

Michael S. Regan, Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Regan,

The National Environmental Youth Advisory Council (NEYAC) appreciates the valuable opportunity to provide input on the EPA's ongoing efforts to advance environmental justice and sustainability. As young leaders deeply committed to addressing the climate crisis and protecting our communities from the impacts of climate change, we recognize the importance of ensuring that environmental policies and actions taken by the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal agencies reflect the interests of young people from every corner of this country. Our generation will bear the brunt of the climate crisis, and it is essential that our voices are at the forefront of the decision-making process.

In response to the charge questions asked, the NEYAC has developed a series of recommendations that address climate change, environmental justice, and the circular economy. These recommendations reflect the urgent need for policies that are inclusive of disadvantaged communities, promote sustainable practices, and empower youth to take active roles in the solutions proposed. Our Advisory Council is committed to fostering meaningful collaboration between the EPA and young people across the country, and we believe these recommendations will contribute to a more equitable and sustainable future.

In particular, we urge the EPA to prioritize community engagement, especially in environmental justice communities where communities of color and working class communities are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, and to expand educational outreach and opportunities for young people to develop the next generation of environmental leadership. By investing in youth-focused programs, fostering partnerships with schools, and ensuring that EPA resources are accessible and inclusive, we can empower the next generation to become leaders in sustainability and climate action.

We look forward to continuing to work alongside the EPA in achieving these goals and advancing meaningful action on climate across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Gabriel Nagel".

Gabriel Nagel  
NEYAC Co-Chair

# National Environmental Youth Advisory Council

## *Final Recommendations*

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## Part I: Climate Change

CC1. Is the Agency's regulatory process sufficiently transparent for meaningful, effective engagement with youth, EJ, and other communities?

### **CC.1.1 Enhance Transparency through Detailed Information Sharing**

EPA should ensure the regulatory process is transparent and accessible by:

- Publishing detailed explanations of regulatory decisions in user-friendly formats, including the scientific basis, rationales, and expected impacts.
- Developing and maintaining easy-to-navigate online portals that provide information on regulatory proposals, public comment opportunities, and EPA activities.
- Providing straightforward guides that explain the EPA's regulatory processes and timelines to help demystify procedures for the public, especially youth and EJ communities.

### **CC.1.2 Strengthen Community Engagement**

EPA should strengthen community engagement by:

- Implementing outreach efforts specifically designed for engaging EJ communities and youth, such as workshops, community meetings, and listening sessions.
- Prioritizing participation from communities most impacted by climate change by providing necessary resources, support, and incentives to enhance their ability to engage effectively.
- Setting up formal structures like advisory councils or working groups that facilitate continuous collaboration and dialogue between the EPA and community stakeholders.

### **CC.1.3 Empower Youth and Diverse Community Participation**

EPA should empower youth and diverse community participation by:

- Creating youth advisory boards and leadership development programs that invite young individuals to partake in environmental decision-making.
- Holding regular meetings where advisory board members can provide input, review EPA proposals, and offer recommendations for addressing community concerns.
- Partnering with educational institutions to promote environmental education, awareness, and activism among young people.

CC2. What are areas of interest to youth communities that EPA should engage on? What are the most pressing issues in your communities that the Agency should focus on or prioritize?

### **CC.2.1 Strengthen Climate Change Education**

EPA should focus on strengthening climate change education by:

- Encouraging states to require climate change education at all K-12 levels, emphasizing not only scientific aspects but also social and economic impacts, with a particular focus on EJ communities.
- Supporting the development of robust training programs for educators to deliver comprehensive climate change instruction effectively.
- Fostering partnerships with educational institutions to integrate climate change education into existing curricula and create new interdisciplinary learning opportunities.

### **CC.2.2 Foster Green Job Opportunities**

EPA should foster green job opportunities by:

- Developing programs that outline clear career pathways in green jobs, tailored to meet the interests and skills of young people.
- Collaborating with educational and industry partners to provide training and skill development opportunities focused on emerging green technologies and sustainability practices.
- Involving youth in the policymaking process related to green jobs to ensure the programs meet their needs and expectations.

### **CC.2.3 Enhance Access to Grants and Funding for Environmental Projects**

EPA should enhance access to grants and funding by:

- Expanding eligibility criteria for environmental grants to include individual students and youth-led groups, particularly those from underrepresented communities.
- Streamlining the grant application process to make it more accessible for young people, including guidance and support through application workshops.
- Offering a variety of funding levels tailored to different educational stages (elementary, middle, and high school) to support a wide range of environmental projects and innovations.

CC3. What does success look like for NEYAC? What data or metrics would the group use (if any) to identify successful outcomes of the NEYAC engagement?

