

Tribal Science Council

Organizational Overview

. . .who we are and how we work

October, 2014

Preface

This document is meant to provide readers with an overview of the Tribal Science Council, including how the organization works and how input is received and tribal needs can be integrated into the agency's priorities. It is intended to be a "living document," the content may be revisited and updated as the needs of the group change. Because the Council ultimately reports to the EPA National Tribal Operations Committee (NTOC), significant issues will be brought before them for their input and support.

I. Introduction

The National EPA-Tribal Science Council (TSC) is a standing working group comprised of EPA representatives from across the Agency, a tribal representative from each of the EPA Regions with federally recognized tribes, and an additional representative of the Alaska Native communities. At the request of the National Tribal Caucus, the TSC was formed in May 1999 to serve as a vehicle through which the Agency builds an understanding of scientific issues that are of highest priority to Indian Tribes at a national level, and through which tribes influence the Agency's scientific agenda by raising priority issues to an Agency-wide group. In December 2000, a group of Tribal Caucus and EPA representatives worked in partnership to develop the Mission and Goals of the TSC and establish the initial membership. The Council held its first meeting in December of 2001 at the Ak-Chin and Gila River Indian Communities.

The agenda of the Council is driven by Tribal priority science issues, meaning the group responds to the most pressing issues of concern to Tribes. However, unlike other Agency Tribal groups that consist solely of Tribal representatives and are advisory in nature, subject to the Federal Advisory Committee Act regulations, and often focused on a particular program or subject area, the TSC uses a collaborative, holistic approach among officially designated Tribal and Agency representatives from across EPA Program Offices and Regions. Members work together to identify the most appropriate mechanisms to address the issues identified. While the group recognizes that there may be situations that necessitate that Tribal and EPA representatives work independently, the foundation of the group is built upon this collaborative, consensus-based way of operating.

II Mission Statement and Goals¹

Mission Statement

The mission of the TSC is to provide a forum for: mutually beneficial interaction between Tribal and Agency representatives and working collaboratively on environmental science issues. *The Tribal Science Council is committed to the development of sound scientific and cultural approaches to meet the needs of Tribes.*

The goals of the Tribal Science Council¹ are to:

- Develop a better understanding of the priority science issues of Tribes from across the Nation and EPA's ability to address these issues and consider them as part of its formal planning process.
- Reach consensus on collaborative approaches for addressing priority science issues.
- Share EPA products or activities that could help address the priority science issues of Tribes.
- Promote partnerships between Tribes and EPA scientists in the development and application of sound science.
- Support Tribes in developing a scientific basis for their environmental programs.
- Facilitate communication and coordination with other agencies and organizations to address aspects of priorities outside EPA's expertise/role.

¹The Mission and Goals of the Tribal Caucus were approved by the Tribal Caucus and the Tribal Operations Committee at their meetings in June and July 2001, respectively.

III. Membership

The membership includes a Tribal representative from each of the EPA Regions that have federally recognized Tribes, and an additional tribal representative for Alaska native tribes/communities. The Agency representatives include a person from Headquarters program Offices and from each Region that has one or more federally recognized tribes. The council has adopted the following membership roles and responsibilities:

The Tribal TSC representatives will:

- Be formally designated by the Regional Tribal Operations Committee (RTOC), WITH ONE Tribal representative and one alternate serving per Region, with an additional tribal representative for Alaska native tribes/communities;
- The Tribal representatives comprise the Tribal Caucus, which is led by the Tribal Co-Chair and meets regularly; and
- Serve as a liaison for Tribes within their Region to identify Tribal science priorities and implement the mechanisms identified for addressing these priorities.

The Agency TSC representatives will:

- Be formally designated by an Assistant Administrator/Regional Administrator or their designee, with one Agency representative serving for each Program Office and one Agency representative serving for each EPA Region that has one or more federally recognized tribes within its geographic region;
- Be able to represent his/her office or Region;
- Have the authority to assess Tribal science priorities relative to his/her Office's or Region's ongoing activities and strategic planning exercises;
- The EPA representatives will comprise the EPA Caucus, which is led by the Agency Co-chair and meets regularly; and
- Serve as liaison with other Tribal program activities supported by his/her office.

Collectively, the TSC members are expected to:

- Possess sufficient scientific knowledge to understand and work on the issues raised by the group, although each person is not expected to be an expert on every topic;
- Work collaboratively with Tribal representatives and EP staff;
- Commit the time needed to adequately contribute to the work of the group; and
- Coordinate with Agency supported Tribal Groups, Tribal organizations, Tribal colleges, other federal agencies and NGO partners.

