



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

July 20, 2023

OFFICE OF
INTERNATIONAL & TRIBAL AFFAIRS

Andrew Carey
Chair, U.S. National Advisory Committee
2508 Historic Decatur Road, Ste 130
San Diego, CA 92106

Email: andy@borderpartnership.org

Dear Mr. Carey:

On behalf of U.S. Council member to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Administrator Michael S. Regan, thank you for the National Advisory Committee's (NAC) June 23, 2023, advice letter. We appreciate the NAC's dedication and commitment to undertaking your charge and providing us with your valuable advice on ways to empower communities to address climate adaptation challenges.

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

(1) Best practices, strategies and tools the CEC could develop to empower minority, low-income, tribal and indigenous communities to address climate adaptation challenges.

Thank you for your detailed advice regarding examples of tools and strategies to consider with the goal of empowering these communities as they address climate adaptation challenges. We are pleased to share that we are already incorporating some of these tools and strategies into our work and will consider others as appropriate as we develop and implement existing and new initiatives.

Some existing initiatives, projects and programs that have applied some of the best practices, strategies, and tools recommended under this charge question include:

- a) ***Communities for Environmental Justice Network*** - launched in March 2023 with the objective of creating a North American network that brings together communities that share environmental justice concerns in the context of climate change. Through the Network, selected communities across Canada, Mexico and the United States will strengthen their capacity to improve local resilience to climate change by exchanging tools, expertise and lessons learned with member organizations.
- b) ***Reduction of Marine Litter*** - by demonstrating, educating, and communicating about the flow of commonly littered items downstream to the ocean, using low-cost

technology and a variety of communication tools, the project will help prevent and reduce marine litter originating from inland cities.

- c) ***EJ4Climate grant program*** - provides funding directly to community-based organizations and seeks to support environmental justice by facilitating the involvement and empowerment of communities searching for solutions and the development of partnerships to address their environmental and human health vulnerabilities, including those due to climate change impacts.
- d) ***NAPECA grant program*** - aims to support an equitable, clean, and sustainable recovery in North America by helping communities, particularly the most vulnerable populations, such as some Indigenous peoples and marginalized groups, build back better and become more resilient to future threats.
- e) ***Enhancing Co-benefits of Marine Protected Areas (MPA)*** - aims to support the development of an ecologically and socially inclusive network of MPAs for the benefit of coastal and marine ecosystems, coastal communities, and a more resilient North America. Recognizing the leadership role of Indigenous and local communities in the management and conservation of coastal and marine areas, the project aims to increase Indigenous and local community engagement in North American MPA networks.

Some areas that we could further explore with Canada and Mexico in the context of the CEC work based on your recommendations include:

- a) ***Building partnerships with other organizations and agencies addressing climate adaptation*** - while we have partnered with other organizations such as the United Nations Environment Programme North America Office (through a Memorandum of Understanding) as well as universities, we recognize the need to continue exploring potential partnerships, particularly in a time of limited resources. Exploring new partnerships at more local/community levels may provide new insights and best practices, as well as benefits to leverage human and financial resources.
- b) ***Leveraging technology to help monitor and respond to climate adaptation*** - while we have had some limited experience with the use of technology, such as the Local Environmental Observer (LEO) Network, we agree that the CEC should explore new ways of incorporating technologies such as mobile applications into existing and future work opportunities.

Lastly, thanks for providing detailed examples of community engagement, capacity building, collaborative partnerships, leveraging technologies and other advice on the importance of engaging residents in identifying and implementing solutions that address their unique needs and vulnerabilities. At the 2023 CEC Council Session in Victoria, British Columbia, the Council announced a new initiative focused on sharing approaches and best practices to adaptation planning and implementation that will respond to the needs of urban citizens. In developing this initiative, the CEDC and selected cities will have the opportunity to identify and implement solutions to address their unique needs.

(2) *Examples of activities and best practices community leaders have implemented to increase engagement and overcome the challenges of implementing climate adaptation efforts.*

Thank you providing examples of existing initiatives, such as San Antonio Climate Ready and Trees for Tucson, that showcase ways to increase engagement and overcome the challenges of implementing climate adaptation efforts. We look forward to further discussions with Canada and Mexico regarding the shared examples, as well as the additional examples of community best practices, and exploring how we can either incorporate aspects of these and other recommendations into our work and/or build partnerships with some of these communities to leverage knowledge and resources.

(3) *How can the U.S support the implementation of the Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) Policy into CEC's climate initiatives that will honor Tribal sovereignty?*

Thank you for sharing examples of steps that the U.S. can take in order to support incorporation of ITEK into CEC's climate initiatives that honor Tribal sovereignty. We agree that meaningful consultation with Indigenous Peoples and integration of ITEK into climate initiatives are the logical first steps in this process, and that this should be an ongoing effort.

In 2015, the Council created the Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group (TEKEG), composed of nine individuals (three from each country), to provide advice and guidance on opportunities to apply TEK to the CEC's operations and policy recommendations and undertake other activities as the Council may request.

In addition, the CEC's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan restates our commitment to continue to enhance the engagement of the TEKEG and Indigenous Peoples, to advance the integration of TEK, Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous-led stewardship practices across CEC operations, to address shared environmental, social and economic concerns.

In addition, the CEC's 2021-2025 Strategic Plan restates our commitment to continue to enhance the engagement of the TEKEG and Indigenous Peoples, to advance the integration of TEK, Indigenous perspectives and Indigenous-led stewardship practices across CEC operations, to address shared environmental, social and economic concerns.

Moreover, during the design of our Operational Plan projects and initiatives, we include a component to identify how each project engages traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) experts or Tribal/First Nations/Indigenous communities, if applicable, highlighting synergies since the inception of the project.

More recently, at the 2023 CEC Council Session in Victoria, British Columbia, the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) hosted a public forum on *Indigenous Approaches to Climate Adaptation*, which served as a platform to showcase climate adaptation stories from Indigenous communities and discuss the critical role that Indigenous knowledge and perspectives can have in shaping climate adaptation policies and planning efforts.

We recognize the importance of ITEK in addressing climate change and we are committed to continue identifying and implementing initiatives that incorporate ITEK into the CEC work.

Thank you again for your thoughtful advice. We appreciate the NAC's knowledge and understanding on these topics and look forward to continued cooperation for the benefit of the North American environment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jane Nishida". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "J".

Jane Nishida
Assistant Administrator