



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Office of Inspector General, received an anonymous hotline complaint concerning the review and selection process for the EPA Region 4 environmental justice grants. The goal of the EPA's Environmental Justice Small Grants Program is to help communities build joint partnerships to address environmental and public health issues. The complaint questioned whether certain applicants received preference and were preselected for grants. The complaint also questioned whether Region 4 management targeted a select audience. The purpose of this review was to determine whether the Region 4 Office of Environmental Justice followed policies and procedures when selecting EJ Small Grants recipients for fiscal years 2010, 2011 and 2012.

This report addresses the following EPA Goal or Cross-Cutting Strategy:

- *Working for environmental justice and children's health.*

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Affairs at (202) 566-2391.

The full report is at:
www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2013/20130621-13-P-0299.pdf

Review of Hotline Complaint Concerning the Region 4 Environmental Justice Small Grants Selection Process

What We Found

Our review of the EPA's Region 4 Office of Environmental Justice found that management had controls in place to protect against bias, fraud, and preselection of EJ Small Grants recipients during FYs 2010, 2011 and 2012. We found that the Region 4 OEJ followed EJ Small Grants policies and procedures when selecting EJ Small Grants recipients, with the exception of one requirement. We found that the Region 4 OEJ did not ensure all review panelists are "knowledgeable about environmental justice prior to serving," a requirement of the EPA Order 5700.5A1, but adhered to the other policies and procedures during the period we reviewed.

During interviews with a sample of review panelists, we found no evidence that EJ Small Grants applicants received preference or were preselected for awards from FY 2010 through FY 2012. Additionally, during interviews with a sample of review panelists, we found no evidence that Region 4 OEJ leadership supported or targeted a select audience for grants.

Some review panelists we interviewed suggested that additional training on objectivity and understanding the ranking criteria would be helpful. We also found that review panelists were not informed of the final selection of EJ Small Grants recipients. Additionally, review panelists were not offered a debriefing meeting to provide suggestions on the process. Inadequate review panelist training and a lack of follow-up and communication on the final selection of grant recipients may have contributed to perceptions that the EJ Small Grants review and selection processes were improperly executed.

Recommendations and Planned Agency Corrective Actions

We recommend that the Region 4 OEJ director provide adequate training to ensure that review panelists are knowledgeable about environmental justice prior to serving on EJ Small Grants consensus review panels. We also recommend additional training on objectivity and the definition of each ranking criterion. Further, we recommend that the Region 4 OEJ obtain feedback from review panelists, as well as notify panelists when recipients are selected for awards.

Region 4 OEJ agreed with all four recommendations and provided corrective actions with estimated dates of completion. We believe that three of the proposed corrective actions address our recommendations. We consider three of the four recommendations resolved and open pending completion of corrective actions. The remaining recommendation is unresolved pending receipt of a revised corrective action and estimated date of completion.