programs to develop effective and lasting solutions to our most pressing environmental challenges.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to support the Agency's web-based tribal Consultation Opportunities Tracking System, a publicly accessible database used to communicate upcoming and current EPA consultation opportunities to tribal governments. The system provides a management, oversight, and reporting structure that helps ensure accountability and transparency.

In addition, EPA will update key policies and guidances related to overseeing states' implementation of federal environmental programs. These updates are intended to strengthen and improve the Agency's oversight of federally delegated environmental programs.

In FY 2024, EPA will continue to enhance transparency, build public trust in Agency actions, and support public participation by strengthening its implementation of the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). EPA will improve its processing of FOIA requests, in particular, to address the increasing complexity and volume of electronic documents required to be searched, collected, and reviewed when responding to FOIA requests. The Agency will work to increase processing speed and to apply appropriate technologies to ensure it supports the timely searching and collection of information for purposes of responding to FOIA requests and other information needs in a cost-effective and sustainable manner. In addition, EPA will procure and prepare to launch a new FOIA recordkeeping and processing software solution to replace FOIAonline at the beginning of FY 2024.