### **CC.3.1 Encourage Scholarship Programs and Environmental Careers**

EPA should focus on preparing youth for future roles in environmental sectors by:

- Establishing scholarships for students with demonstrated interest in integrating environmental justice and/or climate action frameworks into their work, regardless of their current field of study, with a focus on those from underserved communities.
- Partnering with universities, trade schools, and organizations to offer internships and mentorships that provide practical experience in environmental careers.
- Developing an accessible database of career resources and opportunities in the environmental sector.

### **CC.3.2 Performance Metrics**

EPA should quantify its influence on policy through clear performance metrics by:

- Tracking the number of NEYAC recommendations that are incorporated into local, state, or federal environmental bills.
- Monitoring the progression of these bills through legislative bodies and their eventual enactment into law.
- Evaluating the broader impact of these laws, such as changes in pollution levels, improvements in public health, and increased public awareness of environmental issues.

### **CC.3.3 National Conference and Resources to Start Sustainability Groups in School**

EPA should boost visibility and effectiveness by:

- Organizing an annual EPA Summit that gathers young environmental leaders from across the country to share ideas, network, and learn from each other.
- Creating starter kits for students and teachers interested in establishing school-based sustainability groups, including guides, project ideas, and funding sources.
- Establishing a national network of school sustainability groups that can share successes, challenges, and best practices, facilitated by NEYAC.

## **Part II: Environmental Justice**

EJ1. 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 that would enhance awareness and access?

### **EJ.1.1 Enhance Digital Outreach and Engagement**

EPA should enhance digital outreach and engagement by:

- Utilizing social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc to spread awareness of EPA resources and initiatives.
- Creating engaging content such as videos, infographics, and podcasts to educate and engage youth in environmental justice issues.
- Collaborating with social media influencers and youth advocates to amplify EPA's outreach efforts and provide communication storytelling workshops and filmmaking grants for advocates in environmental justice and Justice40 communities.

### **EJ.1.2 Engage Schools and Youth Organizations**

EPA should engage schools and youth organizations by:

- Partnering with educational institutions to incorporate environmental justice education into curricula and extracurricular activities, offering guest lectures and educational materials.
- Building trust and relationships by engaging directly with community leaders and youth, attending local events, and gathering community feedback.
- Hosting virtual events and workshops focused on environmental justice topics, providing platforms for youth to learn and connect with EPA representatives.

### **EJ.1.3 Develop User-Friendly Online Resources**

EPA should develop user-friendly online resources by:

- Creating interactive and accessible tools like interactive maps and toolkits to help youth navigate environmental justice issues and access EPA resources.
- Expanding language options and providing translation services to accommodate users from diverse linguistic backgrounds, enhancing accessibility.
- Engaging communities directly to gather input on the usability of tools like EJScreen, conducting usability testing, and implementing regular updates based on user feedback.

EJ2. How can the EPA engage youth in environmental sustainability? How can young people actively promote innovation and implement sustainable ideas? How would you identify youth's vision for a just and sustainable future?

### **EJ.2.1 Highlight Individual Youth Climate Stories**

EPA should highlight individual youth climate stories by:

- Creating a digital campaign or filmmaking fellowship that features monthly stories of youth who have made significant environmental impacts.
- Collaborating with youth organizations and media platforms to spread these stories widely, ensuring they reach and inspire a diverse audience.
- Expanding on awards or recognitions like the President's Environmental Youth Award for innovative sustainability projects led by youth, providing them platforms at EPA events to share their experiences and achievements.

### **EJ.2.2 Expand Youth Engagement and Education in Sustainability**

EPA should expand youth engagement and education by:

- Providing toolkits for starting sustainability clubs, integrating climate education into school curricula, and creating online platforms for students to collaborate and share achievements.
- Hosting environmental job fairs and collaborating with educational institutions and industry leaders to offer internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs.
- Establishing scholarships focused on environmental sustainability for students in environmental justice communities and organizing conferences where students can present projects and compete for funding.

### **EJ.2.3 Develop National EPA Climate Ideas Conference**

EPA should develop a national EPA climate ideas conference by:

- Organizing an annual conference where youth from across the country can present their sustainable solutions and projects.
- Including workshops and seminars led by experts in sustainability to educate and inspire participants.
- Providing networking opportunities with like-minded peers and mentors from the environmental sector.

EJ3. 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?

### **EJ.3.1 Develop Continuous Outreach/Programs, Not Just One-Off Events**

EPA should develop continuous outreach programs by:

- Establishing long-term partnerships with community organizations, local schools, and Tribal councils to continuously assess and address environmental justice issues.
- Creating a series of workshops and seminars that address ongoing environmental challenges and engage community members in problem-solving.
- Implementing regular update meetings with communities to inform them of progress and gather feedback on EPA initiatives.

