

# **National EPA-Tribal Science Council**

## **Organizational Overview** *...who we are and how we work*

*June 2017*

## **Preface**

This document is meant to provide readers with an overview of the National EPA-Tribal Science Council, including how the organization works and how input is received and tribal needs can be integrated into EPA's priorities. It is intended to be a "living document," and the content may be revisited and updated as the needs of the group change. Because the Council ultimately reports to the EPA National Tribal Operations Committee (NTOC), significant issues will be brought before the NTOC for its input and support.

## **Updates**

The document was revised in October 2019 to reflect EPA's 2019 reorganization and the change of the Office of Science Policy to the Office of Science Advisor, Policy, and Engagement.

# Table of Contents

1.	Introduction.....	1
2.	Mission Statement and Goals.....	1
3.	Membership.....	2
4.	Participation.....	3
5.	Co-Chairs .....	4
6.	Executive Secretary.....	4
7.	Workgroups.....	5
8.	Flow of Information.....	6
9.	Decision Making.....	7
10.	Ground Rules.....	8

# 1. Introduction

The National EPA-Tribal Science Council (TSC or Council) is a standing working group comprising EPA representatives from across the Agency, a tribal representative from each of the EPA regions with federally recognized tribes, and an additional representative of the Alaska Native communities. At the request of the National Tribal Caucus (NTC) of the National Tribal Operations Committee (NTOC), the TSC was formed in May 1999 to serve as a vehicle through which the Agency builds an understanding of scientific issues that are of highest priority to Indian Nations at a national level and through which tribes influence the Agency's scientific agenda by raising priority issues to an Agency-wide group. In December 2000, a group of NTC and EPA representatives worked in partnership to develop the mission and goals of the TSC and establish the initial membership. The Council held its first meeting in December of 2001 at the Ak-Chin and Gila River Indian Communities.

The agenda of the Council is driven by tribal priority science issues, meaning that the group responds to the most pressing issues of concern to tribes. However, unlike other EPA-Tribal Partnership groups that consist solely of tribal representatives and are advisory in nature, subject the Federal Advisory Committee Act regulations, and often focused on a particular program or subject/media area, the TSC uses a collaborative, holistic approach among officially designated Tribal and Agency Representatives from across EPA program offices and regions. Members work together to identify the most appropriate mechanisms to address the issues identified. Although the group recognizes that some situations may necessitate that Tribal and EPA Representatives work independently, the foundation of the group is built on this collaborative, consensus-based way of operating.

## 2. Mission Statement and Goals

**Mission Statement:** The mission<sup>1</sup> of the TSC is to provide a forum for mutually beneficial interaction between Tribal and Agency Representatives to work collaboratively on science issues. *The Tribal Science Council is committed to the development of sound scientific principles, integrity and culturally appropriate approaches to meet the needs of individual tribes/nations, tribal communities and the resources on which they depend.*

The goals<sup>1</sup> of the TSC are to:

- Develop a better understanding of the priority science issues of tribes from across the nation and EPA's ability to address these issues and consider them as part of its formal planning process.
- Reach consensus on collaborative approaches for addressing priority science issues.

---

<sup>1</sup> The original mission and goals of the TSC were approved by the National Tribal Caucus and National Tribal Operations Committee at their meetings in June and July 2001, respectively. The mission and goals have been updated, most recently at the TSC Spring 2017 Face-to-Face Meeting.

- Share EPA products or activities that could help address the priority science issues of tribes.
- Promote partnerships between tribes and EPA scientists in the development and application of sound science.
- Support tribes in developing a scientific basis for their environmental programs.
- Facilitate communication and coordination with other agencies and organizations to address aspects of priorities outside EPA's expertise/role.
- Highlight tribal success stories through an annual report.

### **3. Membership**

The membership includes a Tribal Representative from each of the EPA regions that have federally recognized tribes and an additional tribal representative for Alaska Native tribes/communities. The Agency Representatives include a representative from pertinent Headquarters program offices and each region. The Council has adopted the following membership roles and responsibilities:

The TSC Tribal Representatives will:

- Be formally designated by the Regional Tribal Operations Committee (RTOC), with one Tribal Representative and one alternate serving per region, with an additional Tribal Representative for Alaska Native tribes/communities;
- Comprise the TSC Tribal Caucus, which is led by the Tribal Co-Chair and Vice Co-Chair and meets regularly; and
- Serve as liaisons for tribes within their regions to identify tribal science priorities and implement the mechanisms identified for addressing these priorities.

The TSC EPA Representatives will:

- Be formally designated by an Assistant or Regional Administrator or their designee, with one EPA Representative serving for each program office and one EPA Representative serving for each EPA region;
- Be able to represent his/her office or region;
- Have the authority to assess tribal science priorities relative to his/her office's or region's ongoing activities and strategic planning exercises;
- Comprise the EPA Caucus, which is led by the Agency Co-Chair and meets regularly; and

- Serve as liaison with other tribal program activities and EPA-Tribal Partnership Groups supported by his/her office.

