

Pursuant to Executive Order 14091 (February 16, 2023) on  
"Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for  
Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government"

## 2023 Equity Action Plan Summary

# U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

### Delivering equity through EPA

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recognizes that fulfilling our mission—to protect human health and the environment—depends on the ability to serve and lift up communities with environmental justice concerns that have long been overburdened by pollution. EPA strives to infuse the consistent and systematic fair, just, and impartial treatment of all individuals into all EPA programs, policies, and activities. In remaining faithful to these commitments, EPA is living up to the promise to protect human health and the environment made to all people in the United States and its territories when the Agency was created more than 50 years ago.

## New strategies to advance equity

EPA has identified eight areas of focus for its [2023 Equity Action Plan](#) through public engagement with a wide range of communities, including socially and economically disadvantaged small businesses; communities with environmental justice concerns and environmental justice organizations; regional, state, and Tribal communities; farmworker advocacy groups; and community science groups. EPA will continue to engage the public on these action areas, its progress, and next steps throughout this year and beyond.

**1. Improve access to federal funding and assistance programs for communities with environmental justice concerns.** *Communities with environmental justice concerns face capacity constraints in accessing federal resources such as grants and technical assistance. These communities often have experienced decades of chronic underinvestment and frequently lack capacity to engage in decision-making processes, prepare competitive proposals, or manage federal awards. These barriers impede efforts to identify the appropriate and most needed forms of assistance, write compelling grant applications, form multiparty collaborative partnerships, develop holistic plans with multiple project elements, and effectively implement and report on the results of grants received. To address the barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Operationalize a [National Network of Environmental Justice Thriving Community Technical Assistance Centers](#) (EJ TCTACs) that focus on basic capacity building assistance such as organizational development, engagement, and collaboration building between communities and others, such as local utilities and states, grant-writing training, and support.

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- Operationalize EJ TCTACs as a one-stop shop to support communities, which will also serve as a navigator for capacity constrained communities to identify and receive additional forms of support from across government and other sources that match their needs. Traditionally the government has squarely placed the burden on communities of looking across thousands of different assistance programs (grants, assistance, other support) and understanding which programs are available to meet their needs. The EJ TCTACs will be a single point of entry for capacity constrained communities into a broader constellation of assistance and will not just inform communities of different programs but facilitate access to support that matches the needs of communities.
- Establish and operationalize a [National Network of EJ Thriving Community Grantmakers](#) (EJ TCGM). The EJ TCGM program will build a nationwide network of Grantmakers that will provide subgrants to communities in their regional coverage areas in amounts between \$100-350K. These subgrants will essentially replace EPA's traditional grant programs such as the EJ Small Grants, which would provide such small levels of support directly to communities through a traditional government grant competition and award process.
- Launched a new \$2 billion [Environment and Climate Justice Change](#) grant program for community-driven collaborations that bring together efforts to deal with legacy pollution, the impacts of climate change, development of local workforces, meaningful engagement, community education – all with a goal of implementing solutions that create positive change on the ground for communities.

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**2. Reduce cumulative environmental and health impacts in communities with environmental justice concerns.** *No community should bear a disproportionate share of adverse environmental or public health consequences from the nation's economic and other activities. However, the past failure of environmental decision-makers to address historical and structural factors such as redlining, or incorporate remedies to historical inequities, has exacerbated the demonstrated connection to negative environmental quality. Government programs have historically failed to fully appreciate the nexus among housing, health care access, transportation, economic development, green space access, climate change, and other issues that amplify an inequitable distribution of cumulative environmental and public health hazard and harm. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Build internal capacity within EPA programs by developing policies, procedures, and practices to improve coordination, collaboration, and adoption of cumulative impacts approaches across programs; building a network of practitioners in EPA's programs and regions to support cumulative impact assessment actions and share data, information resources, best practices, and legal tools; and developing and delivering training materials on cumulative and disproportionate impacts.
- Create forums to explore emerging tools and methodologies, innovative ideas, and promising practices to advance understanding of topics related to cumulative impacts.
- Advance the development and implementation of performance metrics on assessing and addressing cumulative impacts in [EPA's Strategic Plan](#) Goal 2 Annual Performance Goals.

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**3. Strengthen EPA's external civil rights compliance program and ensure that civil rights compliance is an Agency-wide responsibility.** *Historically, civil rights enforcement in the environmental sector has been insufficiently resourced, and resource constraints have hindered EPA's ability to fully use its civil rights implementation and enforcement authority to vigorously enforce federal civil rights laws. EPA's civil rights compliance efforts have not fully engaged with internal and external stakeholders and had not fully integrated civil rights compliance throughout EPA programs and activities. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Strengthen [EPA's external civil rights workforce and program](#) through hiring, onboarding, and training of dedicated civil rights federal and contractor staff in headquarters and the regions, and conducting timely and effective complaint investigations and resolutions.
- Initiate and complete proactive pre-award and post-award civil rights compliance activities, including affirmative compliance reviews.
- Operationalize clear and strong civil rights guidance and provide corresponding training and technical assistance to increase recipients' compliance with civil rights laws.
- Strengthen federal interagency collaboration and coordination on complaints, compliance reviews, and policy guidance.
- Refine the informal resolution process to increase opportunities for complainants and communities to participate in resolving complaints.