### **EJ.3.2 Launch Assessment Outreach Programs Pre/Post Event to Assess Quantitative and Qualitative Impact**

EPA should launch assessment outreach programs by:

- Developing and distributing pre-event surveys as part of the EPA's event-planning and outreach process and incorporating pre-event survey feedback in their event planning to understand community concerns and expectations.
- Conducting post-event evaluations to measure changes and impacts, using both surveys and focus groups to gather comprehensive feedback.
- Utilizing the data collected to refine and improve future initiatives, ensuring that the programs are responsive to the actual needs and concerns of the communities involved.

### **EJ.3.3 Facilitate Youth Engagement in Environmental Decision-Making**

EPA should facilitate youth engagement by:

- Implementing youth advisory councils within EPA regional offices to enable young people to provide insights and perspectives on local environmental issues.

- Providing meaningful internships and volunteer roles that engage youth in hands-on projects and decision-making, offering real-world experience in environmental management and policy.
- Offering grants to support environmental restoration and sustainability projects led by youth.

EJ4. 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?

#### **EJ.4.1 Expand Public-Facing Education and Engagement Initiatives**

EPA should launch these public-facing initiatives by:

- Creating short, engaging edutainment videos showcasing green space access, preservation efforts, and cleanup projects.
- Hosting competitions for youth to propose innovative environmental policies, with winners getting recognition and possible implementation.
- Centralizing website resources for easier access to EPA information and tools.

#### **EJ.4.2 Increase Physical Presence and Regional Office Visibility**

EPA should increase physical presence and regional office visibility by:

- Partnering with local initiatives to facilitate the creation of local environmental youth advisory councils.
- Supporting the formation of Local Environmental Youth Advisory Councils (LEYACs) to involve youth directly in policy-making and local environmental health responses.
- Increasing activities of regional offices in local environmental projects to foster community involvement and enhance visibility.

#### **EJ.4.3 Effective Use of Social Media**

EPA should effectively use social media by:

- Analyzing which social media platforms are most effective for engaging specific youth demographics, focusing efforts where the most impact can be achieved.
- Conducting live Q&A sessions on platforms most frequented by youth (YouTube, Instagram, etc) with EPA experts on topics like environmental justice and sustainability.
- Leveraging digital platforms and social media to connect with and mobilize youth, providing them with platforms to express their views and influence EPA initiatives.

EJ5. What topics relating to Environmental Justice are most urgent to youth?

#### **EJ.5.1 Green Jobs and Educational Opportunities**



EPA should emphasize green jobs and educational opportunities by:

- Emphasizing the importance of supporting workers transitioning from fossil fuel industries to clean energy sectors to prevent economic hardship and promote equity.
- Highlighting the significance of sustainable career paths that align with youth values and aspirations, focusing on local job creation and training opportunities.
- Enhancing awareness of what green jobs entail, such as roles in renewable energy sectors and sustainable agriculture, and promoting entrepreneurship in environmental solutions.

### **EJ.5.2 Clean Air & Water**

EPA should focus on clean air and water by:

- Advocate for stronger enforcement policies on industries affecting air and water quality with dedicated partners prioritizing community well-being, stricter Clean Air and Water Act enforcement in sacrifice zones, greater fines for non-compliance, and compensation for community members and environmental restoration.
- Focusing on reducing high ozone levels that adversely affect youth health, emphasizing the need for immediate regulatory actions to safeguard long-term health.
- Enhance educational efforts to raise youth awareness about the impacts of air and water pollution and the importance of stringent air and water quality standards, employing clear and accessible language for effective comprehension.

### **EJ.5.3 Transportation and Mobility**

EPA should address transportation and mobility issues by:

- Implementing stricter emissions standards for larger vehicles and ensuring accurate assessments of low-emission technologies.
- Collaborating with cities to improve public transit systems, making them more reliable and accessible for young people.
- Supporting local and state initiatives to create pedestrian and bike-friendly zones through funding and policy advocacy, and educating youth about the benefits of alternative transportation modes.

### **EJ.5.4 Protections for Sacrifice Zones**

EPA should ensure protections for vulnerable ecosystems and communities in sacrifice zones by:

- Prioritizing climate solutions that safeguard vulnerable communities and ecosystems, while avoiding false solutions which impose significant costs.
- Providing appropriate support for recovery in sacrifice zones and at-risk communities through grants for grassroots efforts, ending subsidies to extractive industries harming ecosystems and communities, and investing in sustainable alternatives.
- Recognizing and protecting the intrinsic rights of nature, especially in vulnerable ecosystems such as wetlands, prairies, and old-growth forests, which are critical to environmental health but are threatened by corporate interests and anthropogenic activity.

## Part III: Circular Economy

CE1. How can EPA and its partners (e.g., state or local governments, non-profit organizations, industry groups or academia) more effectively engage young people to help reduce food waste at home and abroad?

