



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 U.S. Council member to the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC), Administrator Michael S. Regan, thank you for the Governmental Advisory Committee's (GAC) June 23, 2023, advice letter. We appreciate the GAC'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 GAC'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 the CEC work and will consider others as appropriate as we develop and implement existing and new initiatives.

Existing examples that address some of your recommendations under this charge question include:

- a) *Proactive engagement* - Public participation and stakeholder engagement are at the core of the CEC mission. The 2021 CEC Strategic Plan identifies achieving *Diverse and Inclusive Stakeholder Engagement and Public Participation* as a cross-cutting theme in our work, especially regarding private sector engagement, the inclusion of traditional ecological knowledge and Indigenous perspectives, youth, vulnerable populations and environmental justice, gender and diversity considerations. In addition, the CEC will be guided by the 2021–2025 Stakeholder Engagement and Partnership Strategy, a 2023–2024 Youth Engagement Plan and a Private Sector Strategy to enhance stakeholder engagement. In addition, the Partnerships Action Plan and Reference Guide will inform our partnerships efforts to support the implementation of the CEC's 2021-2025 Strategic

Plan. To support these efforts, the 2023 CEC budget designates CAD\$325,000 for Stakeholder engagement and Partnership Development.

- b) *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.
- c) *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.
- d) *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.
- e) *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.
- f) *Intra- and inter-agency collaboration* - as the U.S. lead agency for the CEC, EPA coordinates within our program offices, as well as with our interagency partners, in the identification, design and implementation of projects and initiatives, leveraging expertise and ensuring we incorporate existing and future considerations into our planning to avoid duplication.

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

- a) *Plain language and clear communication* - we recognize the need to clearly and accurately communicate with communities and tailor our message for diverse audiences in a way that is transparent and continuous and reflects our commitment to meaningful participation.
- (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 those focused on Sustainable Land Use and Urban Planning, and Climate Action Campaigns and Outreach, 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 in a respectful manner. 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.

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, Canada, 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 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 GAC's knowledge and understanding on these topics and look forward to continued cooperation for the benefit of the North American environment.

Sincerely,


Jane Nishida
Assistant Administrator