



Council on Environmental Quality

Open Government Plan

Version 2.0

September 19, 2014

The Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) coordinates Federal environmental efforts and works closely with agencies and other White House offices in the development of environmental policies and initiatives. CEQ was established within the Executive Office of the President (EOP) by Congress as part of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) and additional responsibilities were provided by the Environmental Quality Improvement Act of 1970. The CEQ Chair serves as the President's principal environmental policy advisor. Through interagency working groups and coordination with other EOP components, CEQ works to advance the President's agenda. It also balances competing positions, and encourages government-wide coordination by bringing Federal agencies, state and local governments, and other stakeholders together on matters relating to the environment, natural resources, and energy.

In addition, CEQ is the leader within the Federal community for improving the environmental footprint and performance of the Federal Government through its statutory role in ensuring Federal agency implementation of and compliance with NEPA and through Federal sustainability efforts led by the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, housed within CEQ.

Transparency, participation, and collaboration are part of CEQ's foundation. From its creation by NEPA over 40 years ago, CEQ has been charged with promoting public participation and transparency in understanding the environmental impacts of Government actions. Moreover, the role of the CEQ Chair in advising the President on environmental policy demands collaboration with the executive agencies, departments, and the EOP components. Therefore CEQ's mission, its operations, and its culture are fundamentally aligned with the Open Government Directive.

President Obama's Open Government Initiative calls on executive departments and agencies to adopt the principles of transparency, participation, and collaboration in their activities to make the Federal Government more accountable and more effective. This Plan updates CEQ's 2010 Open Government Plan and showcases a selection of current and future CEQ efforts. This Plan is divided into three main sections which address CEQ's commitment to transparency, participation, and collaboration.

Transparency

Transparency in Government is a key component of a democracy. Ensuring that the public has access to Government information both builds public trust in Government decision-making and allows the public to hold Government accountable for those decisions. Transparency at CEQ has three facets: public access to programmatic information, public access to operational information, and active release and transmittal of information. The first two focus on good website management, participation in government-wide data clearinghouses, a logical online filing schema, and proactive FOIA disclosure. The third involves press releases, blogs, the use of web sites, status reports, public meetings, and other communications and outreach mechanisms. Discussed below are key highlights of efforts CEQ has undertaken to build on the transparency principles in the 2010 Open Government Plan.

Open Data

Climate Data Initiative

Consistent with President Obama's May 2013 Executive Order No. 13642 on Open Data – and recognizing that freely available open Government can fuel entrepreneurship, innovation, scientific discovery, and public benefits – the Administration launched a Climate Data Initiative (CDI) to leverage extensive Federal climate-relevant data to stimulate innovation and private-sector entrepreneurship in support of national climate change preparedness. The CDI brings together extensive open Government data and innovation challenges with commitments from the private and philanthropic sectors to develop data-driven tools for communities, companies, and citizens to prepare for the impacts of climate change and taken action to address it. The CDI builds on the success of the Administration's ongoing efforts to unleash the power of open Government data. Since the launch of Data.gov in 2009, the central site to find U.S. Government data resources, the Federal Government has released troves of valuable data that was previously hard to access in areas such as health, energy, education, public safety, and global development. Co-led by CEQ, the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, CDI is an example of EOP's work on data and tools for climate resilience. This effort also exemplifies CEQ's role in deploying Government resources to support innovation and community action.

NEPA

At its core, NEPA creates transparency by requiring disclosure, public comment, and coordination about the environmental impacts of Federal actions. CEQ, with support from the Department of Energy Office of Health, Safety and Security, manages an extensive web portal for NEPA at NEPA.gov. NEPA.gov provides a wide range of information about NEPA through this portal. CEQ continues to upgrade this site to include the status of reviews of agency NEPA guidance and links to the database of Environmental Impact Statement filings and statistics posted on the Environmental Protection Agency's website. These upgrades are designed to improve public participation and the quality of Federal agency administration of NEPA.

National Ocean Council

An Executive Order signed on July 19, 2010, established the National Ocean Council (NOC), which is co-chaired by CEQ and OSTP. The NOC provides a [website](#) to support regional marine planning efforts across the country and to create a convenient place for anyone to find out more about the marine, coastal, and Great Lakes environments. The website includes a [Data Catalog](#) that has hundreds of Federal documents that the public can download and view. The website also welcomes members of the public or interested stakeholders to [submit](#) comments or suggestions.

