

OCEAN JUSTICE STRATEGY

A REPORT BY THE OCEAN POLICY COMMITTEE

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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON



Executive Summary

The ocean makes life on Earth possible—feeding us, sustaining livelihoods, and connecting economies across the globe. It is a source of recreation and rejuvenation for our spirits and links us to our history and heritage. Indigenous communities have stewarded the marine habitats of our lands and islands since time immemorial. Through its rich ecosystems of diverse plants, animals, and other species, it is also central to our fight against the climate crisis and to creating a cleaner, safer, and healthier future.

The Biden-Harris Administration believes all people—regardless of race, background, income, ability, Tribal affiliation, or zip code—should have equitable access to the benefits provided by the ocean. The Ocean Justice Strategy (Strategy) reflects the Administration’s strong commitment to environmental justice for all, including the people of the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes. The Biden-Harris Administration’s Ocean Climate Action Plan (OCAP), released in March 2023, called for the creation of the Strategy to identify barriers and opportunities to fully integrate environmental justice principles into the Federal Government’s ocean activities, so that the benefits of a healthy ocean environment and sustainable ocean economy are accessible to all people.¹

The Strategy is motivated by the recognition that many communities that live near the ocean, depend on marine resources, or are part of the ocean economy face unique circumstances that exacerbate their existing challenges and prevent equitable access to the benefits the ocean provides. Ocean justice derives from environmental justice, with a specific focus on the ocean and Great Lakes. It focuses on addressing environmental justice concerns related to the use of the ocean for economic, cultural, spiritual, and recreational purposes, and food security. Ocean justice provides the opportunity to work towards repairing past harms and a lens through which to think through past, current, or future impacts to the ocean. It also provides a framework with which to improve the well-being of people in coastal communities and other communities connected to and dependent on the ocean. The Biden-Harris Administration’s vision for ocean justice was developed with input from public comments received through a Request for Information published in the Federal Register, Government-to-Government consultation with Tribal Nations, roundtables with U.S. Territories and Native Hawaiian organizations, and a 2023 virtual Ocean Justice Summit. The vision includes:

- Equitable access to the benefits of a healthy and resilient ocean and sustainable ocean economy.
- Meaningful engagement of all communities in Federal ocean activities.
- Recognition of the value of engagement with Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Knowledge in ocean decision-making and research.
- Expanded and improved ocean education to build knowledge about the ocean and create a diverse and inclusive ocean workforce.

¹ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.



- Application of an ocean justice lens to ocean research and ways of knowing.

The purpose of the Strategy is to advance this vision by highlighting overarching goals, principles, and practices that the Federal Government can adopt in order to provide long-term, sustainable benefits for people, communities, and the environment. These recommendations include:

1. **Embed Ocean Justice in Federal Activities:** Provide opportunity for meaningful community engagement, better incorporate equity into funding processes and budget development, embed ocean justice into Federal practices, and improve interagency coordination.
2. **Develop a Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive, and Accessible Federal Ocean Workforce:** Grow Federal staffing capacity, increase recruitment within the Federal Government ocean workforce and leadership pipeline, and recruit and retain students and early career professionals.
3. **Enhance Ocean Justice through Education, Data, and Knowledge:** Expand and improve ocean education and workforce development, consider and apply Indigenous Knowledge throughout Federal research and development, apply an ocean justice lens to ocean research and ways of knowing, and expand the Federal tools used in characterizing social and environmental justice patterns to encompass ocean justice indicators.

To provide examples of Federal actions that work towards ocean justice, the Strategy includes seven case studies from across the Federal Government. Examples include processes, programs, and data products that enhance justice.



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About the Ocean Policy Committee

The Ocean Policy Committee (OPC) was codified by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 to coordinate Federal actions on ocean-related matters.² The OPC traces its roots to the National Ocean Council created by Executive Order (EO) 13547³ and the Ocean Policy Committee established by Executive Order 13840.⁴ The OPC is co-chaired by the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) and is directed to engage and collaborate with the ocean community on ocean-related matters, facilitate coordination and integration of Federal activities in ocean and coastal waters to inform ocean policy, identify priority ocean science and technology needs, and to leverage resources and expertise to maximize the effectiveness of Federal investments in ocean research. For more information, please see <https://www.noaa.gov/interagency-ocean-policy>.

About the Council on Environmental Quality

The White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) was established within the Executive Office of the President by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA).⁵ CEQ advises the President and develops policies on climate change, environmental justice, Federal sustainability, public lands, the ocean, and wildlife conservation, among other areas. As the Agency responsible for implementing NEPA, CEQ also works to ensure that environmental reviews for infrastructure projects and Federal actions are thorough, efficient, and reflect the input of the public and local communities. For more information, please see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/ceq>.

About the Office of Science and Technology Policy

The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) was established by the National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act of 1976 to provide the President and others within the Executive Office of the President with advice on the scientific, engineering, and technological aspects of the economy, national security, homeland security, health, foreign relations, the environment, and the technological recovery and use of resources, among other topics.⁶ As a Cabinet-level office in the Biden-Harris Administration, OSTP leads interagency science and technology policy coordination efforts, assists the Office of Management and Budget

² William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-283, § 1055(b), 134 Stat. 3388, 3851 (2021) (codified at 10 U.S.C. § 8932).

³ EO 13547, *Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes*, 75 Fed. Reg. 43023 (July 22, 2010), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2010/07/22/2010-18169/stewardship-of-the-ocean-our-coasts-and-the-great-lakes>.

⁴ EO 13840, *Ocean Policy To Advance the Economic, Security, and Environmental Interests of the United States*, 83 Fed. Reg. 29431 (June 22, 2018), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2018/06/22/2018-13640/ocean-policy-to-advance-the-economic-security-and-environmental-interests-of-the-united-states>.

⁵ 42 U.S.C. § 4321 et seq.

⁶ National Science and Technology Policy, Organization, and Priorities Act of 1976, Pub. L. No. 94-282, § 202, 90 Stat. 459, 463 (1976).



with an annual review and analysis of Federal research and development in budgets, and serves as a source of scientific and technological analysis and judgment for the President with respect to major policies, plans, and programs of the Federal Government. For more information, please see <http://www.whitehouse.gov/ostp>.

About this Document

This document was developed by the Ocean Justice Strategy workgroup of the Ocean Policy Committee. This document builds upon best practices to inform, guide, and coordinate actions of the Federal Government to address ocean justice concerns for the people and communities of the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.

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⁷ Co-chair from the committee from May 2023 to August 2023.

⁸ Co-chair from August 2023 to present.

⁹ Writing Group member from May 2023 until August 2023.



List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
AEP	Analytic Exchange Program, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Army–Civil Works	Civil Works Program, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
BOEM	Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, U.S. Department of the Interior
BRIC	Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities
CEJST	Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool
CEQ	Council on Environmental Quality
CISA	Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
CMTS	U.S. Committee on the Marine Transportation System
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DNI	Office of the Director of National Intelligence
DOC	U.S. Department of Commerce
DOD	U.S. Department of Defense
DOE	U.S. Department of Energy
DOI	U.S. Department of the Interior
DOJ	U.S. Department of Justice
DOT	U.S. Department of Transportation
EJ	Environmental Justice
EJI	Environmental Justice Index
EO	Executive Order
EPA	U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
FWS	U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
MARAD	Maritime Administration, U.S. Department of Transportation
NASA	National Aeronautics and Space Administration
NEPA	National Environmental Policy Act of 1969
NNA	Navigating the New Arctic
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration



NOPP	National Oceanographic Partnership Program
NPS	National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior
NSF	National Science Foundation
OCAP	Ocean Climate Action Plan
OES	Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs, U.S. Department of State
OIA	Office of Insular Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior
OIRA	Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPC	Ocean Policy Committee
OSTP	Office of Science and Technology Policy
OVP	Office of the Vice President
PEIS	Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement
SPEC	Office of the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate
State	U.S. Department of State
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math
SVI	Social Vulnerability Index
USACE	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Defense
USCG	U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Department of Homeland Security
USDA	U.S. Department of Agriculture



Introduction

The ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes (referred to here as simply the “ocean”)¹⁰ are intertwined with our cultures, communities, heritages, and histories. They are also interconnected with each other by rivers, streams, canals, and the hydrological cycle. In the United States, our Nation’s coasts are home to approximately 40 percent of the population,¹¹ and the ocean’s benefits—including sustenance, economic activity, recreation, and spiritual renewal—extend even further.

