



Bipartisan Policy Center

Strengthening Transparency and Accountability at EPA

OPTIONS FOR ENHANCING THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY'S CULTURE FOR SCIENCE, EVIDENCE, AND DATA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) prepares to celebrate its 50th anniversary, public health and environmental conditions in the United States are vastly improved because of the agency's efforts. Preparing for the next 50 years will require renewed innovation, application of program evaluation, and attention to efficiencies that collectively maximize accountability and transparency for the agency's activities.

In November 2019, the Bipartisan Policy Center published the report *Meaningful Transparency at EPA*, which provides an overview of the suite of policies that relate to transparency, open science, and data use at EPA. The report presented a conceptual framework to consider how EPA might advance evidence-based policymaking in the future. It included descriptions of how EPA can apply scientifically- and socially-relevant transparency through information sharing and use over the next 50 years.

This report presents options that represent a range of ideas to strengthen the agency's learning culture and increase public trust in EPA information, among other topics. This is largely accomplished with options for making EPA data accessible and useful to the American public, while also ensuring the best available science is accessible and used for decision-making. The options are organized into four groups:

- **Strengthen EPA's Learning Culture** options embody a continuous improvement ethos throughout the agency.
- **Improve EPA's Data Governance and Management** options ensure EPA-collected information is used to benefit agency decisions.
- **Enhance EPA's Policy Analysis and Evaluation Functions** options provide strategies for rigorously studying policy implementation and making reasonable prospective assumptions for future actions.
- **Bolster Public Trust and Enrich EPA Communication** options promote credibility with the American public that the best available science is considered and used by the agency.

The options in this report are intentionally not presented as recommendations; this is not designed as a consensus report from experts. Instead the options are intended to initiate a dialogue about how EPA may further improve successful implementation of critical environmental laws by creating additional opportunities for accountability and transparency. EPA officials, Congress, and the American public must all identify and support a meaningful strategy that promotes the best available science to be accessible and used in decision-making processes. This report offers an initial framing for those discussions and considerations.

EPA has a long history of promoting scientific discovery and applying cutting-edge insights to decision-making. However, EPA must continue to implement innovations to ensure the best available science is meaningfully applied to fulfill the agency's mission. These endeavors should be paired with continued efforts to improve transparency and accountability for the American public.

Summary of Options

Options to Strengthen EPA's Learning Culture

- #1: Develop and Implement a Participatory Enterprise Learning Agenda
- #2: Establish an Environmental Innovation Lab with Demonstration Authority
- #3: Explore New Models for Incorporating Expert and Stakeholder Feedback
- #4: Support Science and Data Literacy with Targeted Skills Training
- #5: Remove Limits on Sharing Scientific and Professional Perspectives
- #6: Incorporate Evidence-Based Policymaking Expectations in Performance Reviews

Options to Improve EPA Data Governance and Management

- #7: Establish and Empower an Office of the Chief Data Officer
- #8: Establish and Prioritize an Agency-Wide Data Governance Board
- #9: Establish and Sufficiently Resource a Legally-Recognized Statistical Unit
- #10: Strengthen Existing Data Standards and Rapidly Apply New Legal Requirements
- #11: Publish and Update an Agency-Wide Data Inventory and Open Data Plan
- #12: Conduct Risk Assessments for Public Data Disclosures
- #13: Establish or Identify a Partnership for a Secure Data Enclave

Options to Enhance EPA's Policy Analysis and Evaluation Functions

- #14: Establish an Independent and Centralized Agency Evaluation Unit
- #15: Facilitate an Agency-Wide Evaluation Community of Practice
- #16: Support International Environmental Systematic Review Processes
- #17: Develop Policies to Promote Routine Evaluation and Retrospective Review of Regulatory Actions
- #18: Establish Advisory Body for Evidence-Building Activities
- #19: Establish an Evidence Incentive Fund

Options to Bolster Public Trust and Enrich Communication

- #20: Issue Agency-Specific Statement on Public Trust in Data
- #21: Update and Publish Enhanced Guidelines for the Use of Valid and Reliable Evidence in Agency Decisions
- #22: Improve Efforts to Relay Complex Scientific Information to the American Public
- #23: Strengthen Guidelines for Ensuring EPA staff can Distinguish Between Policy and Scientific Judgment
- #24: Publish Standard Practices for Operational Transparency in Advisory Committees
- #25: Establish Best Practices for Scientific Integrity and Data Sharing



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