



Core Principles for Agency Engagement to Support Community Rights for Climate Adaptation

Purpose

The following recommendations are from The Rising Voices Working Group on Community Resettlement and Site Expansion, for NOAA's Strategic Plan for Implementation of Justice40. The purpose is to collaboratively work with NOAA's Office for Coastal Management and across NOAA programs and offices to move these recommendations into action and commitment to support community-led adaptation and climate actions.

Successful climate adaptation and environmental justice grantmaking must start with real engagement with communities to honor their rights and priorities. Above all, it is a human right that you should be able to stay in your homelands and the creative adaptations forged in an era of change must not be premised upon a violation of that right.

For Grants and Funding to Indigenous and Overburdened Communities [1,2]



Agency-level commitment to discontinue matching requirements for Indigenous and overburdened communities.



Fund relationship building and ongoing collaboration led by Indigenous and overburdened communities.^[3]



Fund independent legal counsel for Tribal and overburdened communities from project creation through the completion of the project.



Share publicly accessible agency guidance that clearly describes criteria for evaluating community engagement and the meaning of community (e.g., connected through kin, relations, culture; and not geography).



Be wary that new data tools like **socio-ecological vulnerability and risk mapping** can become a barrier to funding and mobility and have not historically taken into account existing actions and community agency.



Create uniformity across federal grants' format and process, to reduce the burden of navigating a new system with each agency.^[4]



Ensure actual **community-leadership** of projects:

- **Tribal, Indigenous, and community leadership at the funding agency's decision-making table**, as well as the funding agency meeting the community at their table when invited, from the conceptualization through implementation and monitoring and evaluation of processes.
- **Avoid flat use of "stakeholders."** The "stakeholder" label undermines Tribal sovereignty and Tribal rights. Tribes and Indigenous Peoples are not stakeholders, but rather collective rights-holders, including rights to self-determination, with inherent responsibilities. Additionally, stakeholder-thinking may flatten diverse power differences and intentions by putting environmental risk producers on equal standing as those advancing ecological sustainability. Prioritize existing Tribal, Indigenous, and community leadership over generic lens of "stakeholder engagement", recognizing those who bear the risk of their lifeway.
- **Contact community leaders directly** when their communities are referenced in proposals as partners to ensure their full knowledge and approval of the project (e.g., akin to a reference check).
- **Co-create, through listening sessions and engagement opportunities, a rubric for reviewing quality of engagement and collaboration**, with review and input from an advisory board with representation from Indigenous and EJ communities leadership.
- **Evaluate if the project directly benefits the Tribe or Indigenous community as a group on their own terms**, and if it fulfills the Tribe or Indigenous community's collective self-determination and cultural goals.
- **Determine if the project includes community capacity building, sharing, and support** (doing 'with' and 'in support of', instead of 'for').
- **The project budget should reflect equitable support for community leaders** (or their chosen representatives), engagement, and on-site coordination.

For Justice40 and IRA Funds



Ensure that federal recognition is **not a requirement** for funding Tribal and Indigenous community projects.



Provide technical assistance throughout the project, including to reduce administrative overburdens.^[5]



Communicate potential financial and administrative burdens of grants and funded projects to communities and Tribes, including technical assistant throughout the funding-cycle, including before funds are awarded and through the close-out.



If land acquisition is part of the grant, **grantees should not be required to pay the difference in real and appraised value** and should have a mechanism to defray the property tax change.

Staffing for Systems Change



Recruit reviewers from impacted communities and environmental justice backgrounds, and provide adequate compensation for review time and labor.



Recruit staff with experience in community engagement, understanding of Tribal governance, environmental justice, and histories of displacement.



Staff and reviewers should have ongoing (more than a one-off) training on different elements of community engagement.



Grant-making staff within agencies should train by participating in community engagement trainings and then respectfully – when invited by community leadership – visiting communities, as determined by the community's time, location, and convenience to add support and not burden



Create positions dedicated to community engagement



Based on the publicly accessible agency guidance that clearly describes criteria for evaluating community engagement and the meaning of community, conduct an:

1. Analysis of authentic community engagement for proposals submitted.
2. Analysis of community engagement for proposals funded.
3. Project evaluation of community engagement, community benefits, and outcomes for implemented projects.



In Grant Administration



Identify mechanisms to cover financial burdens of additional insurance, bonding, audit requirements, etc.



Create templates and tools to facilitate grants management.



