



National Congress of American Indians



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EPA Exchange Network Establishes Cooperative Agreement with NCAI to Assist with Tribal Participation in Environmental Data Exchange Network: Tribal Users Meeting Set for April 6-7, 2006

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) is partnering with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through a cooperative agreement to disseminate information to American Indian Tribes regarding potential collaboration in a data sharing project currently administered by the EPA. The Environmental Information Exchange Network (Exchange Network) is a project that aims to share environmental, health, geographic, and other types of data between states, tribes and territories through the internet using common data standards. The overarching goal of the Exchange Network to improve decision making by giving Network partners access to consistent, accurate environmental data.

The Exchange Network relies on using a common data format, XML (extensible markup language), and the internet to exchange data. Partners submit XML-encoded data to their individual "nodes" which communicate with other partner's nodes, exchanging data via the internet. The EPA can provide funding in the form of grants to tribes to facilitate the construction of necessary technological infrastructure, which includes reliable broadband internet access and a network node. Grants can be used for contract work to build infrastructure, develop nodes, and to translate data into the XML format. Between FY 2002- FY 2005 nearly \$8.4 million has been administered to 44 tribes from the EPA Exchange Network Grant Program. The Exchange Network website describes the aspects of the Exchange Network and data formats at <http://www.exchangenetwork.net>.

The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe of New York is utilizing the Exchange Network Grant Program to implement the first tribal node with the capacity to exchange data over the network. The tribe saw the advantages in accessing state and federal environmental data that may affect their water, land, and air and the ability it gave to manage their own resources more effectively. However, their data was in a format that could not be shared and needed substantial work to become Network ready, a problem most likely common to many tribes. Additionally, they had little hardware and staff to manage the project and depended on grants to build technological capacity and fund personnel. The St. Regis Mohawk Tribe used the Exchange Network Grant Program and expertise of Exchange Network Partners to overcome these barriers.

The Exchange Network has the potential to put more power in the hands of tribal governments by being able to monitor their individual environmental concerns more effectively with access to accurate state and federal data. The EPA Exchange Network staff is fulfilling the spirit and intent of the EPA American Indian and Alaska Native Government Policy in reaching out to tribes to include them in this technologically advanced effort. Linda Travers, Acting Assistant Administrator of EPA's Office of Environmental Information said, "We look forward to NCAI's involvement in expanding the Exchange Network to the tribal community. This partnership will support tribal participation in the development, operation and governance of the Exchange Network."

NCAI is hosting an Exchange Network Tribal Users Meeting on April 6-7 2005 at the Seminole Hard Rock Hotel in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Rooms are currently available for this conference. The meeting will disseminate information and prepare tribes to participate in the Exchange Network. In addition, there will be an Exchange Network Users Meeting held on April 18-19, 2005 in San Francisco, California, hosted by the EPA. For further information on these meetings, please contact: Robert Holden (rholden@ncai.org) or Daniel Cordalis (daniel_cordalis@ncai.org) at NCAI (202)-466-7767. NCAI Tribal User Meeting information and draft agenda are available on the NCAI website: <http://www.ncai.org>.