IV. Participation

Regular participation by TSC members is critical to the group's success. Council business meetings and conference calls are kept to a small size to maximize interactions and build relationships among TSC members (as defined in the membership Section). TSC members are expected to attend all in-person meetings, and conference calls. When they are unable to participate, members are responsible for staying informed about what transpired during meetings and conference calls, which includes reading meeting minutes or call summaries. TSC members may send their designated alternate as their official representative in their absence.

If a TSC member sends their alternate in their place, they are responsible for exchanging information with that person to ensure an effective flow of communication.

In addition to the parameters above, the following guidelines for participation apply to TSC meetings and conference calls:

- Only officially designated TSC representatives, or their alternates, may participate in TSC member discussions;
- Although anyone may observe TSC meetings and conference calls, those that are not officially designated Agency or Tribal representatives should provide input to the TSC via officially designated representatives;
- Outside experts and guests may be invited to participate in TSC meetings and conference calls. (Outside experts, guests, and observers should be introduced or announced at the start of the meeting or conference call.)

If a TSC member is not able to attend a conference call or meeting it is their responsibility to contact the appropriate Co-Chair prior to the call or meeting. *If a TSC member misses three meetings, including conference calls, without contacting one of the TSC Co-Chairs, the appropriate Co-Chair will contact the member.*

V. Co-chairs

There are two TSC Co-chairs – one Co-chair nominated by consensus from among the EPA Caucus and one from among the Tribal Caucus, based on a process determined by each Caucus.

The following describes the roles and responsibilities of the Co-chairs:

- Coordinate discussions within their respective caucus and ensure that the issues are considered by the larger group.
- Plan and develop agendas for conference calls and face-to-face meetings. Facilitators and other members of the TSC will provide assistance, as appropriate.
- Run conference calls, open and close meetings and conference calls, and provide guidance for achieving the goals of the conference calls and meetings.
- Provide overall guidance for the Tribal Science Council.
- Represent the TSC at National and Regional Tribal Operations Committee and Tribal Caucus meetings, as directed by the council
- Speak on behalf of the TSC, as directed by the Council.
- Serve as liaisons with other organizations, as directed by the TSC.
- Address any unresolved Council issues that arise by developing proposals for TSC concurrence.

Co-chairs typically serve for a period of two years, but the term length can be modified as necessary. Their terms can be staggered or concurrent. It is the intent to rotate the position of Co-chairs. The new Agency Co-chair will be nominated and selected by Agency TSC members. The Tribal Co-chair role generally will be passed from Region to Region in descending order, beginning with Region 10 - or other process as determined by the Tribal Caucus.

VI. Executive Secretary

The TSC Executive Secretary's role is to assist in the effective operation of the Council and facilitate the flow of information within and beyond the Council. This position is currently in ORD'S Office of Science Policy (OSP); therefore OSP will select the Executive Secretary. This individual will serve the TSC by:

- Coordinating and planning conference calls and meetings;
- Seeking input from the TSC Co-chairs prior to making expenditures related to training and facilitation on the TSC's major funding decisions;
- Being the initial point of contact for inquiries to the TSC from external entities, other than NTOC, and communicating responses to the TSC;
- Tracking the Progress of the group;
- Maintaining regular communications with the Council co-chairs; and
- Assisting in the development and dissemination of group products.

VII. Subcommittees

The TSC may form subcommittees to address Tribal science issues. This structure will help ensure that issues are discussed and researched in greater depth than is possible in a full-group setting. These subcommittees or work groups will:

- Be formed on an as-needed basis with an anticipated "life span";
- Consist of EPA and Tribal representatives; and
- Have an EPS and a Tribal subcommittee Co-chair.

These subcommittees or work groups may:

- Have broad participation by experts, both internal and external to the TSC, to ensure subject matter expertise;
- Meet periodically outside of the full TSC meetings.
- Develop products for review and approval by the Council;
- Explore issues, contact relevant parties, and develop potential solutions;
- Present proposed solutions and issues for resolution; and
- Report their progress to the Council during full TSC meetings and conference calls.

VII. Flow of Information

The TSC was formed to address issues that are important to tribal and federal interests. One of the primary responsibilities of the TSC is to work collaboratively to identify and address national tribal science priorities to be implemented at the tribal community level as well as to foster opportunities for collaboration.