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**4. Protect children equitably from exposure to environmental contaminants.** *Children are at greater risk to environmental health impacts due to biological, behavioral, and social factors. Early life exposures may also result in adverse health impacts later in life or in later generations. Research shows that social inequities create substantial environmental health disparities that result in pregnancy-related complications that affect the unborn child, adverse health outcomes, and disease. Adverse health impacts on pregnant women and children are exacerbated by climate change, which demonstrates the need to give particular attention to children’s environmental health in climate resilience and adaptation planning. To address the barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Use available science, research, and policy to strengthen protection for children from the health effects resulting from harmful environmental exposures and reduce environmental disparities for socially vulnerable children. For example, consider available children’s environmental health science in conducting risk assessments, including cumulative risk assessments, and other analyses that drive decisions on pollution reduction rules, environmental standards, and guidance.
- Identify, prioritize, and conduct research to better understand the impact of environmental exposures on children and inform decisions that are protective of children’s health for socially vulnerable communities.
- Devote compliance and enforcement resources to address areas with potential lead exposures to children noted in the Biden-Harris fact sheet: [New Actions and Progress to Protect Communities from Lead Pipes and Paint](#) and in support of the

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[EPA Strategy to Reduce Lead Exposures and Disparities in U.S. Communities.](#)

- Integrate children’s health considerations into the work of EPA’s regional offices to advance environmental justice and collaborate with federal partners to advance children’s health protections under the [President’s Task Force on Environmental Health and Safety Risks to Children.](#)
- Implement EPA’s Action Plan as part of the White House Gender Policy Council’s [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#) to promote gender equity in mitigating and responding to climate change and regulating and reducing exposure to environmental contaminants that pose risks to maternal and children’s health.
- Implement actions in support of the [White House Blueprint for Addressing the Maternal Health Crisis](#) related to women’s reproductive health risks associated with lead, wildfire smoke, extreme heat, chemical and non-chemical stressors, and the provision of adequate and equitable community-level health care for environmental exposures.
- Implement actions in support of the [Cancer Moonshot](#) to prevent childhood exposure to carcinogens and other toxins by compiling data and providing analysis on children’s health used to inform Agency risk assessments and regulations and using partnerships and outreach to increase awareness.

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**5. Address inequitable access to information and resources to improve engagement and health impacts in rural communities.**

Existing [information](#) demonstrates that there is a lack of equitable access to adequate wastewater sanitation service in rural areas. Rural economies are more dependent on natural resources, which may be disproportionately affected by pollution, chemical exposures, and from climate change. Requirements of funding opportunities, imposed through statute, regulation, or practice, can create additional burdens on rural communities (e.g., to perform a feasibility study). Limited access to resources (materials, skilled labor, expert consultants, etc.) in rural communities can result in more costly project expenses, delayed timelines, and / or incorrectly scoped projects. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:

- Work to provide financial and technical assistance to small and rural communities to implement actions supporting the [Closing America's Wastewater Access Gap Community Initiative](#), an EPA and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) partnership, to help historically underserved communities with environmental justice concerns identify and pursue federal funding opportunities to address their wastewater needs and eliminate harmful exposure to backyard sewage.
- Support water infrastructure using technical, managerial, and financial assistance opportunities and provide technical assistance to rural communities to increase access to water and wastewater infrastructure and other projects that in turn can reduce public health concerns.
- Participate in the USDA-led [Rural Partners Network](#), an alliance of federal agencies and commissions working directly with rural communities to expand rural prosperity through job creation, infrastructure development, and community improvement.



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- Modernize EPA's financial assistance programs to encourage climate-smart investments in communities across the U.S., including rural communities, including through the Resilient Infrastructure Subgroup on Climate to support EPA offices with integrating climate adaptation into their financial assistance programs, and making EPA's tools, training, data, and technical assistance programs discoverable and accessible to applicants and funding recipients.
- Increase the availability of pesticide safety information and reduce adverse health impacts by working to provide access to bilingual (particularly Spanish) labeling.

**6. Ensure public access to EPA programs and activities, and ensure full protection from health and environmental harms for people with disabilities.** *EPA has lacked the capacity to ensure consistent, effective, and well-coordinated reasonable modifications and / or auxiliary aids and services to ensure open access to EPA programs and activities. People with disabilities are more likely to have social and economic risk factors, such as poverty and unemployment, that put them at greater risk and exposure to disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects. These effects include those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Develop a clear EPA Directive / Order on [Section 504](#) (of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) procedures for ensuring meaningful access for persons with disabilities to EPA programs, services, and activities.