Just as the ocean links us with our past, it can also connect us with a future that fulfills the Biden-Harris Administration’s promise of environmental justice for all. Executive Order 14096 directs all executive branch agencies to make achieving environmental justice part of their missions, and instructs the Federal Government to restore and protect a healthy environment as “a matter of justice and a fundamental duty that the Federal Government must uphold on behalf of all people” by implementing and enforcing environmental and civil rights laws, preventing pollution, addressing climate change and its effects, and working to clean up legacy pollution that is harming public health and the environment.¹² Executive Order 14096 builds on Executive Order 14008, which established the Justice40 Initiative, setting the goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.¹³ Additionally, Executive Orders 14091¹⁴ and 13985¹⁵ charge the Federal Government with advancing equity for all to support and empower all people, including the many communities that have been underserved, discriminated against, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality.

This vision—of a restored, conserved, and healthy ocean, linked to maintaining and improving the health of connected land and freshwater systems—is of the utmost importance to the Biden-Harris Administration. The benefits to communities even far from the coast are tangible and significant. The sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and job

¹⁰ For the purposes of this document, collectively, the “ocean,” except where specifically described otherwise, includes the open ocean, coasts, estuaries, the U.S. Arctic Ocean, the Great Lakes, and the ocean and coasts surrounding U.S. Territories. While we acknowledge the importance and interconnectedness of rivers and inland waterways and their direct connections to issues of ocean justice, this document focuses on the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes per the direction of Executive Orders 13547 and 13840, *see supra* at notes 3 and 4.

¹¹ NOAA Office for Coastal Management. Economics and Demographics. <https://coast.noaa.gov/states/fast-facts/economics-and-demographics.html>. Last accessed October 2023.

¹² EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>.

¹³ EO 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, 86 Fed. Reg. 7619 (February 1, 2021), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/02/01/2021-02177/tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad>.

¹⁴ EO 14091, *Further Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, 88 Fed. Reg. 10825 (February 22, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/02/22/2023-03779/further-advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal>.

¹⁵ EO 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, 86 Fed. Reg. 7009 (January 25, 2021), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/01/25/2021-01753/advancing-racial-equity-and-support-for-underserved-communities-through-the-federal-government>.



creation (known as a “sustainable ocean economy”) can support good-paying jobs, skills training, and other economic benefits, ensure that healthy and plentiful seafood is widely available, and produce abundant and accessible ocean-based sources of energy, recreation, transportation, and trade.¹⁶ Alongside the economic benefits, coastal and ocean-dependent communities rely on healthy and resilient ocean ecosystems to protect homes, businesses, and infrastructure from extreme weather and to provide opportunities for people to pursue traditional and cultural practices.

The Ocean Climate Action Plan (OCAP), released in March 2023, is premised on the notion that there is no path to a healthy and livable climate without the ocean. The OCAP called for the creation of the Ocean Justice Strategy (Strategy) to identify barriers and opportunities to fully integrate environmental justice principles into the Federal Government’s ocean activities.¹⁷ Environmental justice in connection with the ocean is also key to the actions needed to mitigate and adapt to a changing climate, including leveraging the multiple benefits of nature-based solutions. Environmental justice will also be a cornerstone of the upcoming National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy.¹⁸

The Strategy is motivated by the recognition that many communities that live near the ocean, depend on marine resources, or are part of the ocean economy face unique circumstances that exacerbate existing challenges. These circumstances prevent many communities from sharing equitably in the benefits the ocean provides. Some communities are disproportionately burdened by the negative outcomes of human activities in and around the ocean, such as coastal flooding, pollution, and overfishing. Past and ongoing racial discrimination and marginalization, redlining, exclusionary zoning, and other discriminatory decisions or patterns have resulted in inequitable siting and growth of coastal infrastructure, such as ports, refineries, and landfills, and inadequate responses to extreme weather events and other climate-related threats. Ocean communities with a significant proportion of people who are Black, Latino, Indigenous and Native American, Asian American, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander may be disproportionately affected by ocean-related health and environmental harms and hazards, as may be communities with a significant proportion of people who experience persistent poverty or other forms of social inequality. Communities with ocean-related environmental justice concerns may also include geographically dispersed and mobile populations, such as migrant fishers displaced by environmental hazards or inequitable development practices.

This Strategy sets overarching goals, principles, and practices that the Federal Government can take to provide long-term, sustainable benefits for people, communities, and the environment. The Strategy focuses on improving Federal Government processes, workforce development, capacity building, and the production and advancement of knowledge to better address injustice faced by coastal and ocean-dependent communities. The content was informed by public

¹⁶ NOAA. (2022). Building a Climate Ready Nation: FY22-26 Strategic Plan. https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/NOAA_FY2226_Strategic_Plan.pdf.

¹⁷ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.

¹⁸ Request for Information; National Strategy for a Sustainable Ocean Economy, 88 Fed. Reg. 42111 (June 29, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/06/29/2023-13839/request-for-information-national-strategy-for-a-sustainable-ocean-economy>. Ocean Policy Committee. (2022). 2022-2023 Action Plan Summary <https://www.noaa.gov/sites/default/files/2022-06/OPC2022ActionPlanSummary.pdf>.



comments received through a Request for Information published in the Federal Register, Government-to-Government consultation with Tribal Nations, roundtables with U.S. Territories and Native Hawaiian organizations, and a 2023 virtual Ocean Justice Summit.

A Vision for Ocean Justice

Based on Executive Order 14096’s definition of “environmental justice,” “ocean justice” refers to the just treatment and meaningful involvement of all people, regardless of income, race, color, national origin, Tribal affiliation, or disability, in Federal Agency (Agency) decision-making and other Federal activities related to the ocean.¹⁹ Advancing ocean justice will enable people to have protection from disproportionate and adverse human health and ocean environmental risks and hazards, as well as equitable access to the benefits of a healthy, sustainable, and resilient ocean environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices.

Ocean justice derives from environmental justice with a specific focus on communities with environmental justice concerns that rely on the ocean and Great Lakes for economic, cultural, spiritual, and recreational purposes, and food security. In this document, these communities are referred to as “ocean justice communities.” Ocean justice communities are not limited to communities adjacent to shorelines, but extend to all communities that have economic, cultural, historical, or spiritual ties to the ocean and are experiencing ocean-related environmental justice concerns.

Ocean justice provides the opportunity to work towards repairing past harms and a lens through which to think through past, current, or future impacts to the ocean. It also provides a framework with which to improve the well-being of people in coastal communities and other communities connected to and dependent on the ocean.

This vision for Ocean Justice includes:

- **Equitable access to the benefits of a healthy and resilient ocean and sustainable ocean economy.** Every person should have access to the benefits of the ocean for sustenance, worship, enjoyment, recreation, education, and the advancement of livelihoods. These benefits should be maintained for future generations and should include protection from adverse environmental and health factors, such as extreme weather, climate risks, and pollution.
- **Meaningful engagement of all communities in Federal ocean activities.** All affected people, particularly those who have been historically excluded, should be able to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives, including timely opportunities to contribute input in a forum where barriers to participation have been removed. People should also have access to information and have the capacity, tools, and resources necessary to engage and, when appropriate, have leadership or advisory roles in Federal ocean decision-making processes. Meaningful engagement with ocean justice communities in Federal

¹⁹ See the definition of “environmental justice” in EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>.



processes requires effort to build, deepen, or in some cases repair the relationships between the Federal Government and ocean justice communities, particularly for Tribal Nations and Indigenous communities with ties to the ocean.