GreenGov Green Button Workshop

The GreenGov Green Button Workshop took place on June 5, 2014, to increase Federal awareness of Green Button and provide resources to promote the use and adoption of Green Button throughout the Federal community. The Green Button initiative is an industry-led effort that responds to a White House call-to-action to provide utility customers with easy and secure access to their energy usage information in a consumer-friendly and computer-friendly format. Customers are able to securely download their own detailed energy usage with a simple click of a literal "Green Button" on their electric utility's website. GreenGov is an official trademark used by CEQ and the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive to define and identify sustainability initiatives throughout the Federal Government.

Proactive Disclosures

CEQ [proactively discloses](#) frequently requested material and information that may be of interest to the public. [CEQ's Proactive Disclosure Reading Room](#) includes reports, publications, environmental laws and regulations, documents frequently requested under FOIA, the legislative history of the NEPA, and CEQ historical documents. [CEQ's Open Government](#) page provides access to past quarterly reports to Congress regarding the status and progress of projects and activities receiving funds under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and how they have complied thus far with NEPA. Also, a plethora of resources concerning NEPA can be found at <http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/>.

Privacy

CEQ reports applicable privacy compliance information periodically, as appropriate, to the Office of Management and Budget and the Office of Administration.

Whistleblower Protection

CEQ works to ensure that its employees are informed of whistleblower rights and remedies and has posted information regarding whistleblower protection throughout CEQ's offices. In accordance with the Whistleblower Protection Act and the requirements of the Obama Administration's Second Open Government National Action Plan, CEQ is taking steps to participate in the U.S. Office of Special Counsel's Whistleblower Protection Act Certification Program.

Websites

The [CEQ website](#) holds a trove of information about the office's work including the types of documents discussed above in the Proactive Disclosures section. CEQ's website is available at www.whitehouse.gov/ceq. CEQ also manages content for the CEQ Open Government website ([Council on Environmental Quality: Open Government | The White House](#)) and welcomes suggestions for expanding public outreach and for improving transparency. Comments and questions may be emailed to CEQ at FN-CEQ-OpenGov@ceq.eop.gov.

Participation in Transparency Initiatives

CEQ's Open Government page allows members of the public to submit suggestions for expanding public outreach. When feasible, CEQ also uses its website to broadcast public meetings and internal working group meetings on CEQ's initiatives, to provide links to opportunities for participation in transparency, and to archive material. CEQ routinely invites public participation in the development of NEPA guidance. For example, on August 22, 2014, CEQ released draft NEPA guidance on when and how Federal agencies can effectively use NEPA programmatic reviews. The public can provide comments on this draft guidance directly from CEQ's website.

Additionally, there is a wealth of information on the [Climate section](#) of Data.gov. The website provides data related to climate change that can help inform and prepare America's communities, businesses, and citizens for the effects of climate change. The website's [data catalog](#) also provides access to a trove of documents and datasets.

Additionally, the NOC maintains a [blog](#) that allows members of the public to remain informed about the work that the Council is undertaking. NOC also works with Data.gov to maintain a large [data catalog](#) that the public can access. NOC's Data.gov page also allows members of the public to [submit](#) their own data to the Council. Members of the public can also [submit](#) comments or suggestions to the Council.

Public Notice

CEQ engages with the public in a variety of ways to ensure the public participates in the activities and efforts of the office. CEQ uses the Web to encourage participation through the [office's official website](#) as well as through the [CEQ blog](#), [Twitter feed](#), and [Facebook page](#). The public can also receive email updates from CEQ by registering on the office's [Stay Connected page](#).

Records Management

Since releasing its initial Open Government Plan in 2009, CEQ has made tremendous progress in improving its records management. CEQ has developed and implemented staff-wide internal records management training in accordance with the Federal Records Act and has a designated Federal Records Officer. Also, CEQ has designated a Senior Agency Official to supervise records management and has completed a self-assessment of its compliance with records management requirements, receiving a 69% score. CEQ is currently working with the National Archives and Records Administration to update its records schedules.

Freedom of Information (FOIA) Requests

Enacted on July 4, 1966, and taking effect one year later, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) provides that any person has a right, enforceable in court, to obtain access to Federal agency records, except to the extent that any portions of such records are protected from public disclosure by one of nine exemptions or by one of three special law enforcement record exclusions.¹ In accordance with the requirement of FOIA and in an effort to assist potential requesters, CEQ's [FOIA Service Center](#), and specifically, CEQ's [Online FOIA Reading Room](#) contain descriptions of CEQ's operations, including methods by which the data can be obtained, and information about CEQ's functions, rules, procedures, and the scope of CEQ's records. Final opinions, and policy statements and interpretations are also among the available content. CEQ also proactively publishes records that are frequently requested under FOIA to help prevent the duplication of incoming requests.

