

The American Indian Environmental Office 2024 Climate Adaptation Implementation Plan Addendum

Introduction:

Each Tribe experiences their own unique vulnerabilities and impacts from climate change, and collectively Tribal Nations experience nearly every climate change impact present in North America. Since Tribes are so closely connected to their surrounding natural environment, the changes to the environment because of climate change disproportionately impacts indigenous peoples.

To better inform the American Indian Environmental Office's (AIEO) vulnerability assessment, AIEO reviewed the vulnerability assessments that each EPA Region conducted. A consistent Tribal vulnerability mentioned throughout regional Climate Adaptation Implementation Plans was water. Extreme drought and extreme precipitation both have disproportionate impacts on Tribes as reflected in Region 9's vulnerability assessment. The assessment states "water is at the heart of many tribal cultures and the foundation of livelihoods, economies, subsistence, and treaty rights".

Listed below are the five-climate adaptation implementation priority actions that AIEO is committed to in 2024:

1. Develop communication resources on how Tribes can use GAP for climate adaptation efforts.
2. Partner with EPN to host climate adaptation technical assistance workshops for Tribes.
3. Develop a coordination process to enable EPA to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Agency decision making.
4. Include climate considerations in the IRA funded EPA Indian country Direct Implementation performance assessment framework.
5. Training plan for enhancing staff knowledge about climate adaptation.

Climate Adaptation Implementation Actions

1. Develop communication resources on how Tribes can use GAP for climate adaptation efforts.

- Background: Tribal Nations and their communities experience a wide variety of impacts from climate change. The General Assistance Program (GAP) has opportunities for Tribes to tailor their environmental programs to meet their climate change adaptation needs by increasing climate work.
- Action(s): AIEO provides meaningful assistance towards capacity building by developing communication resources and plans on how Tribes can use GAP for climate adaptation efforts.
- Expected Outcome(s): AIEO promoting the opportunities of GAP for climate adaptation will correlate with an increase in the number of Tribes taking action to adapt to climate change.

2. Partner with EPN to host climate adaptation technical assistance workshops for Tribes.

- Background: Tribal Nations and their communities experience a wide variety of impacts from climate change including vulnerabilities such as the administrative burdens associated with applying for climate funding.
- Action(s): AIEO partners with Environmental Protection Network (EPN) to host climate adaptation technical assistance workshops focused on addressing specific climate and institutional vulnerabilities.

- Expected Outcome(s): An increase in Tribes receiving technical assistance from EPN can lead to an increase in Tribes acting on climate adaptation priorities.

3. Develop a coordination process to enable EPA to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge (IK) in Agency decision making.

- Background: Incorporating IK into Agency decision making is imperative to EPA's decision-making processes because it provides Tribal environmental and cultural information to advise critical climate baselining and historical data from often underrepresented indigenous perspectives. To respond effectively to Tribal climate vulnerabilities, EPA staff are encouraged to bolster their understanding of Indigenous Knowledge, how it can be incorporated into Agency decision making, how IK can only be included when a Tribe wishes to share their knowledge, and careful consideration is required to ensure the inclusion of IK is respectful and appropriate.
 - In November 2021, the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the CEQ jointly released a new memorandum that commits to elevating Indigenous Knowledge in federal scientific and policy processes. The memorandum includes the creation an Interagency Working Group charged with initiating a process to develop government-wide guidance for Federal agencies on elevating IK with Tribal consultation, Native community engagement, as well as Agency, expert, and public input.
- Action(s): To support the broader action of incorporating IK in Agency decision making, in FY23 AIEO developed training to educate EPA staff and how to incorporate it into EPA's work. For FY24, AIEO will focus on coordinating efforts to deliver IK training, as discussed in AIEO's training plan.
- Expected Outcome(s): The application of Indigenous Knowledge can help EPA's actions to be more resilient to climate change and encourage more Tribal engagement in climate adaptation actions.

4. Include climate considerations in the IRA funded EPA Indian country Direct Implementation performance assessment framework.

- Background: It is critical for EPA to fully incorporate climate change considerations into the Direct Implementation (DI) responsibilities so when EPA implements an environmental program in Indian country, the program is implemented with resilience and adaptation in mind. OITA, in partnership with EPA Region 9, is establishing a Regional-HQ Center of Excellence for coordination on EPA Direct Implementation in Indian country. This initiative is funded through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). The Center of Excellence will include completing a national assessment of Indian Country Direct Implementation program performance and set up of a long-term framework for DI performance measurement, transparency, accountability, and collaborative engagement.
- Action(s): AIEO will incorporate climate considerations into the long-term Direct Implementation performance framework.
- Expected Outcome(s): Intentional incorporation of climate change considerations into forthcoming DI performance framework will ensure climate resiliency and adaptation is embedded in how EPA assess and conducts its Direct Implementation responsibilities.

5. Training plan for enhancing staff knowledge about climate adaptation.

- Background: AIEO's planned trainings address several vulnerabilities including institutional vulnerabilities related to Indigenous Knowledge, general Tribal capacity development barriers, and specific wildfire vulnerabilities faced by Tribes.

- Action(s): AIEO will develop and/ or assist in four trainings. These trainings are:
 - *Indigenous Knowledge (IK) Training*: AIEO will finalize and deploy IK training focused on how EPA can implement CEQ's IK Guidance. The training and subsequent quarterly IK discussions will focus on how to incorporate IK into Agency decision making, especially climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
 - *EPA's New Consultation Policy Training*: AIEO will continue to work on aligning EPA climate efforts with the Tribal Treaty Rights (TTR) MOU through a training on EPA's new consultation policy, which includes EPA's policy on TTR and how the policy should be considered when EPA is developing climate actions.
 - *Tribal UST Climate Case Study*: AIEO will assist OLEM with the development of a regulated entities training by including a Tribal UST climate case study.
 - *EPA Tribal Climate Programs*: AIEO will co-develop and deliver training on how EPA's programs that can be effectively utilized for Tribal climate work.
- Expected Outcome(s): These planned trainings will build on AIEO's current climate plan action of developing communication resources on how GAP can be used for climate work. The goal of all the AIEO trainings is to better educate EPA staff on the complexities surrounding climate adaptation issues for Tribal communities and to help Tribes better adapt to those realities.