- **Recognition of the value of engagement with Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and Indigenous Knowledge in ocean decision-making and research.** Indigenous Knowledge should be considered, included, and applied in Federal decisions, including decisions about the ocean, as appropriate and with consent and respect for confidentiality. This engagement should follow the principles set forth in the Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge²⁰ and Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation.²¹
- **Expanded and improved ocean education to build knowledge about the ocean and create a diverse and inclusive ocean workforce.** The economic opportunities created by a sustainable ocean economy should be accessible to ocean justice communities, including good-paying jobs, educational skills training that builds workforce opportunities, technical assistance to build local capacity, and workforce development in areas that have historically received less investment.
- **Application of an ocean justice lens to ocean research and ways of knowing.** The Federal Government should apply equitable and accessible practices to the process of ocean research, including co-production of research within coastal and ocean communities and providing technical assistance to build capacity and provide information.

The Strategy has three broad goals, built on the Vision, that articulate Federal action on ocean justice:

- (1) **Embed Ocean Justice in Federal Activities** by providing opportunity for meaningful community engagement, better incorporating equity into funding processes and budget development, embedding ocean justice into Federal practices, and improving interagency coordination;
- (2) **Develop a Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive, and Accessible Federal Ocean Workforce** by growing Federal staffing capacity, increasing recruitment within the Federal ocean workforce and leadership pipeline, and recruiting and retaining students and early-career professionals; and
- (3) **Enhance Ocean Justice Through Education, Data, and Knowledge** by expanding and improving ocean education and workforce development, considering and applying Indigenous Knowledge throughout Federal research and development, applying an ocean justice lens to ocean research and ways of knowing, and expanding the Federal tools used in characterizing social and environmental justice patterns to encompass ocean justice indicators.

²⁰ Office of Science and Technology Policy and Council on Environmental Quality, *Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>.

²¹ The White House, *Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/11/30/memorandum-on-uniform-standards-for-tribal-consultation/>.



1. Embed Ocean Justice in Federal Activities

The Federal Government should facilitate, support, and encourage meaningful engagement in government activities by all communities. This means that public and governmental engagement should not be check-the-box exercises, and Agencies should conduct engagement with appropriate planning and active dialogue or other interaction with stakeholders in which all parties can contribute. For example, such engagement can inform communities of the potential for significant effects of Federal activities or identify alternatives that avoid or reduce these effects on individuals and communities. Agencies should determine the appropriate level of outreach needed to engage meaningfully and effectively with affected communities.

1.1. Provide Opportunity for Meaningful Community Engagement

Local communities are often best equipped to understand their own unique needs, dynamics, and goals and to recommend appropriate solutions. As such, the Federal Government should seek and consider the views and input of communities on Federal activities that may directly or indirectly impact coastal tourism, ocean planning, fishing, aquaculture and harvesting, spiritual, religious, or cultural practices, offshore energy production, marine conservation and restoration, or other uses of the ocean and coasts. This consideration is of particular importance for ocean justice communities that have faced historical inequities and systemic barriers that impair their ability to maintain a healthy and sustainable ocean environment.

As Agencies develop new processes, propose new projects or grant programs, or anticipate new permit applications, they should engage ocean justice communities for input at the earliest possible stage to ensure programs will meet community needs and not cause undue burden. For example, both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) have issued or are developing rules to emphasize early, meaningful coordination with stakeholders.²² Engagement should be in a form that provides meaningful access to individuals with limited English proficiency and is accessible to individuals with disabilities (e.g., translation for written or spoken materials, accessible venues and communications for persons with disabilities, and accommodations that enable participation for those who lack network connectivity).²³ Agencies should allow for sufficient time for meaningful public participation, including for ocean justice communities, such as by ensuring that comment periods or grant application deadlines take into account known community constraints, such as extending

²² Clean Water Act Section 401 Water Quality Certification Improvement Rule, 88 Fed. Reg. 66558 (September 27, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/09/27/2023-20219/clean-water-act-section-401-water-quality-certification-improvement-rule>; National Environmental Policy Act Implementing Regulations Revisions Phase 2, 88 Fed. Reg. 49924 (July 31, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/07/31/2023-15405/national-environmental-policy-act-implementing-regulations-revisions-phase-2>.

²³ EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>.



sufficiently beyond a fishing season or allowing for additional time in the event of a natural hazard affecting likely participants.

The OCAP affirms the Federal Government’s commitment to incorporate environmental justice and equity in ocean climate mitigation and adaptation priorities, such as offshore wind energy, green maritime shipping, marine carbon dioxide removal research, and climate-adaptive marine protected area networks.²⁴ For example, ocean justice is woven into the OCAP’s coastal blue carbon²⁵ priorities on coastal community engagement because the conservation and restoration of coastal wetlands and other blue carbon habitats can support local economies and livelihoods and improve the health and prosperity of people living in coastal communities. Since these areas also provide multiple climate and environmental benefits for carbon storage, coastal flood protection, water quality, and local fish and bird populations, the OCAP directs the Federal Government to work with local, State, Tribal, and Territorial governments on research, monitoring, project design and development, and technical assistance for wetland conservation and restoration.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): Climate and Equity Roundtables and Pilot Projects

In 2021 and 2022, NOAA’s Regional Collaboration Network hosted a series of Climate and Equity Roundtables across the country to collect information directly from community partners on their needs in a changing climate and to gather feedback on how NOAA provides climate services and engages with communities.²⁶ The roundtables each focused discussions around the climate impacts experienced in that region of the country, such as extreme heat and coastal flooding, and provide a model moving forward for enhancing community engagement on climate, environmental, and regional issues facing ocean justice communities.

The roundtable discussions resulted in the development of seven pilot projects that would address the specific climate needs identified by partners.²⁷ Examples of the pilot projects include building Tribal climate capacity in Alaska with the Alaska Native Tribal Health Consortium, developing climate communication tools for the Native Hawaiian homestead community, and building a community monitoring system for extreme heat in four municipalities across the Southwest and Southeast. The pilot projects are examples of Federal projects and initiatives that were developed in direct response to community needs and feedback.

²⁴ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan.
https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.

²⁵ Blue carbon areas are the coastal and marine habitats that naturally store carbon, such as salt marshes, mangroves, and seagrasses.

²⁶ NOAA. NOAA’s Climate and Equity Roundtables.
<https://www.noaa.gov/regional-collaboration-network/noaas-climate-and-equity-roundtables>.
Last accessed September 2023.

²⁷ NOAA. NOAA Regional Collaboration Network Announces Climate and Equity Pilot Projects.
<https://www.noaa.gov/noaa-regional-collaboration-network-announces-climate-and-equity-pilot-projects>.
Last accessed September 2023.



Agencies can also facilitate community-led and co-developed efforts through sustained, iterative, and varied engagement with Federal processes and programs. Relationships likely need to start *before* a project or a grant is set to begin. Special care should be taken to engage with ocean justice communities at multiple decision points, such as initial scoping, public comment periods, implementation, assessment, and evaluation, with modifications made as appropriate to fit community needs (e.g., extending a comment period or hosting additional public meetings). Agencies should solicit feedback through a variety of mechanisms that account for diversity in culture, accessibility needs, and capacity. Agencies also should make efforts to clearly articulate how this feedback has been considered and incorporated into the decision-making process. Agencies should consider the use of tools such as Community Benefit Agreements, which are legal agreements between community groups and developers, stipulating the benefits a developer agrees to fund or furnish, in exchange for community support of a project.²⁸

Due to historical harm caused by certain Federal policies, actions, and inactions, ocean justice communities may lack trust in Federal entities. Meaningfully engaging with these communities and encouraging their leadership in Federal activities requires effort to build, deepen, or in some cases repair the relationships between the Federal Government and ocean justice communities. Relationship and trust building is a time-intensive process and will require sustained and sincere action. Agencies can work to implement this in a variety of ways, such as creating positions that are focused on relationship-building, prioritizing hiring individuals with lived experience in key issues for relevant Federal positions, or creating mechanisms for communities to understand how their feedback is incorporated.

