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

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June 23, 2023

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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. Governmental Advisory Committee (GAC) to the U.S. Representative to the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) held its 59th hybrid meeting on May 18, 2023, in El Paso, Texas. This letter represents our advice resulting from that meeting. The main objective of our meeting was to provide advice to the EPA Administrator on ways to empower communities to address climate adaptation challenges.

Our meeting included presentations on: 1) *U.S. Priorities on the CEC* from Mark Kasman, on behalf of Jane Nishida, Assistant Administrator for EPA's Office for International and Tribal Affairs (OITA), 2) *CEC Updates on Operational Plan and EJ4 Climate Change Grants*, from Jorge Daniel Taillant, Executive Director of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation, 3) *JPAC Report-out* from Octaviana Trujillo, Chair of the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC), 4) *Update on Regional Sustainability and Climate Adaptation Challenges*, from Adrian Vazquez, Director, Center of Atmospheric Sciences & Green Technologies, University of Ciudad Juarez, 5) *NADBank Overview and Lessons learned from working with Vulnerable Communities*, from Calixto Mateos, Managing Director, and 6) *Lessons Learned from EPA's Work with Communities*, from Surabhi Shah, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Administrator.

The meeting was opened with opening remarks from Federal Advisory Committee Management Division (FACDM) Director Robbie Young-Mackall, who provided an overview of FACMD activities and responsibilities. Dr. Carlos Rincon, Director, El Paso Border Office welcomed the GAC to El Paso. The GAC appreciates the dedicated support provided by the FACMD and thanks Director Young-Mackall, Oscar Carrillo our GAC Designated Federal Officer, and all the FACMD staff and El Paso Border Office 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,



Marina Brock, Chair Governmental  
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, Federal Advisory Committee Management Division, EPA  
Matthew Tejada, Director, Office of Environmental Justice & External Civil Rights, EPA  
Martin Kenneth, Director, American Indian Environmental Office, EPA  
Surabhi Shah, Office of the Administrator, EPA  
Mark Kasman, Director, Office of Regional & Bilateral Affairs, OITA, EPA  
Monisha Harris, Deputy Director, Office of Regional & Bilateral Affairs, OITA, EPA  
Lesley D'Anglada, General Standing Committee (OITA), EPA  
Oscar Carrillo, NAC Designated Federal Officer, EPA  
Octaviana Trujillo, Chair, Joint Public Advisory Committee  
Jorge Daniel Taillant, Executive Director, CEC  
Members of the U.S. National and Governmental Advisory Committees

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Administrative support for the GAC is provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,  
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Governmental Advisory Committee  
(GAC) to the U.S. Representative to the  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

**Advice 2023-2 (June 23, 2023)**

***Best practices, strategies, and tools the CEC could develop to empower minority, low-income, tribal, and indigenous communities to address climate adaptation challenge***

The GAC raised several important points regarding the need for government agencies like the CEC, EPA, and State and Regional government entities to recognize and address the concerns of minority, low-income, tribal, and Indigenous communities to improve outreach and engagement efforts to address climate adaptation challenges. Here's a summary of the key suggestions, best practices, strategies, and tools that can be developed:

1. **Direct and Inclusive Communication:** Government agencies like the EPA should take the initiative to directly communicate with key minority, tribal, low-income, and Indigenous players and agencies rather than relying on indirect channels or state/regional agencies. This action ensures that information reaches the intended communities and avoids excluding them from communication and engagement efforts.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity and Understanding:** Approach these communities with cultural sensitivity, understanding their available resources or resource limitations. Consider crafting outreach efforts and communication strategies that are respectful and effective, taking into account their unique cultural contexts.
3. **Compensation and Support:** Recognize the value of community members' time and contribution by compensating community-based organizations (CBOs) and individuals for their efforts. This approach demonstrates a genuine commitment to involving and supporting their communities.
4. **Avoid Last-Minute Invitations:** Address the issue of last-minute invitations to indigenous groups, as it can make their participation appear as an afterthought. Prioritize direct and inclusive communication, allocate dedicated resources for engagement, and ensure that invitations are extended promptly and inclusively.
5. **Proactive Engagement:** Dedicate additional resources to proactively identify and engage with indigenous, minority, low-income, and tribal communities. Actively involve them in decision-making processes and remedial activities to ensure their perspectives, concerns, and knowledge are respected and considered.
6. **Education and Awareness:** Provide education and awareness programs for government officials and the general public to improve community engagement. This includes training government agencies on active listening, clear communication, and using accessible language in public notices and communications.
7. **Capacity Building and Grants:** Recognize that low-income, tribal, and indigenous communities may lack the capacity to initiate or sustain critical environmental programs. Provide grants to start the process and support the development of skills and resources needed for long-term sustainability.
8. **Federal and State Responsibility to Collaborate and Coordinate with existing governmental agencies which share similar to identical mission and functions:** All levels of Government

