



# Evaluation of EPA's Tribal General Assistance Program

September 2008

## Fact Sheet

### Introduction

The EPA is responsible for administering Federal environmental statutes on all U.S. lands, including Indian country. The EPA recognizes tribal governments as the primary parties for making environmental policy decisions and implementing environmental programs that affect Indian communities. The General Assistance Program (GAP) was established under the authority of the Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act of 1992. The primary purpose of the GAP is to help federally recognized tribes and intertribal consortia build the basic components of a tribal environmental program, which may include planning, developing, and establishing the administrative, technical, legal, enforcement, communication, and outreach infrastructure.

An evaluation of GAP was conducted to determine how effective GAP has been in building Tribal environmental capacity. For the purpose of this evaluation, Tribal environmental capacity is defined as administrative, legal, technical and enforcement capability of Tribes to develop and implement a Tribal environmental program, and communications capability to work with Federal, State, Local, Tribal, and other environmental officials.

### Evaluation Questions

1. Is the GAP being accessed by all federally-recognized tribes? If not, why are some tribes not involved in GAP? Are there tribes that received GAP grants at one time but which no longer receive GAP grants? If so, why?
2. Are tribal governments using the resources (technical, fiscal, and programmatic) provided as a component of GAP?
  - a. How often are they accessed?
  - b. How are tribes using these resources?
  - c. To what extent have tribes met program expectations for grants management, execution of administrative functions, and carrying out proposed activities?
  - d. How does participation in GAP increase understanding of the process required to develop a tribal environmental program?
3. What indicators of tribal environmental capacity exist?
  - a. To what extent have tribes achieved environmental capacity as suggested by the presence of these indicators?
  - b. What factors contribute to the achievement of environmental capacity, and what is the impact of these factors?
  - c. What is the relative contribution of GAP toward achieving capacity?
4. Is the GAP process providing adequate outputs to achieve tribal goals and priorities?
5. To what degree does GAP support EPA's strategic goal of increasing tribes' ability to build environmental program capacity?

<http://www.epa.gov/evaluate>

For more information on completed evaluations at EPA or the Evaluation Support Division, visit the above link.

## Evaluation Methods

- Collected quantitative data for a sample of 111 tribes, drawn from four databases:
  - EPA GAP Accountability Tracking System (GAP database)
  - EPA Grants Information and Control System
  - EPA Strategic Goals Reporting System
  - US Census Audit Database
- Conducted file reviews for tribes not included in GAP database to ensure representative data from all EPA regions
  - GAP database and file review data represents GAP grantee activity from October 2000 – September 2004
- Qualitative data drawn from:
  - Interviews with GAP project officers in eight regions
  - Panel discussions with tribal representatives at three regional tribal meetings
- Methodology developed and peer reviewed by:
  - EPA
  - Tribal representatives
  - Academic evaluation experts
    - The methodology was modified to address comments from the peer reviewers, including changes such as:
      - Inviting greater tribal input during the interviews of Tribal representatives
      - Asking tribal representatives about their definition of environmental capacity
      - Assessing the extent to which organizations other than EPA, as well as program areas within EPA other than GAP, have helped Tribes develop environmental capacity

## Key Findings and Recommendations

### Findings

- The extent of capacity-building varies across indicator areas for tribes in the sample that received GAP grants. These tribes have relatively well-developed technical and communications capabilities, but less developed legal, enforcement, and administrative capacity.
- GAP has done much in recent years to clarify grant expectations and administrative requirements for tribes and tribes in turn are increasingly meeting these expectations and requirements.
- Restrictions on GAP grants that preclude using GAP funds for program implementation are now hindering tribal environmental program development.
- Tribes emphasize that GAP funding is essential to achieving their environmental goals, but perceive that current levels of funding are insufficient to address tribal priorities.

### Recommendations

- Consider developing a mechanism to support tribal program implementation.
- Consider working more directly with tribes and regions to enhance administrative, legal, and enforcement capacity.
- Consider whether some tribal programs would be well suited to innovative environmental policy approaches that complement traditional codes and standards.
- Acknowledge cross-cultural differences, and continue working with tribes to maintain a respectful dialog.
- Track progress toward achievement of the new 2006-2011 strategic goals and targets.

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