Meaningful inclusion and leadership in decision-making for ocean justice communities starts with access to the entities that are responsible for setting and implementing ocean programs and policies, from local to national scales. The Federal Government should take proactive steps to provide ocean justice communities with access to Federal decision-making. Additionally, Agencies can work with local organizations that are known and trusted by ocean justice communities, such as non-governmental organizations, universities and schools (particularly Minority Serving Institutions, e.g., Historically Black Colleges and Universities), faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, or cultural organizations to seek community insight on proposed plans or policies. Meeting people where they are, and working through credible organizations rooted in those communities, can foster more sustained and streamlined access to the Federal decision-making process for ocean justice communities.

Many Agencies also operate at a regional scale, such as through EPA's Regions or NOAA's Regional Offices. These regional hubs are an excellent resource for engaging with local communities on a more regular basis and identifying what Federal initiatives are needed and desired by those communities. (See Case Study: EPA Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers). Agencies should lean into the leadership of their regional branches, take proactive steps to ensure that ocean justice communities are aware of available regional resources, and engage with municipalities, States, Territories, and regional groups on ocean justice issues.

²⁸ U.S. Department of Energy Office of Energy Justice and Equity. Community Benefit Agreement (CBA) Toolkit. <https://www.energy.gov/diversity/community-benefit-agreement-cba-toolkit>. Last accessed October 2023.



Case Study: Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) Pilot Approaches to Engaging Underserved Communities and Communities with Environmental Justice Concerns in Offshore Wind

As offshore wind leasing accelerates, BOEM is iteratively improving its processes based on many lessons learned, such as the amount of time and intention necessary to establish meaningful engagement processes that align with decision-making timelines.²⁹

BOEM’s New York Bight offshore wind leases off the coast of New York and New Jersey were the first to incorporate a provision encouraging early engagement of lessees with Tribal Nations, underserved communities, and other ocean users.³⁰ Lessees are required to submit progress reports on engagement activities to BOEM every six months from the lease sale until approval of a Construction and Operations Plan, and these reports are published on the BOEM website. Lessees must report to BOEM about how these engagement activities alter or influence the project. Related to this lease sale, BOEM partnered with the States of New York and New Jersey to release *A Shared Vision on the Development of an Offshore Wind Supply Chain*, focused on coordinating efforts to address impacts and deliver benefits to underserved and overburdened communities.³¹

In March 2022, BOEM held an Underserved Community Dialogue Series on Offshore Wind. Members of the public who participated emphasized the need for ongoing, iterative engagement; authentic, reciprocal communication; and robust and clear feedback mechanisms that spell out how BOEM is incorporating community input. The Dialogue Series led to the Environmental Justice Roundtable Convening Series for the New York Bight Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). The Dialogue Series and the Roundtable informed BOEM’s pilot approach to holding quarterly New York and New Jersey Offshore Wind Environmental Justice Forums (EJ Forums) to allow BOEM to better assess the potential environmental impacts of offshore wind during the New York Bight PEIS process.³² Based on community feedback, BOEM is tracking input heard during the EJ Forums and publishing how this input is being addressed, through “Input-Status Reports” published on BOEM’s website.

²⁹ U.S. Department of the Interior. (2022). Environmental Justice Annual Implementation Report Fiscal Year 2022. <https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/2022-doi-ej-annual-report.pdf>.

³⁰ Atlantic Wind Lease Sale 8 (ATLW-8) for Commercial Leasing for Wind Power on the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) in the New York (NY) Bight—Final Sale Notice (FSN), 87 Fed. Reg. 2446 (January 14, 2022), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2022/01/14/2022-00504/atlantic-wind-lease-sale-8-atlw-8-for-commercial-leasing-for-wind-power-on-the-outer-continental/>.

³¹ Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. *A Shared Vision on the Development of an Offshore Wind Supply Chain*. <https://www.boem.gov/sites/default/files/documents/renewable-energy/state-activities/BOEM%20NY%20NJ%20Shared%20Vision.pdf>. Last accessed October 2023.

³² Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. *New York & New Jersey Offshore Wind Environmental Justice Forums*. <https://www.boem.gov/renewable-energy/state-activities/new-york-new-jersey-offshore-wind-environmental-justice-forums>. Last accessed October 2023.



1.2 Better Incorporate Equity into Funding Processes and Budget Development

The Federal Government wields significant power in where and to whom it allocates funding and resources. For example, through the Justice40 Initiative, the Federal Government has made it a goal that 40 percent of the overall benefits of certain Federal investments flow to disadvantaged communities that are marginalized by underinvestment and overburdened by pollution.³³ The OCAP has set a goal to expand the range of coastal resilience and restoration project financing mechanisms available to frontline communities.³⁴ To improve just and equitable outcomes, the Federal Government must continue to integrate principles of equity and environmental justice into the funding process.

Participation in Federal activities can require time, transportation, money, childcare, and access to technology, all of which can be significant barriers, particularly for ocean justice community members. This is why, for example, in most local jurisdictions, jury duty is compensated with a per diem stipend. Agencies could consider steps to facilitate participation and engagement where members of the public may face obstacles. The White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs (OIRA) provided guidance to agencies on how to promote equitable and meaningful participation by a range of interested or affected parties during the regulatory process.³⁵ For example, OIRA suggests that where consistent with applicable law, Agencies might be able to permit Federal financial assistance program participants to pay for child care, personal care attendants, travel, meals, or related expenses for community members participating in engagement activities.

Reducing burdens to access public benefits and services when interacting with government programs is a central priority of the Biden-Harris Administration,³⁶ including expanding access for ocean justice communities. Currently, smaller organizations with limited capacity often find applying for Federal support and the reporting and non-Federal match requirements associated with Federal grants to be challenging. Not all applicants will have the same level of familiarity and capacity to successfully access these resources. While matching requirements can help to leverage Federal dollars, these requirements can further entrench disparities in the distribution of Federal resources. Agencies should first simplify these Federal processes where possible to reduce barriers, and then provide assistance to communities to navigate them. This could include streamlining reporting requirements and waiving match requirements where permissible by law and regulation. Agencies could also consider providing technical assistance to support reporting requirements. For example, the interagency Thriving Communities Network is a Federal

³³ The White House. Justice40. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/environmentaljustice/justice40/>. Last accessed October 2023.

³⁴ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.

³⁵ Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, *Broadening Public Participation and Community Engagement in the Regulatory Process* (July 19, 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Broadening-Public-Participation-and-Community-Engagement-in-the-Regulatory-Process.pdf>.

³⁶ Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. *Tackling the Time Tax: How the Federal Government is Reducing Burdens to Accessing Critical Benefits and Services* (July 2023). <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/OIRA-2023-Burden-Reduction-Report.pdf>.



interagency effort to coordinate place-based technical assistance and capacity-building resources, such as grant and financial management support, pre-development assistance, community engagement, planning, and project delivery support.³⁷ (See Case Study: EPA Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers). Agencies who work on ocean policy are encouraged to partner with existing centers and networks, such as the National Sea Grant College Program to facilitate grant capacity and engagement in Indigenous, Tribal, and underserved communities.³⁸

Case Study: EPA Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers

As part of the interagency Thriving Communities Network, EPA has established 16 Environmental Justice Thriving Communities Technical Assistance Centers (Centers). The Centers help underserved and overburdened communities across the country by removing barriers and improving accessibility for communities with environmental justice concerns. The Centers provide training and other assistance to build capacity for navigating Federal grant application systems, writing strong grant proposals, and effectively managing grant funding. The Centers also provide guidance on community engagement, meeting facilitation, and translation and interpretation services for participants with limited English-speaking proficiency, thus removing barriers and improving accessibility for communities with environmental justice concerns. The Centers also create and manage communication channels to provide direct access to resources and information for all communities.

³⁷ The White House, *FACT SHEET: White House Releases New Technical Assistance Resources to Help Communities Unlock Opportunities from President Biden's Investing in America Agenda* (September 13, 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/13/fact-sheet-white-house-releases-new-technical-assistance-resources-to-help-communities-unlock-opportunities-from-president-bidens-investing-in-america-agenda/>.

³⁸ NOAA. Sea Grant. <https://seagrant.noaa.gov/>. Last accessed November 2023.



Case Study: Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)'s Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities Program

The Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) program aims to shift Federal focus away from reactive disaster spending and towards research-supported, proactive investment in community resilience. The BRIC program makes Federal funds available for Federally Recognized Tribal governments, States, Territories, and local governments for natural hazard mitigation activities.