hold a responsibility to improve their mission and function and maximize available resources continually. To this end, the Government at all levels should be accountable for breaking down silos, identifying joint missions, and maximizing efforts and resources toward continual improvement. In the area of climate change, existing agencies holding public responsibility in environmental protection, prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, public health, infrastructure protection, and policy should make every effort to break down red tape and work together and efficiently. Federal agencies to consider include DHS, EPA, FEMA, DHHS, CDC, NIOSH, USPHS, DOD, NOAA, and others yet to be determined; similarly, on the State level, equivalent agencies should follow suit. The complexity of current issues is predicated on a systems approach involving complexity beyond the scope of any single agency.

9. **Effective Liaisons**: Ensure the capacity to engage with these communities frequently and build sustainable outcomes and relationships. Consider providing training on trauma-informed care systems and approaches to improve communication and interactions.
10. **Engaging with Communities**: Recognize that community and tribal liaisons may be overwhelmed and cannot engage with community and tribal members as frequently as necessary. Dedicate additional resources to listen and cultivate sustainable outcomes and relationships. Use a "roundtable" approach to open discussions, ensuring equal opportunities for tribal and governmental participants. Identify individuals with the necessary communication skillsets and competencies for frontline liaison positions.
11. **Authentic Outreach and Consultation**: Engage in authentic outreach and consultation with community members, especially when there is opposition or concerns. Actively listen, provide open forums for discussion, and build community trust by soliciting and incorporating community priorities.
12. **Transparent and Ongoing Communication**: Prioritize transparent and ongoing communication with communities. Engage with community members, listen to their concerns, and provide regular updates on the progress and outcomes of environmental projects. Involve community representatives in decision-making processes to ensure their perspectives are considered.
13. **Plain Language and Clear Communication**: Use plain and clear communication to address the challenge of understanding and tailoring communications for diverse audiences. Avoid jargon and politically correct language that may alienate the public and make communication more direct, honest, and accessible.
14. **Building Trust through Long-Term Assurance**: Rebuild trust by addressing historical concerns and grievances. Prioritize long-term assurance of environmental safety, involve communities in decision-making, and provide ongoing support and communication.
15. **Timely Response and Local Community Involvement**: Recognize the need for timely response and involvement of local communities in emergency situations. Provide additional expertise and staff members to translate government jargon into plain language and incentivize and support local communities in conducting hazard assessments and developing mitigation plans.

By implementing some of these practices, strategies, and tools, the CEC and other government agencies may serve to empower minority, low-income, tribal, and indigenous communities to effectively address climate adaptation challenges and ensure meaningful involvement in decision-making processes.

Governmental Advisory Committee  
(GAC) to the U.S. Representative to the  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

**Advice 2023 – 3 - (June 23, 2023)**

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

Some examples referenced by the GAC in their discussions include examples provided in Question 1 and additional activities implemented or recommended to increase engagement and overcome the challenges of implementing climate adaptation efforts, including:

1. **Sustainable Land Use and Urban Planning (Various locations):** Community leaders understand the importance of sustainable land use and urban planning practices in addressing climate challenges. They actively promote mixed land-use development, which encourages the integration of residential, commercial, and recreational spaces within neighborhoods. By creating compact and walkable communities, preserving natural spaces, and implementing green infrastructure, communities enhance their resilience to climate impacts, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and improve overall livability.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships for Resilience (Various locations):** Collaboration between public and private entities is instrumental in implementing climate adaptation efforts. Community leaders foster partnerships with businesses, industries, and organizations to leverage resources, expertise, and funding. Innovative solutions are developed through these partnerships, such as sustainable infrastructure projects and climate resilience initiatives. Public-private collaborations enable communities to implement effective climate adaptation strategies while sharing the responsibility of building resilience.
3. **Climate Action Campaigns and Outreach (Various locations):** Community leaders initiate public awareness campaigns and outreach programs to educate and engage residents in climate adaptation efforts. These campaigns utilize various communication channels, including social media, community events, workshops, and educational materials. By raising awareness about the impacts of climate change and fostering a sense of urgency, community leaders can mobilize individuals and inspire collective action toward climate resilience.
4. **Integration of Climate Adaptation into Existing Programs (Various Locations):** To overcome challenges in implementing climate adaptation, community leaders integrate climate considerations into existing programs, policies, and initiatives across different sectors. This involves incorporating climate resilience into land use planning, infrastructure development, public health programs, and emergency management strategies. By mainstreaming climate adaptation, communities can integrate climate considerations systematically, leading to more effective and comprehensive adaptation measures.
5. **Financial Incentives and Support for Climate Resilience (Various locations):** Community leaders implement financial incentives and support programs to encourage climate resilience. This includes providing grants, subsidies, and low-interest loans for energy-efficient upgrades, renewable energy installations, green building certifications, and climate-resilient infrastructure projects. By offering financial support, communities make climate adaptation more accessible and financially viable for individuals, businesses, and organizations, promoting widespread engagement and participation.