### **CE.1.1 School & Educational Outreach**

EPA should enhance school and educational outreach by:

- Emphasizing the importance of early intervention in shaping food habits and attitudes through educational techniques like gameplay, storytelling, and hands-on participation.
- Creating resources for older youth groups to guide them through initiatives to prevent over-consumerism, showcase useful grocery shopping habits, teach about food safety and health, and engage in urban sharing.
- Encouraging youth to engage in urban sharing initiatives like communal gardens and food-sharing programs.

### **CE.1.2 Experiment With Social Media Outreach Campaigns**

EPA should experiment with social media outreach campaigns by:

- Making information fun by creating apps or challenges that encourage group participation, such as workshops and competitions focused on reducing plastic usage.
- Creating challenges and workshops centered around EPA goals to engage youth actively, such as a "Plastic-Free Week" challenge that addresses both individual habits and the broader systems promoting over-consumerism.
- Highlighting youth who complete challenges on social media with photos and stories to emphasize the power in numbers, encourage collective action, and inspire systemic change beyond the platform.

### **CE.1.3 Changing the Narrative Around Food**

EPA should change the narrative around food by:

- Incorporating culturally significant foods into educational initiatives to form connections with food that holds personal and communal importance.
- Promoting the importance of eating in seasons with local plants and encouraging activities like community gardening and visiting farmers' markets.
- Developing educational docu-series that recognize and highlight local foods, native foods, and their connections to lands, people, and wildlife.

CE2. How can EPA's efforts to manage food (as a material) in the most sustainable and efficient way be improved to benefit and work for youth?

### **CE.2.1 A Physical Presence in Community Partnerships**

EPA should enhance community partnerships by:

- Meeting youth where they are at by providing accessible opportunities for engagement and education in schools, parks, and online.
- Tailoring outreach programs to align with science education curricula and establishing educational initiatives in locations where youth frequent.
- Supporting Farm to School initiatives that bring locally produced foods into school cafeterias and incorporate food and agriculture education into the curriculum.

### **CE.2.2 Skill-based Training & Opportunities**

EPA should provide skill-based training and opportunities by:

- Integrating hands-on activities into school curricula, such as field trips to local farms or community gardens.
- Organizing cooking demonstrations and workshops to demystify food preparation and highlight value-added products.
- Partnering with local businesses and organizations to offer internships, apprenticeships, and mentorship programs in the food industry.

CE3. How can outreach and education on making the most of food and preventing food from going to waste at home be most effective in disadvantaged communities?

### **CE.3.1 Building Connections to Food**

EPA should build connections to food by:

- Increasing emotional connection to food through gardening and cooking activities that benefit human well-being and predict pro-environmental behaviors.
- Providing grants and financial incentives for local governments to develop and maintain composting and recycling facilities.
- Supporting sustainable agriculture initiatives that promote land restoration and traditional knowledge in modern agricultural techniques.

### **CE.3.2 Community Engagement & Trusted Partnerships**

EPA should enhance community engagement by:

- Working directly with community-based organizations and schools to establish educational opportunities on children's health and food-related topics.
- Combining principles of sustainability, STEAM education, and cultural competency to ensure emotional connection and relevance to diverse backgrounds.
- Supporting initiatives for community and home gardens, especially with food plants that can handle the local climate.
- Supporting sustainable agriculture initiatives in areas affected by environmental degradation and climate change.

### **CE.3.3 Addressing Food Deserts & Their Consequences**

EPA should address food deserts by:

- Encourage municipalities to establish programs requiring food vendors and restaurants to donate safe-to eat leftover food to local nonprofits for human consumption, while remaining aware of the disproportionate effects the regulations may have on small businesses and vendors
- Educating communities on sustainable food management practices through school gardens, after-school programs, and partnerships with educational institutions.
- Support local food cooperatives and farmers markets to promote food sovereignty and circular economies, and create incentive programs for food vendors, restaurants, and nonprofit-operated temporary food establishments to participate in food donation pathways.

CE4. What roles can food retailers and food service providers play in helping young people and those living in disadvantaged communities waste less at home?

#### **CE.4.1 Plastic Pollution & Reliable Recycling**

EPA should address plastic pollution by:

- Implementing bans on single-use plastics and promoting the adoption of affordable sustainable packaging alternatives.
- Investing in recycling and composting infrastructure to improve waste management practices.
- Supporting grassroots initiatives aimed at addressing plastic pollution and promoting sustainable waste management.

#### **CE.4.2 Grant Programs & Community Building**

EPA should develop grant programs and community building initiatives by:

- Partnering with the private sector to target initiatives in reducing food waste/loss in disadvantaged communities.
- Establishing community kitchens where residents can cook and share meals using surplus food.
- Prioritizing grant applicants that represent youth-led, community-driven organizations, particularly in disadvantaged communities.