Collectively, the TSC members are expected to:

- Possess sufficient scientific knowledge to understand and work on the issues raised by the group, although each person is not expected to be an expert on every topic;
- Work collaboratively with tribal representatives and EPA staff and EPA-Tribal Partnership Groups;
- Commit the time needed to adequately contribute to the work of the group; and
- Coordinate with Agency-supported EPA-Tribal Partnership Groups, other tribal groups, tribal organizations, tribal colleges, other federal agencies and nongovernmental organization partners.

## 4. Participation

Regular participation by TSC members is critical to the group's success. Council business meetings and conference calls are kept to a small size to maximize interactions and build relationships among TSC members (as defined in the Membership Section). TSC members are expected to attend all in-person meetings and conference calls (which include a monthly TSC teleconference, a monthly Caucus teleconference, and workgroup teleconferences as needed). When they are unable to participate, members are responsible for staying informed about what transpired during meetings and conference calls, which includes reading meeting minutes or call summaries. TSC members may send their designated alternate as their official representative in their absence. If a TSC member sends his/her alternate, the TSC representative and alternate are responsible for exchanging pertinent information to ensure an effective flow of communication.

In addition to the parameters above, the following guidelines for participation apply to TSC meetings and conference calls:

- Only officially designated TSC representatives, or their alternates, may participate in TSC member discussions;
- Although anyone may observe TSC meetings and conference calls, those who are not officially designated Agency or Tribal Representatives should provide input to the TSC via the officially designated representatives;
- Outside experts and guests may be invited to participate in TSC meetings and conference calls. (Outside experts, guests and observers should be introduced or announced at the start of the meeting or conference call.)

If a TSC member is unable to attend a conference call or meeting it is his/her responsibility to contact the appropriate Co-Chair prior to the call or meeting. *If a TSC member misses three meetings, including conference calls, without contacting one of the TSC Co-Chairs, the appropriate Co-Chair will contact the member.*

## 5. Co-Chairs

Two TSC Co-chairs preside over the Council—one from among the EPA Caucus and one from among the Tribal Caucus, based on a process determined by each Caucus. Additionally, the Tribal Caucus has a Vice Co-Chair who assumes the responsibilities of the Tribal Co-Chair in his or her absence.

The following describes the roles and responsibilities of the Co-Chairs:

- Coordinate discussions within their respective caucus and ensure that the issues are considered by the larger group.
- Plan and develop agendas for conference calls and face-to-face meetings. Facilitators and other members of the TSC will provide assistance, as appropriate.
- Run conference calls, open and close meetings and conference calls, and provide guidance for achieving the goals of the conference calls and meetings.
- Provide overall guidance for the TSC.
- Represent the TSC at NTOC, NTC and RTOC meetings, as directed by the Council
- Speak on behalf of the TSC, as directed by the Council.
- Serve as liaisons with other organizations, as directed by the TSC.
- Address any unresolved Council issues that arise by developing proposals for TSC concurrence.

Co-Chairs and the Tribal Vice Co-Chair typically serve concurrently for a period of 2 years, but the term length can be modified as necessary. It is the intent to rotate the position of Co-Chairs. The incoming Agency Co-Chair is designated by the Office of Science Advisor, Policy, and Engagement. The Tribal Co-Chair and Vice Co-Chair are chosen by a process determined by the Tribal Caucus.

## 6. Executive Secretary

The TSC Executive Secretary's role is to assist in the effective operation of the Council and facilitate the flow of information within and beyond the Council. This position currently resides

in and is selected by the Office of Research and Development's (ORD) Office of Science Advisor, Policy, and Engagement. This individual will serve the TSC by:

- Coordinating and planning conference calls and meetings;
- Seeking input from the TSC Co-Chairs prior to making expenditures related to training and facilitation on the TSC's activities;
- Being the initial point of contact for inquiries to the TSC from external entities, other than NTOC, and communicating responses to the TSC;
- Tracking the progress of the group;
- Maintaining regular communications with the Council Co-Chairs; and
- Assisting in the development and dissemination of group products.

## **7. Workgroups**

The TSC may form workgroups to address tribal science issues. This structure will help to ensure that issues are discussed and researched in greater depth than is possible in a full-group setting. These workgroups will:

- Be formed on an as-needed basis with an anticipated "life span";
- Consist of EPA and Tribal Representatives;
- When appropriate, include representatives from EPA-Tribal Partnership Groups; and
- Be presided over by EPA and Tribal Workgroup Co-Chairs.

These workgroups may:

- Include broad participation by experts, both internal and external to the TSC, to ensure subject matter expertise;
- Meet periodically outside of the full TSC or Caucus meetings.
- Develop products for review and approval by the Council;
- Explore issues, contact relevant parties and develop potential solutions;
- Present proposed solutions and issues for resolution; and
- Report their progress to the Council during full TSC and Caucus meetings and conference calls.



