January 18, 2023

Submission to: Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2022-0873

Comments to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
From the Georgetown Climate Center

The Georgetown Climate Center submits the following comments, which were substantially informed by conversations with state agency officials participating in the Air Quality Monitoring Workgroup of Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states convened and facilitated by the Georgetown Climate Center (GCC). The Air Quality Monitoring Workgroup brings together state officials from environment agencies in Connecticut, Delaware, District of Columbia, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. These comments respond to the Environmental Protection Agency's set of non-regulatory dockets regarding the Office of Air and Radiation (OAR) implementation of various sections of the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA).

The IRA's infusion of funding to expand community-based air quality monitoring throughout the country could yield valuable lessons along with policy-relevant data and information to help inform decisions about where pollution-reducing investments and policies are most-needed, and, over time, whether these policies are achieving expected results. However, our conversations with state agency staff and leaders consistently suggest that much more is needed to build the capacity of state and local governments to ensure that air quality monitoring projects are designed and implemented in ways that meaningfully address community needs.

Here is a brief summary of our primary recommendations, which are described in more detail below:

1) EPA should provide additional resources for state and local government agencies to build their capacity to develop and administer community-based air quality monitoring programs. This includes providing more funding to hire full time staff, and provide training and technical support for existing staff.
2) EPA should more actively invite input from state, local and Tribal governments to inform their approaches to advancing community-based air quality monitoring, and participate in more locally-organized meetings and conferences.
3) EPA should develop tools to enable air quality monitoring efforts to better inform policy, regulatory, and enforcement actions.
4) EPA should provide guidelines to clarify data quality and methods needed for community-based monitoring projects to more effectively inform how their projects could produce more purpose-driven, technically sound, quality data, and thereby achieve their desired results.

Background

To achieve the life-saving climate[1] and equity[2] policy goals that many federal, state, and local governments have set for themselves, environment, energy, transportation, and public health agencies will need to act quickly and creatively to incorporate new and expanded community-based air quality monitoring efforts into a wide range of climate and clean energy programs.

Community and environmental justice advocates have long called for more air quality monitoring in their neighborhoods and a growing number of political leaders at the federal, state, and local levels of government are now taking responsive actions. To help state agencies respond to increased demand for local air monitoring, the Georgetown Climate Center facilitates a community of practice among state agency officials in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic region. The purpose of this effort -- known as the Air Quality Monitoring Workgroup (AQMWG) – is to share information and best practices regarding community-based air quality monitoring and related policy actions to help states achieve the justice goals of air quality, climate, and clean energy programs. The workgroup receives substantive and facilitation support from veteran environmental justice leader Vernice Miller-Travis, at the Metropolitan Group,[3] and experienced air quality monitoring practitioner Tim Dye, at TD Environmental Services.[4]

Recommendations

Drawing on insights generated by our ongoing conversations with state-agency participants in the AQMWG, we offer three primary recommendations regarding OAR's implementation of IRA where it concerns community-based air quality monitoring:

1) Support states with additional funding to build their capacity to develop and administer community-based air quality monitoring programs. Staff at state and local environment agencies

[1] See FACT SHEET: President Biden Sets 2030 Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Target Aimed at Creating Good-Paying Union Jobs and Securing U.S. Leadership on Clean Energy Technologies, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/04/22/fact-sheet-president-biden-sets-2030-greenhouse-gas-pollution-reduction-target-aimed-at-creating-good-paying-union-jobs-and-securing-u-s-leadership-on-clean-energy-technologies/ (The Biden Administration has committed to a new target for the United States to achieve a 50-52 percent reduction from 2005 levels in economy-wide net greenhouse gas pollution in 2030). Examples of ambitious state greenhouse gas reduction targets include: New York (goal to reduce GHG emissions 40% below 1990 levels by 2030 and at least 85% below 1990 levels by 2050.S. 6599), New Jersey (reduce emissions 50% below 2006 levels by 2030, EO 274) and Rhode Island (reduce GHG emissions 10% by 2020, 45% by 2035, and 80% by 2040, all compared to 1990 levels, R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-6.2-2).

[2] See Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad,* https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/ (Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative commits that no less than 40 percent of the benefits of investments made through certain climate and clean energy programs will go to so-called "disadvantaged communities); California Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (Assembly Bill 32, Nunez, 2016) https://calepa.ca.gov/envjustice/ghginvest/ and New York Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act, S6599 https://climate.ny.gov/Our-Climate-Act (Laws in California and New York that require at least 35 to 40 percent of certain climate and clean energy program investments to occur in – or for the benefit of – overburdened and underserved communities).

[3] Metropolitan Group, https://www.metgroup.com.