The BRIC program created specific funding for Tribal Nations in response to feedback that FEMA received during outreach and engagement efforts conducted in 2019. During these engagements, Tribal representatives emphasized the unique challenges they face, including varying capability levels and a wide range of natural hazard mitigation needs. They also expressed interest in capability and capacity building and support for hazard mitigation planning, project scoping, and project application development.

Since the BRIC program's inception in 2020, under its Tribal set-aside, FEMA has awarded, or is in the process of awarding, approximately \$106 million for mitigation projects and capability- and capacity-building activities. A Tribe also had success outside of the Tribal set-aside in the Fiscal Year 2022 BRIC Program's National Competition, securing approximately \$12 million in BRIC funds to mitigate against wildfire risk through hazardous fuels reduction.

1.3 Embed Ocean Justice in Federal Practices

Accessibility of Federal products

Executive Order 14096 directs Agencies to “continue to remove barriers to the meaningful involvement of the public” in decision-making around projects that may have adverse human health and environmental effects, “particularly those barriers that affect members of communities with environmental justice concerns, including those related to disability, language access, and lack of resources.”³⁹ This Executive Order builds on Executive Order 13166⁴⁰ and the related memo⁴¹ that affirm the Federal Government's commitment to improve the accessibility of these services and to help facilitate full participation by individuals with limited English proficiency.

³⁹ See EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, Sec. 1, 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>.

⁴⁰ EO 13166, *Improving Access to Services for Persons With Limited English Proficiency*, 65 Fed. Reg. 50121 (August 16, 2000), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2000/08/16/00-20938/improving-access-to-services-for-persons-with-limited-english-proficiency>.

⁴¹ Office of the Attorney General, *Strengthening the Federal Government's Commitment to Language Access* (November 21, 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/media/1260736/dl?inline>.



Agencies may also need to consider barriers around digital access and communication format. Agencies who consider the audience of their products may find that translating ocean-related reports and other products into other languages and providing multiple formats will better broaden the reach and serve their intended purpose.⁴²

Agencies increase accessibility of Federal products through compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)⁴³ and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973,⁴⁴ but despite these efforts, the materials are not always accessible to the people who need them. Agencies should perform due diligence to understand appropriate formats, and to ensure practices, training and tools support production of accessible content. Agencies should also make every effort to provide materials in the languages that are commonly spoken in communities identified for engagement.

Evaluation metrics

As Agencies build on and create new programs, the Ocean Policy Committee (OPC) should develop suggested evaluation metrics for Agencies to use to address and advance ocean justice, including through the identification of new staffing, policies, regulations, or guidance documents.⁴⁵ Agencies can further ocean justice by developing guidelines for how programs or other Federal activities may impact or relate to ocean justice communities.⁴⁶ Building in ocean justice metrics into Federal programmatic evaluation is a concrete step to institutionalizing ocean justice in Federal activities.

Diversity of advisory bodies, interagency coordination bodies, and decision-making groups

The diversity of advisory bodies, interagency coordination bodies, and decision-making groups is an important factor to achieving ocean justice. Decision-making groups that do not represent those most affected may not develop and implement ocean justice solutions that are the most effective or most needed. The inclusion of Indigenous Peoples, members of ocean justice communities, people with accessibility and functional needs or disabilities, and environmental justice experts in these groups can create a long-term venue for justice to be actively discussed and considered in Federal activities. For example, the Ocean Research Advisory Panel,⁴⁷ which

⁴² Kelly, R., Evans, K., Alexander, K. et al. (2022). Connecting to the oceans: Supporting ocean literacy and public engagement. *Reviews in Fish Biology and Fisheries* 32: 123-143. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11160-020-09625-9>.

⁴³ 42 U.S.C. § 12101 *et seq.*

⁴⁴ 29 U.S.C. § 794d. *See also* U.S. General Services Administration. Section 508. <https://www.section508.gov/>. Last accessed October 2023.

⁴⁵ *See* EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation's Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, Sec. 4(b), 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>; *see also* U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2011). Performance Measurement and Evaluation. GAO-11-646SP. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-11-646sp.pdf>.

⁴⁶ U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2019). Environmental Justice: Federal Efforts Need Better Planning, Coordination, and Methods to Assess Progress. GAO-19-543. <https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-19-543>.

⁴⁷ *See* 10 U.S.C. § 8933; *see also* NOAA. Ocean Research Advisory Panel. <https://www.noaa.gov/ocean-research-advisory-panel>. Last accessed October 2023.



is the Federal Advisory Committee for the OPC, is formulated with members who represent the views of Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, States, Territories, local governments, communities, the private sector, civil society, and academia. The OPC is also tasked with ensuring that an appropriate balance of academic, scientific, industry, and geographical interests and experiences are reflected in the membership.⁴⁸

Equitable physical access to the coast

Equitable physical access to the shores of the ocean and Great Lakes is important to achieving ocean justice, but Federal authority is limited on non-Federal lands. Regions differ widely in how strongly public access to the coasts is implemented, with some States and Territories guaranteeing public access to their coasts and others allowing the coast to be privately owned. The OPC should explore ways the Federal Government can improve access on Federal properties where feasible and appropriate, and work with States and Territories to address questions of coastal access. This work should consider access improvements for ocean justice communities throughout the United States, adjusting for regional variation and accounting for Tribal sovereignty and Tribal access to cultural and sacred sites.⁴⁹ For example, one potential direction could be an advisory group tasked to explore whether regulations facilitating coastal public access for publicly funded projects should be expanded.⁵⁰

Improving coastal accessibility for people with disabilities

Access to the coast for people with disabilities can be improved by enhancing accessibility to coastal sites. Examples for improving accessibility for coastal recreation include creating wheelchair-accessible trails, sensory trails, and ramped beach access points; providing beach wheelchairs; and supporting adaptive boating for people with disabilities. Agencies should continue efforts to improve coastal accessibility on Federal properties where feasible and appropriate.

1.4 Improve Interagency Coordination

Federal activities can be confusing and complex, which can be especially burdensome for small or under-resourced ocean justice communities. Each Agency and program often has its own processes and requirements, which act as barriers to participation. For example, working on a specific issue or project unaware of other similar efforts underway, termed “siloeing,” is inefficient and can cause confusion or frustration among those engaging with the Federal Government. Agencies should make processes such as public engagement and funding applications less complex and more accessible.

⁴⁸ 10 U.S.C. § 8933(a)(2).

⁴⁹ See, e.g., EO 13007, *Indian Sacred Sites*, 61 Fed. Reg. 26771 (May 29, 1996), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/1996/05/29/96-13597/indian-sacred-sites>.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, ER 1165-2-130, *Federal Participation in Shore Protection* 12-13 (June 15, 1989), https://www.publications.usace.army.mil/Portals/76/Publications/EngineerRegulations/ER_1165-2-130.pdf. See also 33 U.S.C. § 2213(d)(2)(B) (“All costs assigned to benefits of periodic nourishment projects or measures to privately owned shores (where use of such shores is limited to private interests) or to prevention of losses of private land shall be borne by the non-Federal interest.”).



Agencies should, when possible, coordinate when soliciting feedback from communities on similar topics to reduce the consultation and engagement burden on communities, especially those that have limited technical capacity, funding, or time. When possible, coordinating functions like permitting and grantmaking can minimize the administrative burden caused by working with multiple Agencies. For example, the National Oceanographic Partnership Program (NOPP) facilitates partnerships between Agencies, academia, and industry to advance ocean science research and education.⁵¹ Through this collaboration, Agencies can leverage resources to invest in priorities that fall between Agency missions or that are too large for any single Agency to support. The OPC serves as the coordinating body for Agencies on ocean policy and provides an existing mechanism to coordinate ocean justice issues.

Case Study: Department of Commerce (DOC) and DOI *Mai Ka Po Mai*

The Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument covers 582,578 square miles of the Pacific Ocean surrounding the Northwestern Hawaiian Islands. Established in 2006, the Monument is held in trust and stewarded by four trustees: DOC, DOI, the State of Hawai‘i, and the Hawai‘i Office of Hawaiian Affairs.