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- Develop program and region-specific disability access plans pursuant to the long-term performance goal under the EPA's Strategic Plan to ensure open access (i.e., digital and physical) to all programs, activities, and services conducted by EPA.
- Seek meaningful input from internal and external stakeholders in the development of the directive, including for implementing a fair and prompt public complaint process.
- Include in performance evaluations accountability for promoting disability access to EPA's programs, activities, and services.
- Conduct a physical assessment of EPA facilities to identify disability access issues (including contractor-operated facilities).
- Initiate research on the intersectionality of people with disabilities and other vulnerabilities to equitable access to environmental benefits.
- Develop "disability disparity indicators" that EPA can target for mitigation (e.g., reduction in environmental exposures and harms leading to childhood asthma).

**7. Strengthen community-based participatory science to achieve environmental equity in communities with environmental justice concerns.** *Many communities with environmental justice concerns lack access to resources (such as funding, training and guidance, equipment loan programs, etc.) to develop and implement community-based participatory science programs. There is also a need to ensure investments in planning, data infrastructure, and technical support to strengthen data quality and data management to support the use of community-generated data to successfully address community public health and to impact decision-making in communities. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:*

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- Develop approaches, guidelines, tools, and training to implement the [EPA Participatory Science Vision](#), including a participatory science implementation guide to serve as a facilitative resource to support the integration and use of data collected by community and volunteer scientists at EPA.
- Conduct outreach to technical support groups, state and local governments, and community science groups to ascertain their needs with respect to data quality, data management, and resourcing of technical and staff needs.
- Conduct research in and with communities through the [Community-Engaged Research Collaborative for Learning and Excellence](#) (CERCLE) in Edison, NJ.
- Fund community science actions through Inflation Reduction Act and / or the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law grant solicitations such as the opportunity for community-driven partnerships to fund monitoring, sampling, and other scientific projects related to reducing pollution and increasing climate resilience through the Environment and [Climate Justice Community Change Grants](#) program.

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**8. Improve data and analytic capacity to better identify and remove barriers faced by communities with environmental justice concerns.** *There are limitations on the ability to develop statistical estimates of exposure to environmental hazards at the relevant geographic scale and socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Additionally, there is a lack of clarity or guidelines on how to assess progress over time in equity. To address these barriers and others, EPA will:*

- Identify and aim to fill gaps in data collected by relevant partners and other agencies that limit EPA's ability to perform robust equity assessments (e.g., compare / combine media data with demographic data to determine a model to map).
- Partner with statistical agencies that have relevant survey or administrative data to develop robust statistical estimates of exposure to environmental hazards disaggregated across relevant dimensions and at an appropriate spatial scale, and with federal, state, local, and Tribal agencies, and other stakeholder groups to share data where appropriate to build larger more robust interoperable data for equity analyses.
- Leverage EPA's community-based participatory science partners to enhance communities' capacity to understand and use data and tools relevant to their specific concerns.
- Develop equity evaluation guidelines for conducting EPA program evaluations supported by equitable data approaches.

## What EPA accomplished

Below is a sampling of EPA's progress delivering on equity and racial justice since its first Equity Action Plan in 2022.

- ***Developed and operationalized a Cumulative Impacts Framework in EPA's programs and activities.***  
Issued [Cumulative Impacts: Recommendations for ORD Research](#), which provides recommendations for EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) cumulative impacts research to improve scientific methods and tools and [Legal Tools to Advance Environmental Justice: Cumulative Impacts Addendum](#), an assessment of EPA's legal authorities to consider and address cumulative impacts.
- ***Built the capacity of communities with environmental justice concerns.***  
Established an [EJ TCTAC program](#) that will provide - free of charge and without the need for any application - tens of thousands of communities and other environmental justice stakeholders with technical assistance such as for grant proposal writing, grant management, effective implementation of projects and grant resources, reporting, etc.
- ***Launched the new [Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights](#).***  
Significantly increased staffing with a majority of full-time employees deployed in EPA's 10 regions; strengthened and increased support for language assistance services and community engagement; began development of indicators to identify disparities in environmental and public health conditions; and trained and built capacity across EPA on integrating equity and

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justice into agency work to advance environmental justice and integrate equity in the implementation of Agency programs.

- ***Strengthened external civil rights enforcement.***

Initiated EPA's first civil rights compliance review to evaluate impacts of potentially discriminatory activities by EPA financial assistance recipients on communities with environmental justice concerns, and increased transparency by affirmatively providing information to the public including an interactive [Online Docket](#) of all external [civil rights](#) complaints filed with EPA since 2014, and corresponding documents.

- ***Integrated participatory (community) science.***

Released [Using Participatory Science at EPA: Vision and Principles](#), a strategic approach to using participatory science (also known as citizen science, community science, volunteer monitoring, public participation in scientific research) to strengthen environmental protection and produced [resource materials](#) (Quality Assurance Toolkit) to support the use of participatory science, such as through [\\$53 million in funding for 132 air monitoring projects in 37 states](#) and [seven approximately \\$75,000 Environmental Justice Small Grant awards](#) to help communities to engage in collaborative efforts to reduce diesel pollution at ports and railyards.