

National Environmental Youth Advisory Council

Public Meeting: February 28, 2024 – February 29, 2024

Environmental Justice and Youth

Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights

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EPA Program Office Background

The [Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights \(OEJECR\)](#) supports the agency's mission by providing leadership on EPA's [environmental justice](#) and external civil rights priorities. OEJECR coordinates implementation of those priorities across the agency's national programs, regions, the Administrator's Office, and across our partnerships with other federal agencies and coregulators in state, Tribal, and local government, and communities. OEJECR provides resources and other technical assistance on civil rights and environmental justice, engages with communities with environmental justice concerns, and provides support for community-led action.

The Office also enforces federal civil rights laws, including Title VI, that, together, prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin (including on the basis of limited-English proficiency); sex; disability; or age by applicants for and recipients of federal financial assistance from EPA. OEJECR is also home to the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Center (CPRC), which is EPA's primary resource for services and expertise in alternative dispute resolution, environmental conflict resolution, consensus-building, and collaborative problem solving.

Background on Charge Topic

"Environmental justice" means the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in agency decision-making and other Federal activities that affect human health and the environment so that people:

- are fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and
- have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices.

The [Environmental and Climate Justice \(ECJ\) Program](#), created by the [Inflation Reduction Act](#), provides funding for financial and technical assistance to carry out environmental and climate justice activities to benefit underserved and overburdened communities. Congress has appropriated \$2.8 billion for financial assistance, and \$200 million for technical assistance, to implement this new program at the

EPA. EPA has selected 98 [Environmental Justice Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreements](#) awardees to receive a total of \$43.8 million in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding for community-based nonprofit organizations to receive up to \$500,000 in grant funding.

EPA has selected 88 [Environmental Justice Government-to-Government \(G2G\)](#) cooperative agreements that will receive a total of \$84.1 million in Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and annual appropriation act funding to receive up to \$1,00,000 in grant funding.

The new [Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Grantmaking \(EJ TCGM\) Program](#) is a competition to select multiple Grantmakers around the nation to reduce barriers to the application process communities face and increase the efficiency of the awards process for environmental justice grants. Grantmakers will design competitive application and submission processes, award environmental justice subgrants, implement a tracking and reporting system, provide resources and support to communities, all in collaboration with EPA's Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights.

EPA's new [EJ Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers Program](#) will establish technical assistance centers across the nation providing technical assistance, training, and related support to communities with environmental justice concerns and their partners. The services provided will include training and assistance on writing grant proposals, navigating federal systems such as Grants.gov and SAM.gov, effectively managing grant funds, community engagement, meeting facilitation, and translation and interpretation services for limited English-speaking participants.

EPA's [EJ Small Grants Program](#) supports and empowers communities working on solutions to local environmental and public health issues. The program is designed to help communities understand and address exposure to multiple environmental harms and risks. For information on grant-writing, make sure to check out these federal grant resources.

When the Office of Environmental Justice was created in 1994, the primary available financial assistance to communities was provided through the Environmental Justice Small Grants and Collaborative Problem-Solving Grants programs. These small grant programs provided limited funds per grant to community-based organizations, local Tribal organizations and Tribal governments working on projects to address environmental and public health concerns. Now with the formation of the OEJECR, and through the Biden-Harris Administration *Invest in America* programs, OEJECR will provide over \$3 billion in assistance through the Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Program which includes the Technical Assistance Centers, Grantmakers Program, Collaborative Problem-Solving and Government to Government Grants and the Community Change Grant programs. The goals of our assistance programs continue to be helping and supporting affected communities create self-sustaining, community-based partnerships that will improve the environmental health, climate resiliency and overall human health of all the communities in our Nation.

Office of External Civil Rights Compliance (ECRC), moved from its original location within the Office of General Counsel to be incorporated into the newly formed [National Program Office](#) – OEJECR – as it works in tandem with the efforts of the Environmental Justice offices. ECRC is the other half of the OEJECR that works to embed EJ, civil rights and equity into the fabric of the Agency. ECRC continues to provide policy guidance and technical assistance to program offices within EPA on civil rights compliance and equal employment opportunity and the enforcement of federal civil rights laws, such as Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 that prohibits discrimination against members of the public by recipients of

EPA funds, is the responsibility of ECRC within OEJEER. ECRC has issued several key guidance documents aimed at audiences including both recipients of EPA financial assistance and members of the public. There is a list of several guidance reports on the [ECR epa.gov](https://www.epa.gov/epa-justice) webpage which showcase the many efforts that ECR is advancing civil rights into EPA's efforts and activities, especially within communities with EJ concerns.

Charge Questions

Under the umbrella of Environmental Justice and equity, we ask the NEYAC to consider these charges from EPA to enhance and improve our engagement with youth, in particular, those in communities with environmental justice concerns.

- **The EPA is interested in ensuring that youth in communities with EJ Concerns are empowered and connected to the resources EPA is making available to support advancing environmental justice in communities.** What barriers to awareness or access exist to empowering and connecting with youth in communities with EJ concerns for Agency resources and outreach (such as environmental leadership, careers, internships, etc.)?
 - What approaches, processes, or strategies would the NEYAC recommend the agency utilize to enhance awareness and access among youth?
- How should EPA work with corresponding state, local, and/or Tribal governments to ensure desired on-the-ground impacts and efforts to advance environmental justice come to fruition? What do youth consider as reliable and impactful engagement and indicators of success?
- What best practices, technologies, and/or platforms are best positioned to connect youth to environmental resources EPA has available, including but not limited to, green space access/preservation, cleanup efforts, grant opportunities, and policy-developing opportunities, particularly for communities with EJ Concerns?
- What topics relating to Environmental Justice are most urgent to youth?