In 2021, after extensive consultation with Native Hawaiian community members, the trustees released a guidance document for the Monument—*Mai Ka Po Mai*—that gave a clear voice to Native Hawaiian culture in the Monument’s stewardship.⁵² The plan includes 20 strategies covering five management areas that align with Native Hawaiian culture and values, while also meeting Federal and State Agency mandates. Strategies include the “use of Hawaiian knowledge, ... traditions, and concepts throughout all areas of management and activities” and enhanced monument “protections through access for Native Hawaiians,” including marine research and habitat restoration projects. The state Office of Hawaiian Affairs CEO, Dr. Sylvia Hussey, called *Mai Ka Po Mai* “a groundbreaking document,” adding that *Mai Ka Po Mai* “demonstrates that providing Native Hawaiian voices equal footing with state and Federal entities in a complex management structure can lead to successful stewardship of our most precious natural and cultural resources.” Kekuewa Kikilio, Chair of the Native Hawaiian Cultural Working Group, cited the plan as “a major paradigm shift” for the trustees.

⁵¹ NOAA. National Oceanographic Partnership Program (IWG-NOPP). <https://www.noaa.gov/ocean-science-and-technology-subcommittee/national-oceanographic-partnership-program>. Last accessed November 2023.

⁵² Office of Hawaiian Affairs. *Mai Ka Po Mai*. <https://www.oha.org/mai-ka-po-mai/>. Last accessed September 2023.



2. Develop a Diverse, Equitable, Inclusive, and Accessible Federal Ocean Workforce

Under Executive Order 14035,⁵³ the Biden-Harris Administration committed to cultivating a Federal workforce that draws from the full diversity of the United States and that advances equitable employment opportunities, including for underserved communities. This commitment can be applied to the sustainable ocean economy. By expanding good-paying jobs with safe working conditions in coastal communities, ocean sectors can recruit people with diverse talents, perspectives, and lived experiences to drive innovation and sustainability.

2.1 Growing Federal Staffing Capacity

The capacity of the Federal Government to implement this Strategy is dependent on Federal staff and contractors trained and directed to work closely with communities to incorporate ocean justice. As Agencies identify programs and activities that can further the goals of this Strategy, appropriate training for staff and personnel dedicated to the actions detailed in this Strategy will contribute to its long-term success. For staff whose duties require engaging with communities, Agencies should consider hiring and stationing new positions in regional ocean areas (e.g., Atlantic, Gulf of Mexico, Pacific and Hawai‘i, Alaska and Arctic, and U.S. Territories) to build closer Federal-community relationships, a greater understanding of local contexts, and more productive Federal actions. Agencies should consider a comprehensive regional approach to create opportunities for Federal staff to work directly with ocean justice communities and to adequately staff regional offices. Agencies should consider the option of remote hiring to allow people with place-based connections (e.g., citizens of Tribal Nations) to apply.

2.2 Increase Recruitment Within the Federal Government Ocean Workforce and Leadership Pipeline

The following actions could play a critical role in increasing recruitment and retention for citizens of Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and people from ocean justice communities in the Federal ocean workforce and leadership pipeline, which includes those working in policy, science and technology, and operations:

- **Data Collection:** Improve the collection of voluntarily self-reported demographic data about the Federal workforce to provide information needed to take an evidence-based approach to reducing potential barriers in hiring, promotion, professional development, and retention.

⁵³ EO 14035, *Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*, 86 Fed. Reg. 34593 (June 30, 2021), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2021/06/30/2021-14127/diversity-equity-inclusion-and-accessibility-in-the-federal-workforce>. See also The White House. (2021). *Government-Wide Strategic Plan to Advance Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategic-Plan-to-Advance-Diversity-Equity-Inclusion-and-Accessibility-in-the-Federal-Workforce-11.23.21.pdf>.



- **Partnerships and Recruitment:** Establish new partnerships to build a pipeline into public service that facilitates recruitment of individuals representing diverse communities, cultures, heritages, ages, locations, and histories.
- **Professional Development, Advancement, and Retention:** Advance equity and transparency in professional development, mentorship, and advancement opportunities.
- **Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) Training and Learning:** Develop or enhance DEIA training programs so that Federal employees are supported and have the tools to promote respectful and inclusive workplaces where everyone feels a sense of belonging and respect.

2.3 Recruit and Retain Students and Early-career Professionals to Advance Ocean Justice

The Federal Government should work to remove barriers for low-income and first-generation professionals in the ocean workforce. Paid internships, scholarships, fellowships, and apprenticeships are crucial to nurturing a diverse and skilled workforce within the Agencies responsible for managing ocean and coastal resources. These programs provide an opportunity for Agencies to actively mentor and support people entering the ocean workforce, including those who come from ocean justice communities.

The Federal Government should work to eliminate reliance on unpaid internships. Agencies should improve communication about existing programs to recruit a diverse applicant pool, reduce application barriers, provide increased flexibility to accommodate a variety of backgrounds and familial situations, and create new opportunities. The Federal Government should also consider recruiting from non-traditional collegiate and educational programs such as ready-to-work training programs.

Early-career positions should provide a living wage. When resources are limited, and if feasible and appropriate, Agencies should consider non-traditional options such as providing a larger stipend for in-person work in a high-cost area versus a smaller stipend if remote work is permissible. Agencies should also aim to expand their understanding and use of Direct Hire Authorities, such as the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Act⁵⁴ and the newly created American Climate Corps.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ 16 U.S.C. § 1725a.

⁵⁵ The White House, *FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Launches American Climate Corps to Train Young People in Clean Energy, Conservation, and Climate Resilience Skills, Create Good-Paying Jobs and Tackle the Climate Crisis* (September 20, 2023), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/09/20/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-launches-american-climate-corps-to-train-young-people-in-clean-energy-conservation-and-climate-resilience-skills-create-good-paying-jobs-and-tackle-the-clima/>.



Case Study: DOI Community Engaged Assessment of Salmon Habitat in the Situk River, Alaska

The Situk River is a very productive resource in southeast Alaska. Salmon fisheries in the Situk River and its adjoining estuary drive a \$2 million economy for the community of Yakutat and support subsistence harvesting for the majority of the local population. The Situk salmon stock is highly sensitive to shifts in temperature and is thus vulnerable to future changes in climate.

In a partnership with the University of Alaska, DOI's U.S. Geological Survey, acting through the Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center, engaged the local community to develop a partnership in collecting and sharing stream temperature data, conducting technical training, and co-mentoring local high school students transitioning to higher education.⁵⁶ This collaborative effort will allow identification of thermally vulnerable aquatic habitats under future climate scenarios, which will in turn be used to build community and professional awareness about local climate vulnerabilities and build capacity for climate mitigation in the management of a culturally and socioeconomically critical resource.

⁵⁶ CASC Project Explorer. Community Engagement in a Stream-network Assessment of Salmon Thermal-habitat in the Situk River Watershed of Yakutat, Alaska. <https://cascprojects.org/#/project/4f831626e4b0e84f6086809b/62d06a83d34e82ff904ad386>. Last accessed October 2023.



3. Enhance Ocean Justice Through Education, Data, and Knowledge

Education, data collection, and the creation and application of knowledge are central to improving justice and equity in ocean policy and management. Research scoping and data collection, analysis, interpretation, and use should be co-developed with affected communities and acknowledge many ways of knowing, including Indigenous Knowledge, as well as local, historical, and traditional knowledge. The unique knowledge and expertise held by Tribal Nations and other Indigenous Peoples should be recognized and included with appropriate consent and respect for confidentiality.⁵⁷ Tools and metrics that are used to understand coastal and ocean communities should be updated to include equity and justice measures.

3.1 Expand and Improve Ocean Education and Workforce Development

Making informed, responsible, and environmentally just decisions regarding the ocean, its resources, and the people who depend on it requires high-quality information and the ability to interpret it. Education and learning can span from early childhood to lifelong learners and include both formal and informal education settings, as well as skills training and workforce development. Enhanced educational initiatives on water and ocean safety can also complement efforts to expand physical access to the coasts and ocean.