FOIA inquiries to CEQ may be submitted electronically at efoia@ceq.eop.gov, via fax, or regular mail. Upon initial contact, requesters are frequently directed to the FOIA Service Center for an explanation of the FOIA process or information about how to submit a proper request. CEQ's Office of General Counsel oversees FOIA implementation. The FOIA Public Liaison manages the day-to-day FOIA program, and communicates directly with individuals regarding the status of their requests and CEQ's response. Initial responses to FOIA requests are handled by the Chief FOIA Officer, and disputes are handled by the FOIA Appeals Officer.

Congressional Requests

CEQ regularly receives requests from the U.S. Congress for information regarding CEQ and its activities. To facilitate the handling of these Congressional requests, CEQ's primary point of contact is its Associate Director for Legislative Affairs. The Legislative Affairs team also proactively engages with Congress about CEQ initiatives and announcements. CEQ issues press releases containing the prepared testimony of its officials who testify before Congress. Testimony can be found on the CEQ website under the [press releases tab](#).

Declassification

CEQ has a process-oriented information security program. CEQ encourages and assists with facilitating declassification efforts on a regular basis.

Public and Agency Ideas

¹ [5 U.S.C. § 552 \(2006 & Supp. IV 2010\)](#).

CEQ engages with stakeholders to receive feedback on its work. For this Open Government Plan, CEQ staff solicited input from across all divisions of the office and held meetings where colleagues could collaborate on ideas for the Plan.

Participation

Opening Government in a meaningful way means including civil society stakeholders and the public in Government activities and decision-making. Public feedback and suggestions can lead to key innovations in Government actions and policies. The “Initiatives” tab on CEQ’s website offers multiple opportunities for public engagement, including public commenting forums and information about public meetings. The public comment portion of the website also offers the opportunity for the public to read each other’s comments. CEQ will continue to focus its public engagement efforts on public awareness of these opportunities. Recent examples of the ways in which CEQ has built participation into its work are discussed below.

Efforts to Modernize and Reinvigorate NEPA

CEQ released draft NEPA guidance on when and how Federal agencies can effectively use NEPA programmatic reviews. This guidance is designed to assist Federal agencies to meet the goals of NEPA, enhance the quality of public involvement in governmental decisions relating to the environment, increase transparency, and ease implementation. In addition, CEQ has worked with the Office of Management and Budget and the Federal agencies on several sector specific initiatives. For example, CEQ assisted in forming rapid response teams to help expedite the review process for transportation, and transmission projects and improve the overall quality and timeliness of federal permitting and environmental reviews. Elements of CEQ’s full efforts to reinvigorate NEPA are described in both this section of the Open Government Plan and in the ‘Collaboration’ section of this plan. Information covering the entire suite of efforts in this area can be found on [CEQ’s Website](#).

America’s Great Outdoors

On February 15, 2011, President Obama announced the America’s Great Outdoors Report, which outlines ways in which the Federal Government will help empower local communities to accomplish their conservation and recreation priorities by recognizing that the best ideas come from outside of Washington. CEQ coordinated efforts to encourage wide-spread participation in the development of the report. In the summer of 2010, senior Administration officials held 51 listening sessions across the country to gather input from Americans about the outdoor places and activities they value most. These sessions drew more than 10,000 participants and more than 105,000 written comments, which were used to inform the America’s Great Outdoors Report.

On December 4, 2012, the Obama Administration released the [2012 America’s Great Outdoors Progress Report](#), detailing key successes of President Obama’s America’s Great Outdoors Initiative, including advancing local conservation priorities, expanding access to lands and waters for recreation, restoring critical landscapes, and creating great urban parks and water trails in American communities. Working with Federal partners and numerous stakeholders, CEQ is

strengthening partnerships and increasing both awareness and participation in outdoor activities and stewardship of our natural resources.

GreenGov Challenge

In October 2009, the Office of the Federal Environmental Executive launched the [GreenGov Challenge](#), which is intended to encourage Federal and military personnel to share ideas about how the federal community can lead by example, green the Government, and meet the goals of [President Obama's Executive Order on Federal Sustainability](#). The GreenGov Challenge has generated more than 5,000 ideas and 165,000 votes from 14,000 federal employees. CEQ continues to build on these successes.

The GreenGov Collaborative, an online discussion group hosted by [FedCenter.gov](#), is where Federal and military personnel from across the Government are given the opportunity to put sustainability related ideas into action. This online community offers various discussion forums to share ideas and strategies, ask questions, and recruit allies in efforts to create a more sustainable Federal Government.

