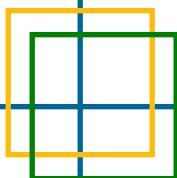




Evaluation of the Drinking Water and Clean Water Infrastructure Tribal Set-Aside Grant Programs



Fact Sheet

Introduction

The EPA Clean Water Indian Set-Aside (CWISA) Grant Program and the Drinking Water Infrastructure Grant Tribal Set-Aside (DWIG-TSA) Program provide funding for wastewater infrastructure and drinking water infrastructure to American Indian tribes and Alaska Native Villages. EPA coordinates with Indian Health Service (IHS) on these programs, a division within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Through this program evaluation, EPA sought to determine the extent to which the combined efforts of the EPA DWIG-TSA program and the EPA CWISA program have resulted in increased access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities and in increased compliance with the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) in Indian country. EPA also sought to better understand and explain how these programs are implemented and the factors influencing program performance. In addition, because IHS often oversees and directly implements the infrastructure projects, EPA hoped to gain a deeper understanding of its own scope of influence and if and how EPA could better demonstrate program results.

The following information describes the questions that structured the evaluation, the overall evaluation approach, and the evaluation's key findings and recommendations.

Overarching Evaluation Questions

The following questions formed the structure of the evaluation:

1. How does EPA implement the DWIG-TSA and CWISA programs at headquarters and in the regions?
2. To what extent are the DWIG-TSA and CWISA programs achieving their stated goals?
3. What factors influence whether the programs achieve their stated goals?
4. Are the current DWIG-TSA and CWISA program performance measures accurate indicators of EPA's progress?
5. What implementation improvements or innovations could be made by EPA to make the DWIG-TSA and CWISA programs more effective in meeting the water and wastewater infrastructure needs of tribes?

Evaluation Approach

To answer these overarching evaluation questions, evaluators collected and reviewed documents related to the programs; conducted interviews with 39 individuals, including EPA headquarters staff, EPA regional staff, IHS staff, and tribal government staff; and analyzed data on over 650 DWIG-TSA and CWISA projects that EPA contributed funding to between calendar years 2003 and 2009.

<http://www.epa.gov/evaluate>

For more information on completed evaluations at EPA or the Evaluation Support Division, visit the above link.

Program Goals and Measures

EPA tracks progress made by the DWIG-TSA and CWISA programs toward the EPA Strategic Plan Goal 2—Protecting America’s waters—according to performance on three Strategic Plan measures.

- **Compliance Strategic Measure:** By 2015, 88 percent of the population in Indian country served by community water systems will receive drinking water that meets all applicable health-based drinking water standards.
- **Drinking Water Access Strategic Measure:** By 2015, in coordination with other federal agencies, provide access to safe drinking water for 136,100 American Indian and Alaska Native homes.
- **Sanitation Access Strategic Measure:** By 2015, in coordination with other federal agencies, provide access to basic sanitation for 67,900 American Indian and Alaska Native homes.

Evaluation Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

- **Program Goals and Priorities:** The specific program goals and priorities for these programs could be clearer and more focused. EPA has the opportunity to more clearly articulate and focus the goals of both programs, and then to focus program design and implementation accordingly in a set of “cascading” decisions and actions that would follow clearer goals and priorities.
- **Funding Allocation:** The method used to allocate funds for each program has an understandable basis and history; however, neither allocation process is an ideal match for the current program priorities and strategic measures.
- **Project Selection:** For both programs, project selection could be more clearly and consistently tied to EPA’s priorities, while still maintaining regional discretion and flexibility.
- **Communication:** Despite improvement in recent years, communication within EPA and between EPA and IHS is inconsistent and not optimal for strategic program management or learning and improvement. There are also opportunities for improved communication with tribes about these programs.
- **Access Strategic Measures:** EPA has limited ability to make progress on the current strategic measures focused on providing access to drinking water and clean water to tribal homes due to a number of factors, such as reliance on other federal agencies and lower than needed funding levels.
- **Compliance Strategic Measure:** EPA appears to be quite limited in its ability to make to make progress toward the current compliance strategic measure, though the extent of the limitations is not clear due to a lack of measurable data. The drivers of some compliance problems may be related to operations and maintenance (O&M) at tribal systems or the introduction of new drinking water rules, rather than to infrastructure problems that the DWIG-TSA program can address.
- **Program Results:** EPA’s meaningful contributions to meeting tribal infrastructure needs are not well reflected by the reported program performance. Despite the identified challenges surrounding making progress toward the current strategic measures, both programs have made significant contributions over the years to Indian country through these programs by providing funding for vital water infrastructure needs.

Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the evaluators recommended the following to the EPA headquarters staff with oversight responsibility for these infrastructure grant programs.

1. Clarify the goals and priorities of both infrastructure grant programs.
2. Consider changing the access strategic measures to ones that more directly reflect EPA's mandate, authority, and scope of influence, considering available data and any changes to the programmatic goals.
3. Consider changing the compliance strategic measure to one that more directly reflects the drivers of compliance problems and EPA's scope of influence over these problems.
4. Reassess the national annual budget allocation for both programs to be more clearly tied to EPA's goals and priorities.
5. For both programs, update and clarify expectations for project selection to be more clearly in line with the program priorities; allow for regional flexibility and discretion; and promote increased consistency and transparency.
6. For both programs, routinely collect and analyze data to enhance transparency and strategic coordination and improve EPA's ability to report on, advocate, and improve both programs.
7. Update the national guidelines for both programs to reflect any changes made as a result of the above recommendations and to reflect implementation changes since the inception of the programs.
8. Continue to enhance and improve communication within EPA, between EPA and IHS, and between EPA and the tribes.

The evaluators also offered three additional considerations which reflect support for previous work and efforts underway related to some of the same issues the evaluation covered.

1. Continue to focus on the critical issues surrounding infrastructure sustainability, including tribal O&M capacity issues;
2. Continue to communicate about interagency agreement requirements, expectations, and inter-agency roles between EPA and IHS; and
3. Reflect on other reports and recommendations that pertain to these programs prepared by other workgroups.

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