



U.S. National Advisory Committee
Independent Federal Advisors on the
North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation

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The Honorable Michael S. Regan
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Regan:

The U.S. National Advisory Committee (NAC) to the U.S. Representative to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation held its 55th meeting via virtual platform on December 9, 2022. This letter represents our advice resulting from that meeting.

The main objective of our meeting was to provide you with advice on how best to engage key sub-national actors in North America (e.g., at the city level, Indigenous groups, civil society leaders, disadvantaged community representatives, etc.) in shaping the CEC's development of its climate adaptation initiative. This initiative was announced by the Council at the 2022 Council Session in Merida, as a large-scale initiative (projects with budgets of C\$1M and with broader scope) and is included in the CEC's 2022 Operational Plan. Our meeting included updates on *U.S. Priorities on the CEC* and guidance on the charges we received, from Jane T. Nishida, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office of International and Tribal Affairs (OITA). The committee also received presentations on *Climate Adaption Goals at EPA* from Joel Scheraga, EPA's Senior Advisor for Climate Adaptation. Jorge Daniel Taillant, CEC Executive Director and Louie Porta, JPAC Chair also gave a brief presentation on behalf of the CEC welcoming back the NAC and GAC Advisory committees. In advance of the meeting, we also received the three charges that the U.S. EPA sought advice on. 1) Facilitate a broader, more inclusive and more effective engagement of key sub-national actors in North America (e.g., at the city level, tribal nations, Indigenous groups, civil society leaders, disadvantaged community representatives, etc.) in shaping the CEC's development of its climate adaptation initiative, 2) Develop a better understanding of the barriers and challenges to ensuring national and sub-national early warning systems provide the right level of awareness for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation actions; and 3) Stimulate uptake of nature-based climate adaptation actions and community early warning systems at the sub-national level across North America.

The meeting was opened with a welcome from Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACDM) Membership Coordinator, Gina Moore on behalf of Division Director Robbie Young-Mackall, and the Designated Federal Officer, Clifton Townsend, who provided an overview of FACMD activities and responsibilities. The NAC appreciates the dedicated support provided by the FACMD and thanks Director Young-Mackall, Clifton Townsend our NAC Designated Federal Officer, and all the FACMD staff for their support to ensure our meeting was a success. We hope our advice is useful to you in your work with your counterparts in the CEC Council, and wish you continued success in your position.

Sincerely,

Andy Carey, Chair,
National Advisory Committee

cc:

Jane Nishida, Assistant Administrator, Office of International & Tribal Affairs (OITA),
EPA

Rafael DeLeon, Deputy Assistant Administrator, OITA, EPA

Robbie Young-Mackall, Director, FACMD, OMS, EPA

Matthew Tejada, Director, Office of Environmental Justice, EPA

Felicia Wright, Acting Director, American Indian Environmental Office, EPA

Surabhi Shah, Acting Director, Office of Community Revitalization, EPA

Mark Kasman, Director, Office of Regional & Bilateral Affairs, OITA, EPA

Lisa Almodovar, Deputy Director, Office of Regional & Bilateral Affairs, OITA, EPA

Nadtya Hong, General Standing Committee (OITA), EPA

Clifton Townsend, Designated Federal Officer, FACMD, EPA

Louie Porta, Chair, Joint Public Advisory Committee

Jorge Daniel Taillant, Executive Director, CEC

Members of the U.S. National and Governmental Advisory Committees

National Advisory Committee
(NAC) to the U.S. Representative to the
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

Advice 2022-2 (January 20, 2023)

Three Charge Questions on how to best engage key sub-national actors in North America (e.g., at the city level, Indigenous groups, civil society leaders, disadvantaged community representatives, etc.) in shaping the CEC's development of its climate adaptation initiative:

The December 9, 2022, Charge Question to the EPA National Advisory Committee (NAC) seeks advice on three questions.

1: Facilitate a broader, more inclusive, and more effective engagement of key sub-national actors in North America (e.g., at the city level, tribal nations, Indigenous groups, civil society leaders, disadvantaged community representatives, etc.) in shaping the CEC's development of its climate adaptation initiative;

2: Develop a better understanding of the barriers and challenges to ensuring national and sub-national early warning systems provide the right level of awareness for disaster preparedness and climate adaptation actions; and

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

Advice Question #1 – Engagement of Sub-Actors in North America to shape CEC climate adaptation initiative.

