



At a Glance

Catalyst for Improving the Environment

Why We Did This Review

The objective of our audit was to determine whether the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) Indian General Assistance Program (IGAP) has been effective in developing tribal capacity to implement environmental programs. This work was included in the Office of Inspector General's (OIG's) Fiscal Year 2007 annual plan based on Agency leadership concerns regarding grant results.

Background

The Indian Environmental General Assistance Program Act of 1992 provides EPA the authority to award grants to Indian tribal governments to build capacity to administer environmental programs. Since its inception, IGAP has become a core program and the largest single source of funding for tribal environmental programs, with almost \$455 million of funding to about 500 different tribal entities since 1992.

For further information, contact our Office of Congressional and Public Liaison at (202) 566-2391.

To view the full report, click on the following link: www.epa.gov/oig/reports/2008/20080219-08-P-0083.pdf

Framework for Developing Tribal Capacity Needed in the Indian General Assistance Program

What We Found

The purpose of IGAP grants is to help tribes develop environmental programs, and over 70 percent of tribes have met at least one of EPA's strategic goals for improving human health and the environment in Indian country. However, only 12 percent of tribes are implementing Federal environmental programs.

Many tribes have not developed long-term plans that describe how they will build environmental capacity to operate their environmental programs. For tribes that do have plans and long-term goals, EPA has not tracked progress against the plans and goals. Six of 27 reviewed tribes that have received funding for more than 5 years had activities limited to outreach, training, and meetings; how the activities will lead to implementing environmental programs is unclear. This situation has occurred because EPA has not provided a framework for tribes to follow or adapt as they develop their capacity to implement environmental programs. As a result, it is not clear whether IGAP funding will result in tribes being able to operate their own environmental programs. EPA has awarded \$455 million in IGAP funds since 1992.

EPA often uses the target funding level of \$110,000 as the basis for IGAP funding instead of considering environmental capacity needs and prior progress. EPA and tribes consider IGAP funding to be essential continuing support for tribal environmental programs. When the funding is not based on tribal capacity needs or priorities, EPA cannot demonstrate that the highest human health and environmental needs are addressed.

What We Recommend

We recommend that the Assistant Administrator for Water:

- Require the American Indian Environmental Office to develop and implement an overall framework for achieving capacity, including valid performance measures for each type of tribal entity, and provide assistance to the regions for incorporating the framework into the IGAP work plans.
- Require regions to (a) negotiate with tribes to develop environmental plans that reflect intermediate and long-term goals, (b) link those plans to annual IGAP work plans, and (c) measure tribal progress in meeting plans and goals.
- Revise how IGAP funding is distributed to tribes to place more emphasis on tribes' prior progress, environmental capacity needs, and long-term goals.

EPA concurred with the recommendations and stated that the American Indian Environmental Office is committed to evaluating the IGAP program and incorporating new ways to improve the program's effectiveness.