6. **Identifying Supporting Actions and Policies Needed for Climate Action:** It is important to engage with communities in developing specific climate action proposals and identify supporting initiatives that may be critical to their success. For example, states may be incentivizing their residents to purchase electric vehicles. An essential but often overlooked supporting policy would be developing charging infrastructure in urban areas and multi-family housing units to support widespread adoption.

These examples highlight the diverse range of activities and best practices implemented by community leaders to increase engagement and overcome the challenges of implementing climate adaptation efforts. Communities can effectively address climate challenges and build resilient futures through partnerships, sustainable land use, public-private collaborations, outreach campaigns, mainstreaming climate adaptation, and financial incentives.

Governmental Advisory Committee  
(GAC) to the U.S. Representative to the  
Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)

**Advice 2023 – 4 - (June 23, 2023)**

***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?***

Recommendations referenced by the GAC in their discussions to support the implementation of ITEK Policy into the Climate Initiatives of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) while honoring Tribal sovereignty include the following:

1. **Consultation and Engagement**: Meaningful consultation with Indigenous Tribes is essential. Through agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the U.S. government should engage in inclusive and collaborative processes involving Indigenous communities from the outset. This engagement allows for the incorporation of ITEK and ensures that Tribal perspectives, knowledge, and priorities are respected and integrated into decision-making processes.
2. **Building Trust and Relationships**: Trust and strong relationships with Indigenous communities are paramount. It requires ongoing engagement, active listening, and open communication to understand the concerns and needs of Tribes. By addressing their specific challenges and aspirations, trust can be fostered, enabling effective collaboration and the co-development of climate initiatives.
3. **Education and Awareness**: Government agencies and other entities involved in climate initiatives must receive education and training on ITEK and the importance of Tribal sovereignty. By raising awareness about the value and relevance of ITEK in climate adaptation strategies, decision-makers can better appreciate its significance and incorporate it appropriately. This education should also emphasize the importance of respecting Tribal sovereignty as a foundational principle.
4. **Representation and Expertise**: The TEKEG, comprising Traditional Ecological Knowledge Expert Group members from Canada, Mexico, and the United States, may require additional support to ensure comprehensive representation. The breadth and depth of ITEK within and across each country's Indigenous communities should be adequately reflected. Seeking input from a diverse range of Indigenous voices and experts will provide more inclusive and robust guidance for policy development and implementation.
5. **Tribal Sovereignty**: Respect for Tribal sovereignty is crucial. Indigenous tribes possess inherent sovereignty and self-governance rights. Government agencies must acknowledge and uphold these rights, ensuring that state laws do not bind Tribal communities unless they voluntarily choose to be. By involving tribes as equal partners in decision-making processes, their autonomy is respected, and climate adaptation strategies can align with their unique cultural, social, and environmental contexts.

6. **Engaging Local Tribes**: The EPA and other relevant entities should implement requirements to engage with local tribes when specific projects may impact their lands, resources, or communities. This proactive engagement allows for direct dialogue, where affected tribes can voice their concerns, provide input, and participate in decision-making processes. By considering their perspectives, the resulting initiatives can better address local realities and respect Tribal sovereignty.

By incorporating these facts into the approach, the U.S. can better support the implementation of the ITEK Policy into CEC's climate initiatives. This approach recognizes the importance of collaboration, respect for Tribal sovereignty, and integrating Indigenous knowledge, ultimately leading to mutually beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders involved.

Finally, the GAC appreciates the concession to hold our last meeting in an in-person and hybrid style as a movement towards bringing the two groups back together into an in-person format. The ability to network, trade ideas, be inspired, and facilitate information exchange in a single location is unparalleled. The GAC highly recommends the EPA move towards a single in-person NAC and GAC meeting to facilitate this process.