To bolster the knowledge necessary to advance ocean policy and management through a justice lens, the Federal Government should strive to:

- Provide support for educators to revise or develop inclusive curricular content on ocean natural and social sciences, technology, and ocean justice across the K-12, community college, and technical education system.
- Continue to support and create new initiatives and opportunities on ocean education, research, and workforce development, in both formal and experiential settings.
 - Consider experiential learning focused on children in underserved and disadvantaged communities, such as creating an ambassador program at a park, reserve, or sanctuary for older children to lead efforts and mentor younger children.
 - Build capacity for ocean science education and research at postsecondary institutions supporting underserved populations.
 - Promote awareness of reasonable accommodations that support accessibility of ocean-based STEM education and workforce opportunities.

⁵⁷ Office of Science and Technology Policy and Council on Environmental Quality, *Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>.



- Foster partnerships focused on training the workforce needed to support activities in the OCAP, such as offshore wind and marine energy, and green maritime shipping.
- Promote and expand activities to help local and regional coastal and ocean scientific and educational institutions (e.g., museums, aquariums, and regional environmental monitoring programs⁵⁸) and organizations (e.g., coastal and ocean conservation; recreational boating and fishing) engage in Federal ocean research.
- Prioritize interagency coordination of science, technology, and engineering education, and engage in strategic planning to improve ocean-specific education and training within interagency activities and through public engagement efforts.

3.2 Recognize, Consider, and Apply Indigenous Knowledge

Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples, including Native Americans, Alaska Natives, Native Hawaiians, and Indigenous Peoples of the U.S. Territories and other regions, bring unique expertise in protecting ecosystems and developing ocean-based solutions to the climate crisis. The Administration is committed to appropriately recognizing, considering, and applying Indigenous Knowledge in Federal decisions, including decisions about the ocean, as appropriate and with consent and respect for confidentiality, following the principles set forth in the Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation⁵⁹ and Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge.⁶⁰ The OCAP also commits to early, frequent, and meaningful engagement with Tribal Nations and to considering Indigenous Knowledge in advancing actions based on the OCAP. As discussed in the Guidance,⁶¹ Federal researchers should look for opportunities to work with Indigenous Knowledge holders to co-produce scientific information and propose solutions to inform decision making.⁶²

To further incorporate Indigenous Knowledge, additional education and training for Federal employees who work with Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples on ocean policy and management may be needed. Where resources are available, Agencies should train staff in these project areas to develop and maintain skills and practices relevant to working with Indigenous Knowledge, Tribal Nations, and Indigenous Peoples. Several Tribal organizations and other external Indigenous-led groups have developed guidance documents and trainings for decision

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Southern California Coastal Water Research Project. Southern California Bight Regional Monitoring Program. <https://www.sccwrp.org/about/research-areas/regional-monitoring/southern-california-bight-regional-monitoring-program/>. Last accessed November 2023.

⁵⁹ The White House, *Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/11/30/memorandum-on-uniform-standards-for-tribal-consultation/>.

⁶⁰ Office of Science and Technology Policy and Council on Environmental Quality, *Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>.

⁶¹ See *id.*

⁶² For success stories that reflect these efforts, see the case studies above on the “Department of Commerce (DOC) and DOI: Mai Ka Po Mai” and “DOI: Community Engaged Assessment of Salmon Habitat in the Situk River, Alaska.”



makers.⁶³ When training Agency staff on Indigenous Knowledge policies and procedures, Agencies should look for opportunities for Tribal Nations and Indigenous Peoples to lead and participate in these training sessions.

Case Study: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge for an Endangered Species Act Listing Decision

In 2022, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) in Alaska began a Species Status Assessment in response to a petition to list the Alexander Archipelago wolf under the Endangered Species Act. This Federal undertaking could not be adequately prepared without including Indigenous Peoples who have a cultural and ecological relationship with these wolves. FWS developed an agreement with the Sealaska Heritage Institute to design and implement a rapid appraisal research study to compile Indigenous Knowledge. Several methods and sources of information were utilized, including notes from Tribal consultations, open-ended conversations, and semi-directed interviews with nine local wolf experts representing six community areas, a mapping exercise, and personal history narratives from long-time wolf trappers and hunters. Information gathered included pack locations and territories, wolf behavior and movement patterns, reproductive rates, diet, interactions between people and wolves, and impacts of harvest. Indigenous Knowledge contributed greatly to FWS' understanding of the Alexander Archipelago wolf in Southeast Alaska and provided the Agency with the information necessary to make an informed classification decision for the subspecies. In August 2023, it was announced that listing the Alexander Archipelago wolf under the Endangered Species Act is not warranted at this time.

3.3 Apply an Ocean Justice Lens to Ocean Research and Ways of Knowing

Working to ensure that communities have a voice at all stages of the research path—from generating the questions, collecting the data, analyzing and interpreting the data, to using the research—is critical to ocean justice. This extends to equitable and accessible practices in information collection, including co-production of research with coastal and ocean communities and providing technical assistance to build capacity, provide information, and receive information and results. Many recent Federal policy and guidance documents have specific information on equitable knowledge gathering and the collection and management of data, including but not limited to: the OCAP,⁶⁴ Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal

⁶³ See, e.g., Yua, E., Raymond-Yakoubian, J., Aluaq Daniel, R., et al. (2022). A Framework for Co-production of Knowledge in the Context of Arctic Research. *Ecology and Society* 27(1): 34. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-12960-270134>; Minnesota Department of Transportation. Tribal-State Relations Training. <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/tribaltraining>. Last accessed October 2023.

⁶⁴ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.



Consultation,⁶⁵ Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge,⁶⁶ Federal Data Strategy Action Plan,⁶⁷ Executive Order 14096,⁶⁸ and the Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region.⁶⁹

Agencies should cultivate participatory research in data acquisition and co-production. Local, historical, and traditional knowledge should be considered to be a valuable source of information and should be considered and included where possible. For example, the 2022-2026 Arctic Research Plan⁷⁰ recognized that Indigenous Knowledge, participatory research, and Indigenous leadership in research are foundational to Arctic research. (See Case Study: National Science Foundation (NSF) Program on Navigating the New Arctic.). Similarly, the OCAP commits to co-producing and delivering products, tools, information, services and assistance to support climate-ready fishing and aquaculture communities.⁷¹ Data products should also represent the diverse geographies of the United States, including Alaska, Hawai‘i, and the U.S. Territories.

The Biden-Harris Administration is committed to ensuring equitable access to Federally funded research by making publications and their supporting data freely available, while respecting confidentiality of Indigenous Knowledge and other sensitive data.⁷² The Equitable Data Working Group (now the Subcommittee on Equitable Data) presented a vision for equitable data that described opportunities for targeted actions that will result in demonstrably improved outcomes for underserved communities, such as catalyzing existing Federal infrastructure to leverage underused data and building capacity for robust equity assessment for policymaking and program implementation.⁷³ This vision should be implemented in the ocean space, alongside proactive data management guidelines and a strategy to store and distribute data in an accessible manner.

⁶⁵ The White House, *Memorandum on Uniform Standards for Tribal Consultation* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2022/11/30/memorandum-on-uniform-standards-for-tribal-consultation/>.

⁶⁶ Office of Science and Technology Policy and Council on Environmental Quality, *Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on Indigenous Knowledge* (November 30, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/OSTP-CEQ-IK-Guidance.pdf>.

⁶⁷ Federal Data Strategy: 2021 Action Plan. <https://strategy.data.gov/assets/docs/2021-Federal-Data-Strategy-Action-Plan.pdf>. Last accessed October 2023.

⁶⁸ EO 14096, *Revitalizing Our Nation’s Commitment to Environmental Justice for All*, 88 Fed. Reg. 25251 (April 26, 2023), <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2023/04/26/2023-08955/revitalizing-our-nations-commitment-to-environmental-justice-for-all>.

⁶⁹ The White House. (2023). Implementation Plan for the 2022 National Strategy for the Arctic Region. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/NSAR-Implementation-Plan.pdf>.

