

**U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY**  
**OFFICE OF AIR AND RADIATION**  
**CONCEPT PAPER FOR ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMUNITY LEARNING**  
**CENTER**  
**FEBRUARY 8, 2011**  
**DRAFT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT**

**INTRODUCTION**

In January 2010, Administrator Lisa P. Jackson made *Expanding the Conversation on Environmentalism and Working for Environmental Justice* one of EPA's key priorities. Many minority, low-income, and indigenous people have been historically underrepresented in environmental decision making, while at times experiencing higher levels of environmental pollution and other social and economic burdens that result in poorer health outcomes. Many members of these communities have not been able to participate effectively in environmental decision making in part because they lack the background and information they need for meaningful participation. As a result, EPA does not always benefit from important community input.

This new Agency priority challenges EPA to empower overburdened communities to take action to improve their health and environment. To address this challenge, EPA's Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) is taking the lead in developing a learning center or institute for environmental justice community members. The purpose of the center is to increase community awareness and understanding of environmental risks stemming from pollution and related environmental justice concerns. This effort will build communities' capacity to participate in the protection of their air, water, and land resources. To become full partners in addressing the sources of pollution in their neighborhoods and communities, communities need help to understand complex environmental regulations and procedures; opportunities for public involvement; access to data and resources; assistance in navigating and participating in the regulatory process.

As OAR develops the learning center, it seeks input from environmental justice communities and stakeholders. The information below represents the initial thoughts of the Office of Air and Radiation.

**INITIAL DRAFT PROPOSAL FOR AN EJ COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTER**

Who would run the learning center?

The Office of Air and Radiation proposes to partner with another organization, perhaps a minority academic institution, which would be selected through a competitive grant process. OAR plans to seek applications from eligible entities capable of designing and managing a training program and resource center for members of minority, low-income and indigenous

communities who seek to address environmental issues that are adversely impacting their communities.

Eligible applicants will be limited to:

- States or state agencies;
- Territories;
- city or township governments;
- county governments;
- the District of Columbia;
- federally recognized American Indian Tribes;
- possessions of the U.S;
- public and private universities and colleges;
- hospitals;
- laboratories;
- other public or private nonprofit institutions; and
- 501(c)(3) organizations.

Where would the learning center be located?

This would depend on where the grant recipient is located.

What would the major activities of the learning center be?

The major activities of the learning center would be to provide trainings and workshops for members of minority, low-income and indigenous communities on environmental issues of concern to them and to develop a newsletter and resource center that serves as a clearinghouse for reference material for communities.

How could community members afford to take trainings and participate in workshops?

The conditions of the grant would require that the grantee make scholarships available to participants who need assistance with travel and per diem.

Where would the trainings and workshops take place?

Some training and workshops would take place at the location of the grantee and others would be offered in other regions of the country. It is expected that some of the training would be offered on-line.

How would community members be involved in setting curriculum and delivering training?

The learning center will not be successful unless it is community-driven. This means that the grantee must have robust discussions about needs with community members and receive input

from a diverse group of potential clients (community members) in order to establish a curriculum. It also means that the grantee must involve community members in planning each facet of the center and each course offering. For example, each training course could include one or more community members as trainers.

What kinds of training would be offered?

This will be decided after the grantee has obtained input from communities. OAR's initial thoughts are that training would develop EJ communities' capacity so that they:

- Understand EPA structure, when and how to make a difference when they engage EPA and other regulatory agencies, such as state, local and tribal agencies
- Come to the table with a basic knowledge base and technical background to provide substantive input.
- Can conduct or participate in community level analysis and assessments using publicly available tools and resources.

This might mean that the initial trainings could cover topics like EPA's rulemaking process, public involvement opportunities, and accessing and using publicly available data (e.g., air quality, socio-demographic, geographic information system (GIS)). At present, OAR expects that for the first year or two of operation, the learning center would focus on courses that are generally applicable to communities such as those listed above and a few courses that are specific to air quality protection. Once the learning center is established, the focus could expand to other programs (water, land, pesticides).

What experience does OAR have in developing this kind of center?

OAR has partnered with Northern Arizona University's Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals to support development of the American Indian Air Quality Training Program (AIAQTP), which provides tribal governments with training and support that facilitates their interaction with EPA and air quality programs. AIAQTP assists in building tribal capacity to manage air quality, while ensuring that courses are culturally sensitive and provides high-quality, up-to-date training. OAR has supported AIAQTP since its inception in 1993 through grant funding and by providing expertise and technical resources. Tribes have made significant progress managing their own air quality management programs as a result of this partnership.

EPA believes the AIAQTP model can be adapted for the purpose of a community training program and resource center and build communities' capacity to participate in the protection of their air, water, and land resources.

**REQUEST FOR INPUT**

EPA seeks feedback on the following questions:

- 1) Does the approach to the learning center in this concept paper seem reasonable and appropriate? Is such a learning center needed? Is there a better approach?
- 2) How can EPA strengthen community involvement in and ownership of the learning center?
- 3) How would you prioritize the activities of the learning center?
- 4) Do you have other comments or suggestions?

Comments are due by March 10, and they can be submitted to EPA via:

- e-mail to Candace Carraway at EPA's Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards at [carraway.candace@epa.gov](mailto:carraway.candace@epa.gov); or
- regular mail to:  
Candace Carraway  
Office of Air Quality Planning and Standards  
US Environmental Protection Agency  
109 TW Alexander Drive (C304-04)  
Research Triangle Park, NC 27711