[4] TD Environmental Services, www.TDEnviro.com.

are currently very limited in their capacity to provide technical and policy support to community projects on the scale that is needed. Developing and implementing such projects require substantial and sustained investments of time and resources, to conduct meetings with residents and community organizations and provide equitable access to training for community groups engaging in air quality issues, among other important activities. Without increased numbers of personnel and associated funding and resources, there is a real risk that federal funds slated for air quality monitoring will not achieve their intended purpose and could fail to effectively meet community needs. To remedy this capacity gap, states will need to hire new staff and provide enhanced training for existing staff. They will also need access to new levels of technical support, which could be provided directly by EPA or through contracts with third-party consultants.

EPA should also consider making more financial resources available for state and local governments to expand their staff's capacity to conduct meaningful public engagement around IRA implementation, including for community-based air quality monitoring. One option for accomplishing this could be for EPA to make such activities and investments eligible for funding in multiple new IRA programs, many of which could be designed with this purpose in mind. For example, EPA guidance for programs like Grants to Reduce Air Pollution at Ports[5] could invite applicants to dedicate a portion of each project's proposed budget toward complementary investments in community-based air quality monitoring programs that can help to inform project implementation.

2) Work more closely with states. State and local air quality agencies are key partners for EPA in making substantial and lasting improvements to local air quality. These agencies are very well positioned to help the EPA deploy IRA funding in ways that effectively address community needs and align with local and state government policy and regulations. EPA could work more closely with states – directly or through third-party consultants – to build a nation-wide community of practice to share information, foster constructive dialogue, and disseminate best practices for community-based air quality monitoring among state, local, Tribal, and community-based organizations.

Additionally, traditional air monitoring and other technical conferences have not typically focused on community-level issues, nor have they placed a priority on inviting community members to participate. Inviting local officials and community representatives to participate in such events would enable EPA and their current research partners to tailor new policies and research priorities to better reflect community interests, needs, and perspectives. We encourage EPA to actively seek state, local, Tribal, and community input and involvement in new program design and create new opportunities for increased and continued sharing of information. This could include hosting regional and national meetings, workshops, and conferences, and providing funding to support community participation at these meetings. We would also encourage EPA staff to place a high priority on attending and engaging with organizers and attendees at locally-organized community monitoring meetings and conferences.

[5] Other examples could include: Section 60114, the Climate Pollution Reduction Grants Program; and 60107, the Low Emissions Electricity Program.

3) Develop tools to enable air quality monitoring efforts to better inform policy, regulatory, and enforcement actions.

With many more people and organizations beginning to conduct air monitoring for the first time, there is an urgent need for simple and straightforward tools, methods, and systems to streamline many of the highly complex tasks associated with gathering and using air quality data. More than just research and guidance is needed to infuse our collective air quality knowledge and best practices into software, tools, and systems that make air quality monitoring, analyses, and decision-making easier and more approachable.

For example, we encourage EPA to create cumulative impact assessment tools that states and community groups can use to evaluate both quantitative and qualitative cumulative impacts and use results to inform decision-making about air pollution related actions. State and local agencies also need tools for communication that vividly and simply illustrate to lay audiences and community leaders how data from air quality monitoring can be used to support policy, enforcement, and regulatory actions to reduce air pollution, and what its limitations are. Software tools are also needed to make air quality monitoring data more accessible to a broader range of people and organizations. These tools could include software, systems, and spreadsheets, and associated training, to cover a variety of topics, including (but not limited to): matching monitoring objectives with measurement technology, developing quality assurance project plans, managing air quality data, quality controlling air monitoring data, interpreting and visualizing air quality data, and communicating data to decision-makers.

4) Clarify data quality and methods needed for successful community-based air quality monitoring projects.

There is an urgent need for EPA to develop and publish guidelines clarifying minimum levels of quality for data and methods that should be used for community-based air quality monitoring projects. This would provide more clarity for community groups to inform how their monitoring projects could produce more purpose-driven, technically sound, quality data, and thereby achieve their desired results. The specific focus should be on helping monitoring efforts produce and deliver the reliable, consistent, high-quality data needed to inform regulations and policy actions at the federal, state, and local levels. To the extent that minimum quality guidelines are not developed and broadly shared, there is a real risk that federal funds slated for air quality monitoring will not achieve their intended purpose and could fail to effectively meet community needs.

Conclusion

Expanding air quality monitoring in overburdened communities is a crucial element to building more transparency and accountability into policy making processes. Community and environmental justice advocates have long called for more air quality monitoring in their neighborhoods and a growing number of political leaders at the federal state and local levels of government are now taking responsive actions. Air monitoring on its own will not guarantee more equitable outcomes, but more resources are needed to build the capacity of state and local

officials to ensure that projects are designed and implemented in ways that meaningfully address community needs. By conducting meaningful public engagement and working collaboratively on air quality monitoring programs with overburdened communities, state and local governments can lay the groundwork for climate and transportation policies that are able to deliver on their justice-related commitments.