

Community Air Monitoring Network to Support EPA Grantees

Managed by the Environmental Protection Network

Background

In November 2022, the U.S Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) awarded 132 grants (total funding \$53.4 million) under a competitive grant program: [Enhanced Air Quality Monitoring for Communities](#) to establish important partnerships to address air quality concerns and address environmental and health outcome disparities stemming from air pollution, particularly in communities that are underserved and historically marginalized. More than half the grants were awarded to community and nonprofit organizations, 12 percent to Tribes, and the remainder to state and local governments. Funds for these three-year grants are from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) of 2021 and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) of 2022.

The [Environmental Protection Network](#) (EPN) harnesses the expertise of over 600 former EPA career staff and political appointees from across the country to serve as a trusted resource, answering calls for objective analysis, scientific rigor, and a vision for a transformed 21st-century EPA. EPN's pro bono capacity-building technical assistance program helps disadvantaged communities, community-serving NGOs, and under-resourced state, local, and tribal government agencies navigate and understand government programs, data, and processes; gain access to partners, allies, and decision-makers; and apply for and manage federal funding.

EPA's Enhanced Air Quality for Communities grants create a significant opportunity to advance community air monitoring, but EPA has limited staffing to support the grantees. EPN can help to fill this gap and help advance the emerging field of community air monitoring (i.e., through advice and support on technical, and policy issues).

EPN Community Air Monitoring Network

To encourage and enable these projects, EPN has created a "learning network" that builds a community of practice among some of the groups that have received these EPA grants. The network will be a space where they can interact with one another, leverage each other's experiences and connections, and connect with pro bono experts on air monitoring and EPA grants management.

Benefits of this inclusive and collaborative learning network include:

1. Peer-to-peer learning – Helping communities work on shared challenges together
2. Involvement of needed expertise – Connecting grantees to relevant pro bono experts that can contribute to project success
3. Moving data to action – Assisting communities in project design and execution so results get used in policies and programs to improve local air quality (often by working with Federal, state, Tribal, and local government agencies)

4. Analysis of lessons learned – Reviewing project successes and failures to inform future monitoring projects and help EPA support such efforts in the future

Learning Network Activities

The learning network has already received a number of requests for technical assistance on how to write grant applications, navigate new grants, and manage the administrative processes that federal grants require. Many of the recipients are first-time awardees of federal funding and understandably struggle to navigate the federal processes necessary to manage the funding. Over time, priority concerns may evolve and future needs may turn to technical challenges, communications, interaction with government agencies, and other issues.

Below is the current set of ideas on how EPN hopes to support the learning network over the next 6 months. The work will also be shaped by the interests of network members.

Networking – *create opportunities for interactive connections across the grantees*

- Monthly Zoom calls with community recipients to discuss projects and issues and receive training
- Showcase projects to allow all grantees to learn about other projects
- Online communication across grantees throughout the network through a Google group where all participants can post

Training and technical assistance – *build skills and internal capacity in communities*

- Monthly Zoom calls will include presentations and training sessions; calls will be recorded and placed on EPN's website. These trainings will:
 - Focus on topics of interest (including QAPPs, instrumentation, reporting, etc.)
 - Provide a mix of presentations and discussion among network members.
 - Feature EPN experts and other external pro bono experts, as needed
- Other trainings and ad hoc or ongoing workgroups will be scheduled depending on interest and capacity
- EPN will continue to answer requests for specific technical assistance for specific projects or challenges as part of its pro bono technical assistance program

Communication – *broadly share and publicize information about the projects*

- EPN will facilitate opportunities for grantees to share their information more widely, including via panels, conferences, or perhaps publications
- EPN will facilitate opportunities for grantees to share lessons learned with EPA and Congress
- Partner with other organizations to get the word out on success stories