The December 2022 meeting of the National Advisory Committee (NAC) identified multiple stakeholder sub-national groups and organizations to be considered, consulted, and engaged in shaping the CEC's development of its climate adaptation initiative. Committee members identified groups across civil society including nonprofit organizations, grant-making foundations, academic institutions, government agencies, tribal organizations, business advocacy organizations, and public policy think-tanks across the United States and tribal nations that would likely be interested in participating as well as assisting the CEC in climate adaptation efforts. (See Exhibit – Key National Actors – National Advisory Committee – E.P.A.). The extensive list of actors includes organizations from 5 countries (United States, Canada, Mexico, Germany, and United Kingdom), 14 American States, and 6 Mexican States. Specific mention was repeatedly made for engagement at the U.S.-Mexico Border region.

We wish to stress the importance of including a cross-section of organizations to enable a comprehensive dialogue across all of society and including other countries. The CEC works primarily in Canada, United States, and Mexico, but their influence must move beyond the borders of these three nations. Additionally, creating strong local networks must also be implemented in key communities where significant progress is needed and can be made. Key support can and must be garnered within academic circles, business networks, local elected officials, tribal leaders and community members, religious groups, scientists, and other interested leaders.

The National Advisory Committee also wanted to reiterate a few of the recommendations presented in our April 2022 meeting on Environmental Justice but in support of Climate Adaptation. These include:

Refine focus of the Environmental Justice project to benefit the equitable and equal implementation of programs and services that support Canada, the United States, and Mexico.

NAC members deliberated on the importance of refining climate adaptation initiatives to be more specific. Greater specificity would allow for more consistent, equitable, and equal implementation of climate adaptation programs in each of the three countries supported by the CEC. Communities along the US-Mexico border are especially vulnerable to climate change. For instance, the southwest is currently facing long-term drought. There is a dire need for the two countries to work collaboratively to protect water pollution that put drinking water resources at risk. The NAC made specific mention of the importance of implementation of air quality monitoring programs. In shared ports of entry, air quality monitoring should be completed collaboratively and equally on both sides of the border between both the U.S. and Mexico and the U.S. and Canada.

Develop more sophisticated approaches to infrastructure projects and incorporate mitigation efforts at the forefront of the project instead of at the end.

NAC members noted how the infrastructure in places such as ports and border crossings have been developed without accommodating the need to mitigate pollution in the community within the design itself. In Michigan, for example, NAC members shared how they advocated for a program that offers voluntary relocations for people to move away from the impacted areas because the community was not designed to withstand the impacts of pollution from infrastructure development. Although these types of programs are expensive, NAC members noted, they are needed because people should not be left defenseless during these conditions with no opportunity to have a healthy, clean environment. One example of an approach to justly accommodate and mitigate for the communities in Detroit is the implementation, at the local level, of a truck routing ordinance to divert trucks away from residential streets, currently in development.

Develop a mapping strategy for mitigation efforts across the three countries to better understand where mitigation efforts have succeeded and where improvements are needed.

NAC members deliberated on the importance of mapping strategies to improve targeting areas for environmental development. NAC members agreed with the importance and relevance of electrification to reduce emissions and noted that EPA Diesel Emissions Reduction Act grants are great funding opportunities. However, NAC members went on to share that these grants are not sufficient to cover all the programs that are deemed necessary for complete implementation. The NAC emphasized the need for an all-hands approach and large-scale strategies at the federal, state, tribal, and local levels. We suggest that EPA map the existing data and target investments to mitigating the problem. For example, EPA should request information from groups currently performing these types of studies to better understand the trends and projected outcomes. The committee also recommends mapping air monitoring underway or completed to inform investments. From one example, Detroit currently has a comprehensive Black Carbon roadway air monitoring project at our northern border with three years of data completed. It can be beneficial to understand current monitoring efforts and results to best target EPA resources for additional monitoring and mitigation.

Integrate cultural competency awareness when working in tribal communities to implement strategies that consider local needs, challenges, and issues. You must meet them where they are and not implement a one-size-fits-all strategy.