Tribal Caucus representatives are the leads for identifying priority science issues for their respective regions. The Tribal TSC representatives are responsible for communicating and coordinating the process for selecting national tribal science priorities through their Regional Tribal Operations Committees. Since the Council is designed to complement EPA's existing infrastructure for working with Tribes across the country, scientific issues can also be brought to the attention of the TSC via an Agency TSC representative from Program-specific Agency Tribal Partnership Groups (e.g., National Tribal Air Association).

The process to finalize science priorities includes elevating the issues to senior leadership, in order that they can determine how to best address the issue. If the priority issue of concern goes beyond EPA's scope or expertise, then the EPA Caucus will facilitate the communication and coordination with other agencies and organizations to more effectively respond to the science priority issues.

The Agency TSC representatives are responsible for communicating priority Tribal science and research issues to their senior managers and appropriate Regional Science Councils. They are tasked with aligning priorities to program and regional activities and assist in leveraging available resources.

The ORD TSC members, including ORD Regional representatives, will work with the ORD Senior Indian Coordinator to inform and engage the National Program Directors (NPDs).

The TSC information surrounding the priorities will be communicated through webinars, the EPA Tribal Science website, and the Tribal Portal.

The Council will exercise consistent communication with the American Indian Environmental Office (AIEO) and Tribal Program Managers. A major deliverable of the TSC is a process to identify tribal science priorities in Indian country.

The purpose of the Tribal Science Priorities (TSPs) process is to establish a framework for EPA and tribes to identify and prioritize environmental and human health issues and to communicate these issues to Senior EPA Managers at the national level to better inform EPA's strategic plan.

Regional Tribal Operations Committees (RTOCs) are critical to developing TSPs. The TSC seeks input from the Tribal Caucus on significant environmental challenges that they face.

The Tribal Caucus will obtain feedback from tribes in their respective regions for identifying TSPs from the RTOCs, federally recognized tribes in their regions, media-based tribal partnership groups (e.g., National Tribal Air Association) and tribal organizations as a first step toward identification of National TSPs.

The objectives and criteria outlined below must be applied to develop a final set of TSPs.

The objectives to select new TSPs should accomplish at least one of the following:

- Contribute to science that is Tribal and Alaska Native specific and advances the field of Tribal environmental and human health research
- Provide methods to understand and address Tribal and Alaska Native environmental and human health issues, inclusive of smaller populations
- Foster a new generation of Tribal and Alaska Native researchers and scientists

Criteria that will be considered in selecting Tribal Science Priorities include:

- Does the potential Tribal Science Priority have national implications? Regional impacts also will be considered.
- How will the Tribal Science Priority assist Tribal and Alaska Native populations, including sensitive sub-populations (e.g., children and the elderly)?
- How can the Tribal Science Priority be tangibly implemented in Tribal and Alaska Native communities?
- How may the Tribal Science Priority be measured in terms of products and outcomes?
- Does the Tribal Science Priority provide opportunities to create and form partnerships and/or increase Tribal and Alaska Native capacity?

IX. Decision Making

The council will spend the majority of its time engaged in dialogue to better understand the tribal science priorities, learn more about existing and planned Agency and Tribal science activities, and explore ways to ensure that these activities address selected tribal science priorities. However, on the occasions where decisions need to be made by the TSC, the council will make decisions based on consensus. For purposes of this group, the term “consensus” is defined as the absence of dissent, meaning that all participants in the decision can “live with” the proposed decision.

For issues that need to be discussed and decided by the tribal members, the Tribal Caucus will convene to discuss the issue and will report the decision back to the full council.

For those issues that need to be discussed and decided by Agency members, the EPA Caucus will convene in person or via conference call to discuss the issue and reach a decision based on the consensus of the members. The decision reached will be reported back to the full council.

X. Ground Rules

The ground rules below are meant to be the basic guidelines for TSC operations. As the activities of the group change, the ground rules may need to be expanded.

- *Promote the group's goals* - In all of its efforts, TSC members will support and promote the goals agreed to by the group.
- *Be solution oriented* – Participants are encouraged to work collaboratively with other members and be solution oriented in their discussions
- *Respects other points of view* – Participants are expected to treat each other with respect and patience, and to make every effort to understand and consider other needs and points of view.
- *Seek to understand* – Participants should listen to others without interruption. When someone raises a point that is unclear, members are encouraged to ask clarifying questions.
- *Stay focused* – participants should stay focused on the agenda for a meeting or call, unless the group agrees that the agenda should be changed.