



Improving EPA's Performance with Program Evaluation

An Evaluation of OAR's Tribal Air Program

Series No. 2

By continuously evaluating its programs, EPA is able to capitalize on lessons learned and incorporate that experience into other programs. This enables the Agency to streamline and modernize its operations while promoting continuous improvement and supporting innovation. This series of short sheets on program evaluation is intended to share both the results and benefits of evaluations conducted across the Agency, and share lessons learned about evaluation methodologies in this evolving discipline. For more information contact EPA's Evaluation Support Division at www.epa.gov/evaluate.

At a Glance

Evaluation Purpose

To assess the use of resources to build Tribal program capacity, address air quality problems on Tribal lands, and provide tools needed to achieve these goals.

Evaluation Type

Outcome Evaluation

Duration

June 2001–June 2002

Partners

Office of Air and Radiation

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Web Links

<http://www.epa.gov/oar/tribal/announce/2002.html>

Background: Why was an evaluation performed?

The 1990 Clean Air Act (CAA) Amendments authorized Indian Tribes to implement CAA programs on Tribal reservations. In support of this charge/mandate, EPA's Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) further developed its Tribal Air Program to provide Tribes with technical and financial assistance to address CAA requirements in their jurisdictions. Since the program's implementation, OAR has provided grants to more than 100 Tribes to support the development of Tribal air programs. Amidst limited funds and staff resources, Tribes have made significant progress in developing capacity to implement CAA programs through small- and large-scale Tribal programs. Small air programs address issues related to emissions inventories or initiating monitoring programs, while larger programs address problems associated with hazardous air pollutants, indoor air quality, acid rain, mobile sources, radiation, and other issues of local concern. It is at this juncture that OAR determined to evaluate how effectively the program is using its resources to: (1) build Tribal program capacity; (2) address significant air quality problems on Tribal lands; and (3) provide the tools necessary to achieve items one and two.

Basic Evaluation Approach: How did they do it?

The evaluation was conducted by a team comprising staff from the Office of Policy, Economics and Innovation (OPEI), the Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO), and contractors led by Darrel Harmon, Senior Indian Program Manager for the Office of Air and Radiation Tribal Program. The evaluation was completed using the six steps outlined below.

- Step I:** Developing an activities flow chart to identify Tribal Air Program stakeholders, and their responsibilities and activities.
- Step II:** Developing a list of 56 interviewees (25 air professionals from Tribes, 25 EPA Regional and Headquarters staff, and six representatives from non-governmental organizations that work with Tribes).
- Step III:** Preparing a one-page interview guide addressing the key issues presented in the activities flow chart.
- Step IV:** Conducting interviews, primarily by phone, individually or in small group settings with project participants.
- Step V:** Collecting and analyzing data on resource expenditures from the Regions and EPA Headquarters.
- Step VI:** Analyzing data and information from the interviews to prepare report findings and recommendations.

Evaluation Results: What was learned?

In 2002, OAR allocated approximately \$9.9 million in State and Tribal Assistance Grants to fund Tribal Air Program activities. The evaluation helped OAR determine that “overall,” the Tribal Air Program has helped Tribes make significant progress toward developing capacity to carry out the CAA on Tribal lands through the development of small- and large-scale Tribal air programs. By providing funding to organizations like the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals and Tribal Air Monitoring Support Centers, EPA has provided useful technical assistance.

Areas needing improvement still exist, however. For example, funds for grants are distributed from OAR to the Regions, which then distribute the grants to eligible Tribes. The evaluation found that the criteria used to distribute the grants to Tribes differs considerably in each Region, suggesting the need to develop a national approach to distributing funds that can be tailored to meet the specific needs of a region. Additionally, improved tracking of information on how Tribes use their resources is needed to determine where resources are being used effectively or ineffectively. The evaluation indicates that EPA should work closely with Tribes to develop performance goals and measures that will help EPA systematically review the efficacy of Tribal air programs. Furthermore, Tribes indicate they require more comprehensive training in areas of technical assistance. They recommend that existing guidance materials and tools that are developed by Tribal organizations, EPA Headquarters, Regional offices, or Tribal organizations be centralized in a database or Web site to facilitate improved communication and information exchange. Tribes also requested that they be involved in the preliminary planning stages and the decision-making process in developing rules or guidance documents that affect them.

Approach for this Evaluation

Step I

Develop Activities Flow Chart

Step II

Develop List of Interviewees

Step III

Develop an Interview Guide

Step IV

Conduct Interviews

Step V

Collect and Analyze Data on Resource Expenditure

Step VI

Develop Findings and Recommendations

Evaluation Outcomes: What happened as a result?

The evaluation, which brought visibility to OAR's Tribal Air Program both internally (through management review of the report) and externally, found that the Tribal Air Program helped Tribes make significant progress toward developing capacity to carry out the CAA on Tribal lands, given limited resources. The evaluation also identified inconsistencies in the allocation of Tribal grant program funds across the Regions, and the need to develop standard criteria for the disbursement of funds. Further, the evaluation highlighted the need for better data collection requirements to measure performance and to fully evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the grant programs and how Tribes use grant funding for their air programs. The evaluation identified approximately 27 recommendations in the areas of training, communication, grants management, performance measures and management, regulatory and guidance development, technical assistance, and program implementation. To date, half of the recommendations included in the report have been implemented and OAR staff are determining which of the remaining recommendations should be implemented. OAR staff continue to monitor the program to identify areas of improvement and update the report as new information becomes available.