Collaboration

Collaborative leadership and interagency facilitation is a core of CEQ's mission, operation, and culture. Some of the best solutions to problems that the Government is looking to solve come from collaboration with the private sector. Innovators and entrepreneurs working alongside Government experts can lead to unique policy decisions and inventive products and services. Key examples of the way CEQ has built collaboration into the office's work are discussed below.

Climate Change Resilience - State, Local, and Tribal Leaders Task Force

In 2013, President Obama signed an [Executive Order](#) that established a Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience to advise the Administration on how the Federal Government could respond to the needs of communities nationwide that are dealing with the impacts of climate change. Among other measures, the Task Force will provide recommendations to the President on removing barriers to resilient investments, modernizing Federal grant and loan programs to better support local efforts, and developing the information and tools they need to prepare. The Task Force welcomes and reviews suggestions from stakeholders and the public.

Recommendations can be submitted via the Task Force [website](#). Following each meeting of the Task Force, the White House will host a briefing call to provide a readout of the meeting and an update on upcoming engagement opportunities. Interested parties can contact outreach@ceq.eop.gov to be added to the climate preparedness email list and be notified about these opportunities.

NEPA Modernization

In 2011, following an open solicitation process, CEQ chose five pilot projects to demonstrate innovative approaches to completing environmental reviews more efficiently and effectively. Two of the selected pilots especially highlight CEQ's commitment to modernizing NEPA in a way that fosters collaboration. CEQ will work with the relevant Federal agencies to implement

the lessons learned from these pilot projects to replicate time- and cost-saving approaches across the Federal Government.

The first of the pilots to highlight collaboration was one that implemented an innovative, efficient NEPA review process for passenger rail service in the Northeast Corridor. CEQ and the Department of Transportation committed to a one-year pilot focused on engaging Federal, state and local governments and the public in the environmental review process earlier to set benchmarks that maintain rigorous environmental protections and save time and costs by avoiding conflicts and delays found in similar complex multi-state transportation projects. CEQ worked with Department of Transportation and the Federal resource and regulatory agencies to develop and finalize a Statement of Principles in January 2013 that provided an alternative to developing a Memorandum of Understanding to memorialize the Federal participating agencies' roles and responsibilities. The efficiencies identified for the high-speed rail project were compiled in a best practices memo.

In another example, CEQ and the U.S. Forest Service announced the "Approaches to Restoration Management," which evaluated and compared the effectiveness of environmental reviews for two forest restoration projects and identified best practices for future restoration projects. This pilot demonstrated that early involvement of stakeholders can reduce costs and enhance efficiencies throughout the Federal Government while maintaining strong environmental safeguards at the ground level. The collaborative efforts and best practices related to this pilot have been presented in webinars for Federal planners and NEPA practitioners.

Flagship Initiative

Climate Change Resilience

On June 25, 2013, President Obama announced his [comprehensive plan](#) to reduce carbon pollution, move our economy toward American-made clean energy sources, and begin to slow the effects of climate change. Reducing carbon pollution will help keep our air and water clean, protect our children, drive innovation to modernize our power plants, and create good American jobs as we move toward cleaner, more efficient forms of energy. CEQ is leading efforts to take steady, responsible steps to cut the carbon pollution that causes climate change and threatens public health and will do so in a manner that is consistent with the Obama Administration's Second Open Government National Action Plan.

Across America, states, cities, and communities are also taking steps to protect themselves against the impacts that are too late to avoid by updating building codes, adjusting the way they manage natural resources, investing in more resilient infrastructure, and planning for rapid recovery from damages that do occur. As laid out in the President's plan, the Federal Government has an important role to play in supporting local efforts to build stronger, safer communities and infrastructure, protecting our economy and natural resources, supporting sound science to manage climate impacts, and ensuring that Federal operations and facilities can continue to protect and serve citizens in a changing climate. CEQ will foster transparency, participation and collaboration in these efforts.

NEPA Modernization

Enacted in 1970, NEPA is a cornerstone of our Nation's efforts to protect the environment and a fundamental tool to harmonize our economic and environmental aspirations. It recognizes that many Federal activities affect the environment and mandates that Federal agencies consider the environmental impacts of their proposed actions before acting. NEPA emphasizes public involvement in government actions affecting the environment by requiring that the benefits and the risks associated with proposed actions be assessed and publicly disclosed.

CEQ has proposed several steps to modernize and reinvigorate NEPA. CEQ has worked with the Office of Management and Budget and the Federal agencies on several sector specific initiatives. These measures are designed to assist Federal agencies to meet the goals of NEPA, enhance the quality of public involvement in governmental decisions relating to the environment, increase transparency, and ease implementation.