Provide staff support to grantees that need technical assistance with forms and reporting.

Within Grant Cycles



Negotiate Memorandums of Understanding and Declarations of Principles between the funding agency, grantee, and partners at start:

1. Specific leadership roles Tribal leaders and community leaders play in the project.
2. Detail government and other stakeholder roles



Build in Mechanism for Withdrawal/Pause for Evaluation and Harmonization

1. If a partnership becomes harmful for a community, they should have mechanisms to stop the funds and withdraw support for the project.

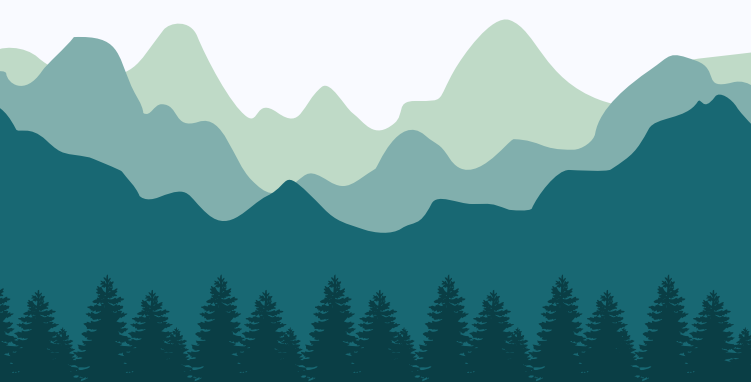


Make funds flexible and able to pivot for a crisis



Performance Measures to assess grants mid-cycle (e.g., through a 360-degree review mechanism).

1. When the grantee is not a Tribe or community, agencies should get feedback from community partners to gauge to what extent grantees are upholding their leadership, engagement, self-determination, and sovereignty.



Data Sovereignty



Policies must be updated to protect Indigenous nations' right to Traditional Knowledges (TKs).

1. TKs must not be subject to open data records or requirements
2. TKs must remain in the ownership/control of Indigenous nations



Respect Indigenous data sovereignty and adhere to the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance^[6] and comply with the best practices of free, prior, and informed consent.

Community-led Resettlement and Recognizing the Right to Remain in Place



Inter-agency coordination of federal government responses among multiple agencies and jurisdictions; see for example, prior recommendations



Indigenous and overburdened communities should be protected from the taking of land by Eminent Domain and FEMA or other agency buyouts.

Endnotes

1. As described in the 5th US National Climate Assessment, an overburdened community is a “[p]opulation or geographic location in the United States that experiences disproportionate environmental and climatic harms and risks. This disproportionality can be a result of greater vulnerability to environmental hazards, lack of opportunity for public participation, or other factors. Increased vulnerability may be attributable to an accumulation of negative or lack of positive environmental, health, economic, or social conditions within these populations or places. The term describes situations where multiple factors, including both environmental and socioeconomic stressors, may act cumulatively to affect health and the environment and contribute to persistent environmental health disparities.” Grade, A.M., A.R. Crimmins, S. Basile, M.R. Essig, L. Goldsmith, A.R. Lustig, T.K. Maycock, A. McCarrick, and A. Scheetz, 2023: Appendix 5. Glossary. In: Fifth National Climate Assessment. Crimmins, A.R., C.W. Avery, D.R. Easterling, K.E. Kunkel, B.C. Stewart, and T.K. Maycock, Eds. U.S. Global Change Research Program, Washington, DC, USA. <https://doi.org/10.7930/NCA5.2023.A5>
2. Overburdened communities includes those considered disadvantaged by the Justice40 Initiative, <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/01/2021-02177/tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad>
3. Tachera, D. (2021), Reframing funding strategies to build reciprocity, *Eos*, 102, <https://doi.org/10.1029/2021E0210546>. Published on 13 October 2021.
4. Painter, M.A., Shah, S.H., Damestoit, G.C. et al. A systematic scoping review of the Social Vulnerability Index as applied to natural hazards. *Nat Hazards* 120, 7265–7356 (2024). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11069-023-06378-z>
5. Hasert, R., C. Countryman, A. Marchand., M. Poe, K. Avery, and M. Krosby. 2024. Climate Adaptation Barriers and Needs Experienced by Northwest Coastal Tribes: Key Findings from Tribal Listening Sessions. A collaborative product of the University of Washington Climate Impacts Group, the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, and Washington Sea Grant.
6. <https://www.gida-global.org/care>

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