NAC members discussed challenges facing tribal communities across North America. NAC members shared that almost half of the 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States are in Alaska. This should be considered when developing new initiatives, especially electrification, which would be challenging in rural parts of the country. The NAC urges to continue to seek diverse ways of supporting climate adaptation issues and urges EPA to “meet them where they are” regarding their existing infrastructures, rather than mandating a new infrastructure to obtain services. The NAC calls attention to the Tribal Air Monitoring Support Center at Northern Arizona University, a success story that is a resource that has been serving tribes through its equipment loan program and providing training and sensors in the community. The NAC underscores that supporting environmental justice issues related to

monitoring is vital, as is providing communities in the environmental justice sectors the training, equipment, and capability to monitor their own air quality.

Engage state and local officials when implementing Environmental Justice programs and include civil society organizations whenever and wherever possible.

NAC members discussed the importance of engaging community leaders from across the public, private, tribal and philanthropic sector whenever possible. NAC members agreed that this environmental justice project is best addressed at the state and local levels and that both should be engaged. The NAC notes that activities in the State of Idaho highlight the increased role of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and industry at becoming part of the wider environmental justice discussion. As an example, the NAC shared how addressing a topic such as air quality improvement—that is tangential, involves other aspects of air pollution (e.g., dust) and extends beyond environmental issues to communities. Various local, tribal and state laws impact environmental justice conditions (buffer distances, zoning, noise levels, truck routing, air permits, etc.) and EPA can share best practices and environmental justice outcomes of policies.

Advice Question #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.

The NAC members deliberated on Advice Question #2 on developing a better understanding of the 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. The committee explored several issues including a lack of community knowledge and understanding of impacts of climate change and the need for early warning systems; a lack of trust due to significant misinformation and active disinformation campaigns to diminish community support of climate adaptation actions; and the need to develop awareness about adaptation, emergency preparedness, and planning, in both highly populated areas as well as rural areas including tribal lands.

In order to improve knowledge and understanding, the NAC committee suggests the [Status of Tribes and Climate Change Report](#) written by the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals at Northern Arizona University, be used as a model to educate the general public about the realities of climate change and the impacts on disasters and disaster preparedness. This is becoming known as a trusted and vetted source and has achieved national support across all E.P.A. regions, which should allow for more effective implementation.

Building trust in key communities and amongst vulnerable populations and constituencies is critical for successful implementation. Trusted community leaders from across civil society must be cultivated and prepared for community awareness and education campaigns on not only the impacts of climate change, but also the tools and resources necessary for successful implementation of early warning systems. It is critical to provide not only information and education, but also means to ensure communities have resources needed to implement some of the solutions that are relevant to them and their communities to reduce the impact of climate change.

Early warning systems are needed in both large population centers and rural communities. The committee believes many communities do not have sufficient early warning systems. In California for example, early warning systems have many forms. During the Santa Ana windstorms, successfully placing wind sensors in canyons allows for energy companies to cut off power that ultimately prevents downed powerlines from starting damaging forest fires. This type of pro-active solution could be implemented in other forms for the benefit of communities most likely to be impacted by other severe weather activity.

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

The NAC members deliberated on Advice Question #3 on stimulating uptake of nature-based climate adaptation actions and community early warning systems at the sub-national level across North America. The committee explored several issues and recommended implementation of Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge (ITEK) initiatives in all federal projects that would spearhead a national effort to bridge the cultural divide in support of climate adaptation efforts. Committee members offered multiple strategies to address nature-based solutions including massive national campaign for planting of trees and native species; leveraging use of urban planners to foster and increased awareness around climate change and climate adaptation best practices; formation of green corridors; and collection of data and research to better inform decision-making at all levels of public policy related to climate adaptation and early warning system implementation.

Additional topics for consideration related to climate change mitigation and preparedness included: decarbonizing air travel, creation of sustainable aviation fuel, reduce greenhouse gas emissions with increased use of electric vehicles, installation of electric vehicles at ports of entry in the U.S.-Mexico Borderlands, clean drinking water initiatives, increased funding for Tribes for building adaptation plans, harvesting rainwater, water reuse, and greater use of desalination plants to offset reduction in key waterways including the Colorado River and Rio Grande/Bravo.