⁷⁰ Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee of the National Science and Technology Council. (2021). Arctic Research Plan 2022-2026. <https://www.iarpcollaborations.org/plan/index.html>.

⁷¹ Ocean Policy Committee. (2023). Ocean Climate Action Plan. https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Ocean-Climate-Action-Plan_Final.pdf.

⁷² Office of Science and Technology Policy, *Ensuring Free, Immediate, and Equitable Access to Federally Funded Research* (August 25, 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/08-2022-OSTP-Public-Access-Memo.pdf>.

⁷³ Equitable Data Working Group. (2022). A Vision for Equitable Data: Recommendations from the Equitable Data Working Group. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/eo13985-vision-for-equitable-data.pdf>.



Examples of community-led practices for equitable data that should be incorporated into U.S. government ocean activities include the FAIR and CARE principles.

FAIR principles are **F**indable, **A**ccessible, **I**nteroperable, and **R**eusable:⁷⁴

- **Findable:** Structure data to be easy to find for both humans and computers.
- **Accessible:** Provide transparency in how data need to be accessed.
- **Interoperable:** Ensure that data can be easily integrated with existing data/data systems so as to minimize the capacity needed to use the new data alongside existing mechanisms.
- **Reusable:** Ensure that data can be replicated or combined in different settings.

CARE principles account for Collective benefit, Authority, Responsibility, and Ethics:⁷⁵

- **Collective benefit:** Work to ensure that data gathered are for the collective benefit of impacted communities, extending into the communities' development, innovation, governance, engagement, and outcomes.
- **Authority:** Work with Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, and communities to determine how they are represented and identified within data.
- **Responsibility:** Provide transparency in how the data gathered will be used for the associated communities' collective benefit and support.
- **Ethics:** Strive to center communities' rights and wellbeing at all stages across the data ecosystem.

⁷⁴ Wilkinson, M., Dumontier, M., Aalbersberg, I. et al. (2016). The FAIR Guiding Principles for scientific data management and stewardship. *Scientific Data* 3: 160018. <https://doi.org/10.1038/sdata.2016.18>.

⁷⁵ Global Indigenous Data Alliance. CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance. <https://www.gida-global.org/care>. Last accessed October 2023.



Case Study: National Science Foundation (NSF) Program on Navigating the New Arctic

Ocean justice is an urgent topic in the Arctic, as rapid warming leads to the loss of houses, hunting grounds, and the traditional ways of life for the Indigenous communities that depend on Arctic coastal and ocean resources. Through the Navigating the New Arctic (NNA) Program, which started in 2017 and ended in 2023, NSF has invested over \$170 million in Arctic research that aimed to advance knowledge and enable resilient and sustainable Arctic Indigenous and local communities. Recognizing the importance of Indigenous Knowledge in solving Arctic problems, NNA emphasized co-production of research and sought to demonstrate substantive engagements with the Arctic communities in research execution, motivation, and planning.

NSF supports the NNA Community Office with dedicated staff to facilitate building partnerships, opportunities, and resources for collaboration.⁷⁶ One of the resources is a quarterly podcast called *Arctic Together*, which features Indigenous community voices and different approaches to issues and solutions in Arctic-based research. Another resource is the *Connecting Arctic Priorities* Portal, which is a searchable collection of reports and documents written by Tribal Nations, Arctic communities, and Indigenous organizations to facilitate awareness of their priorities and values. The NNA Community Office hosts annual meetings, which provide an opportunity for NNA researchers, partners, Indigenous communities, policymakers, and Agency partners to come together to consider the state of research and research relations within and beyond the NNA Initiative.

3.4 Expand the Federal Tools Used in Characterizing Social and Environmental Justice Patterns to Encompass Ocean Justice Indicators

To understand the environmental justice factors that affect ocean justice communities, a quantitative approach can be helpful. Agencies are developing many useful tools that can be applied to ocean justice issues (Table 1). As Agencies look toward implementing the goals, strategies, and practices suggested by this Strategy, these tools can offer helpful information on how the concerns of ocean justice communities—for example, economic development—can be better addressed. As the Federal Government considers future updates to the tools, they can also consider whether these tools should include new datasets or indicators that could further support incorporation of the specific concerns of ocean justice communities.

⁷⁶ Navigating the New Arctic Community Office. <https://nna-co.org/>. Last accessed September 2023.



Table 1. Selected Environmental Justice Tools.

Name	Description	Link to access
<p>CEJST: Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (CEQ)</p>	<p>A geospatial mapping tool that identifies disadvantaged communities that face burdens related to climate change, the environment, health, and lack of economic opportunity based on nationally-consistent, publicly-available data. The tool includes an interactive map. Agencies are using the CEJST to identify geographically defined disadvantaged communities for any covered programs under the Justice40 Initiative and for programs where a statute directs resources to disadvantaged communities, to the maximum extent possible and permitted by law. Communities are considered disadvantaged if they are in Census tracts that meet the thresholds for at least one of the tool’s categories of burden or if they are on the lands of Federally Recognized Tribes, including Alaska Native Villages.</p>	<p>https://screeningtool.geoplatform.gov/en/</p>
<p>Community Social Vulnerability Indicators Toolbox (NOAA Fisheries)</p>	<p>A suite currently comprised of 14 statistically robust social, economic, and climate change indicators that uniquely characterize and evaluate a community’s vulnerability and resilience to disturbances (extreme weather, oil spills, sea level rise, etc.). The indicator map and graphing tool enable users to analyze both environmental justice as well as the climate vulnerability of over 4,600 coastal communities in 24 States.</p>	<p>https://www.st.nmfs.noaa.gov/data-and-tools/social-indicators/</p>
<p>EJScreen: Environmental Justice Screening and Mapping (EPA)</p>	<p>A nationally consistent dataset and approach that combines environmental and demographic indicators in maps and reports. The data are filterable and downloadable.</p>	<p>https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen https://www.epa.gov/ejscreen/additional-resources-and-tools-related-ejscreen</p>



<p>Environmental Justice Index (EJI) (Center for Disease Control’s (CDC) Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry)</p>	<p>Ranks the cumulative impacts of environmental injustice on health for every census tract on 36 environmental, social, and health factors.</p>	<p>https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/eji/index.html</p>
<p>Implications of Extreme Weather Analytic Exchange Program (AEP) Climate Hub (Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA))</p>	<p>Compiles national to state level government resources to provide information on climate-enhanced extreme weather events and their impact on communities. Links to Federal programs that support improved resilience at scales from the individuals/single homes to large-scale critical infrastructure sites.</p>	<p>https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/a1ec0d1276064ae387c863f2a14b11e1/</p>
<p>The National Risk Index (Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA))</p>	<p>Leverages available source data for natural hazard and community risk factors to develop a baseline risk measurement for each U.S. county and Census tract.</p>	<p>https://hazards.fema.gov/nri/</p>
<p>Social Vulnerability Index (SVI) (Center for Disease Control’s Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry)</p>	<p>Uses 16 U.S. Census variables to help local officials identify communities that may need support before, during, or after disasters; social vulnerability refers to the potential negative effects on communities caused by external stresses on human health. Such stresses include natural or human-caused disasters, or disease outbreaks.</p>	<p>https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/placeandhealth/svi/index.html</p>



Conclusion

The Biden-Harris Administration has made clear that environmental justice is the responsibility of every Agency. For the Americans who depend on the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes, this means making progress towards a world where the Federal Government’s ocean and Great Lakes work is intertwined with ocean justice, because the lives and well-being of people in ocean justice communities are interconnected with the health and well-being of our ocean.

This Strategy builds on the Administration’s work towards environmental justice through Executive Orders 13985, 14008, 14091, and 14096, as well as actions in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and the Inflation Reduction Act. None of this would be possible without decades of work by Tribal Nations, Indigenous Peoples, ocean justice communities, and elected leaders at all levels of government who worked tirelessly to bend the policymaking arc towards justice.

The release of this Strategy is not the end of this work, but a beginning. Through the actions listed here, Agencies will take concrete steps to build a more just future for the people of the ocean, coasts, and Great Lakes.