## 8. Flow of Information

The TSC was formed to address issues that are important to tribal and federal interests. One of the primary responsibilities of the TSC is to work collaboratively to identify and address National Tribal Science Priorities to be implemented at the tribal community level, as well as to foster opportunities for collaboration.

TSC Tribal Representatives are the leads for identifying priority science issues for their respective regions. They are responsible for communicating and coordinating the process for selecting National Tribal Science Priorities through their RTOCs. Because the Council is designed to complement EPA's existing infrastructure for working with tribes across the country, scientific issues also can be brought to the attention of the TSC by an TSC EPA Representative working with a program-specific EPA-Tribal Partnership Group (e.g., National Tribal Air Association).

The process to finalize National Tribal Science Priorities includes elevating the issues to EPA senior leadership, so that they can determine how to best address the issue. If the priority issue of concern goes beyond EPA's scope or expertise, then the EPA Caucus will facilitate the communication and coordination with other agencies and organizations to more effectively respond to science priority issues.

The TSC EPA Representatives are responsible for communicating priority tribal science and research issues to their senior managers and appropriate Regional Science Councils. They are tasked with aligning priorities to program and regional activities and assisting in leveraging available resources.

The TSC EPA Representatives from Headquarters offices, including ORD regional representatives, will work with the ORD Senior Indian Coordinator to inform and engage the National Program Directors.

The TSC information surrounding the National Tribal Science Priorities will be communicated through webinars, the EPA Tribal Science website, and the Tribal Portal.

The Council will exercise consistent communication with the American Indian Environmental Office and Tribal Program Managers. A major deliverable of the TSC is a process to identify National Tribal Science Priorities in Indian country.

The purpose of the National Tribal Science Priorities process is to establish a framework for EPA and tribes to identify and prioritize environmental and human health issues and communicate these issues to senior EPA managers at the national level to better inform EPA's strategic plan and ORD's strategic research action plans.

RTOCs are critical to developing the National Tribal Science Priorities. The TSC seeks input from the Tribal Caucus on significant environmental challenges that they and the tribes that they represent face.

The Tribal Caucus will obtain feedback from tribes in their respective regions for identifying National Tribal Science Priorities through the RTOCs, federally recognized tribes in their regions, media-based EPA-Tribal Partnership Groups (e.g., National Tribal Air Association), and tribal organizations as a first step toward identification of National Tribal Science Priorities.

The objectives and criteria outlined below must be applied to develop a final set of National Tribal Science Priorities.

The objectives to select new National Tribal Science Priorities should accomplish at least one of the following:

- Contribute to science that is tribal and Alaska Native specific and advances the field of tribal environmental and human health research.
- Provide methods to understand and address tribal and Alaska Native environmental and human health issues, inclusive of smaller populations.
- Foster a new generation of tribal and Alaska Native researchers and scientists.

Criteria that will be considered in selecting National Tribal Science Priorities include:

- Does the potential priority have national implications? Regional impacts also will be considered.
- How will the priority assist tribal and Alaska Native populations, including sensitive subpopulations (e.g., children and the elderly)?
- How can the priority be tangibly implemented in tribal and Alaska Native communities?
- How may the priority be measured in terms of products and outcomes?
- Does the priority provide opportunities to create and form partnerships and/or increase tribal and Alaska Native capacity?

## **9. Decision Making**

The Council will spend the majority of its time engaged in dialogue to better understand tribal science priorities, learn more about existing and planned EPA and tribal science activities, and explore ways to ensure that these activities address selected tribal science priorities. On the

occasions where decisions need to be made by the TSC, the Council will make decisions based on consensus. For purposes of this group, the term “consensus” is defined as the absence of dissent, meaning that all participants in the decision can “live with” the proposed decision.

For issues that need to be discussed and decided by the Tribal Representatives, the Tribal Caucus will convene to discuss the issue and will report the decision back to the full Council. *Participation by all members of the Tribal Caucus is important for the success of the decision-making process.*

For those issues that need to be discussed and decided by EPA Representatives, the EPA Caucus will convene in person or via conference call to discuss the issue and reach a decision based on the consensus of the members. *Participation by all members of the EPA Caucus is important for the success of the decision-making process.* The decision reached will be reported back to the full council.

## 10. Ground Rules

These ground rules are meant to be the basic guidelines for TSC operations. As the activities of the group change, the ground rules may need to be expanded.

- *Promote the group’s goals.* In all of its efforts, TSC members will support and promote the goals agreed to by the group.
- *Be solution oriented.* Participants are encouraged to work collaboratively with other members and be solution oriented in their discussions
- *Respects other points of view.* Participants are expected to treat each other with respect and patience and make every effort to understand and consider other needs and points of view.
- *Seek to understand.* Participants should listen to others without interruption. When someone raises a point that is unclear, members are encouraged to ask clarifying questions.
- *Stay focused.* Participants should stay focused on the agenda for a meeting or call, unless the group agrees that the agenda should be changed.

