



At a Glance

Why We Did This Review

We reviewed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Office of Environmental Education's (OEE's) actions to address recommendations in the National Environmental Education Advisory Council's 2005 report to Congress, and to assess program benefits.

The National Environmental Education Act of 1990 established the EPA's OEE to develop and support programs to improve understanding of the environment, as well as curricula, educational material and training programs; and to manage grant assistance. The act created the National Environmental Education Advisory Council to advise, and make recommendations to, the EPA Administrator about the program. OEE awarded over \$16 million in grant funds for fiscal years 2012 through 2014.

This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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EPA Cannot Assess Results and Benefits of Its Environmental Education Program

What We Found

OEE took some steps to address the National Environmental Education Advisory Council's recommendations, but was not timely in implementing recommendations. Also, key performance management activities remain incomplete. Specifically, regarding the council's 2005 recommendations, OEE:

Continued EPA funding for environmental education without program and performance management controls creates high risk for waste and abuse of public funds.

- Developed the framework and tools to measure the environmental education program, but did not execute or update those tools to assess comprehensive program results.
- Implemented research initiatives to improve environmental literacy and stewardship, but did not assess the effectiveness of these initiatives toward achieving OEE program performance goals.
- Funded programs to improve educators' ability to teach environmental concepts, but did not assess the effectiveness of the programs toward achieving OEE performance goals.

Further, OEE did not get consistent data from grantees and synthesize program performance data and report results. Program performance data is emphasized in OEE's 2006 strategic plan, the National Environmental Education Advisory Council's 2005 recommendations, federal guidance and EPA policy. After 2005, the OEE did not fund and convene the council to engage in the business of the council as required by the act until 2012. Thus, the council was not always able to provide advice to the Administrator, or congressionally required reports, on the extent and quality of environmental education in the nation.

OEE lacks internal program assessment controls, an updated strategic plan, and performance reporting requirements for grantees that are connected to strategic measures. As a result, OEE is significantly impaired in its ability to provide evidence of program results and benefits, manage the program to achieve results, or spot waste and abuse.

Recommendations and Agency Response

We made eight recommendations to the Associate Administrator for Public Engagement and Environmental Education, including that OEE assess and report comprehensive results and benefits of its environmental education program, ensure that the National Environmental Education Advisory Council is appointed and submits required reports to Congress, and promptly resolve the council's recommendations. OEE disagreed with most of the findings in our draft report. Subsequent to our meeting with OEE, two recommendations are resolved and closed, four recommendations are resolved and open, and two recommendations are unresolved with resolution efforts in progress.