

Federal Forum on Environmental Collaboration and Conflict Resolution (ECCR)

Meeting Notes

Tuesday, September 26, 2023, 1:00 PM – 2:30 PM Eastern Time

Welcome and Introductions

Stephanie Kavanaugh, Deputy Director of the John S. McCain III National Center for Environmental Conflict Resolution (National Center; a program of the Morris K. Udall and Stewart L. Udall Foundation), welcomed Forum members. In-person and virtual participants introduced themselves by name and agency. See [Appendix A](#) for a participant list.

General Updates from Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)

CEQ is currently working on providing technical assistance to lead agencies on The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023 which was signed into law on June 3, 2023.

On July 31, 2023, CEQ proposed multiple revisions to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) in the Federal Register. The “Phase 2” proposal builds on CEQ’s prior revisions to NEPA (Phase 1) which were finalized on April 20, 2022. The comment period closed on September 29, 2023.

General Updates from the National Center

Brian Manwaring, National Center Director, introduced Sandy Talley, a detailee at the National Center from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). Sandy is supporting National Center projects and training.

Brian also informed the Forum that spaces are still available in the National Center’s upcoming *Collaboration with Native Nations and Tribal Consultation* training in Washington, D.C. on December 6-7, 2023 and the *Collaboration in NEPA* training offered virtually January 9-18, 2024 via Zoom. For questions about any of the National Center courses, please contact training@udall.gov. More information about National Center trainings can be found here: <https://www.udall.gov/OurPrograms/Institute/Training.aspx>

A University of Arizona Summit on Indigenous Data Sovereignty being held April 11-12, 2024. If you’re interested in learning more, please email Brian at manwaring@udall.gov

Stephanie reminded the Forum to provide comments to the FY 2022 draft Annual ECCR in the Federal Government Synthesis by October 6, 2023. Agency reports for FY 2023 are due Friday, January 26, 2024.

Marci DuPraw and Rachel Hammelman provided an update from the June 2023 ECCR Forum discussion on the Climate Service Area Community of Practice discussion. As background, Marci explained that two years ago the National Center published an assessment of opportunities to expand the use of ECCR for addressing climate change-related challenges. Since then, the National Center has developed a Climate Service Area focused on raising Federal agency awareness of how and when ECCR may be an effective approach for addressing climate change-related challenges. To date, the National Center has documented six success stories and hosted three webinars. The National Center gathered input from the ECCR Forum, a SurveyMonkey from ECCR practitioners, and an informal poll of over 200 participants on a webinar on climate. Many people responded that they would be interested in a Community of Practice on Climate but that they are spread thin with other communities of practice. The National Center also learned that they would need a larger staff for the Community of Practice. The National Center has decided to not launch a Community of Practice but will continue to do individual events on climate related topics such as webinars.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Marci (dupraw@udall.gov) and Rachel Hammelman (hammelman@udall.gov).

General Updates from Other Agencies

The Department of Energy (DOE) is co-hosting their annual environmental attorneys training on September 27, 2023. The topics will include a one-hour session on ECCR and tribal issues. The training is available virtually or in person. To register, please email Steven Miller at steven.miller@hq.doe.gov. CLE or CE credits may be available for attendees and certificates will be provided.

Discussion: Accessibility in ECCR Processes – Stacy Langsdale, USACE; Leslie Coker, EPA; Kailey Kornhauser, DOI CADR; and Jennifer Dunn, USACE; with Introduction by Will Hall and Gina Langan Garcia

Description: USACE, DOI, and EPA have been developing a reference product for consideration of accessibility in ECCR processes sponsored by Federal agencies. Agency representatives will share key points and answer questions from Forum members. Forum members will then be asked to share any efforts or best practices for assuring and improving the accessibility of ECCR processes at their own agencies.

Will Hall, Department of Interior, introduced this topic with the background that in 2022, the National Center, DOI, and EPA brought their programs together for a joint training on accessibility from the [Mid-Atlantic Americans with Disabilities Act \(ADA\) Center](#). The purpose of the training was to encourage participants to think about how to incorporate accessibility into virtual and in-person meetings and other events. After the training, EPA, DOI, and USACE started a working group on how to make the ECCR practice more accessible. Since then, a small working group comprised of staff from those same agencies has been working on creating a best practices checklist for accessibility in ECCR processes.

Stacy Langsdale (USACE) and Leslie Coker (EPA) introduced the draft document, “A Quick Guide for Accessibility in Public Engagement Events and Processes” which can be found in [Appendix B](#). They explained that the working group designed this checklist on incorporating accessibility needs for agencies to use when planning public meetings but it can also be used for external and internal meetings. Stacy and Leslie reviewed the draft checklist and then opened it up to the Forum for comments and edits. Below are suggestions from the Forum:

- Remove, “including those with disabilities” in the first paragraph and ending the sentence at “audience”. Edits are below:
“Our agencies are committed to making our communications, activities, and facilities are accessible to a wide audience, ~~including those with disabilities~~. Thus, any public engagement activities need to include accessible accommodations.”
- Incorporate ECCR-specific items for ECCR processes such as situation or conflict assessments.
- Add how to assess a geographic location for accessibility needs such as public transportation, weather, elevators, and parking.
- Provide a link to lists of disabilities and what types of accessible tools and techniques can support participation.
- Design some guidance on how to incorporate food under Federal regulations as having accessible food is important to some with low blood sugar, medication needs, etc.
 - Federal partners shared that there are ways to work with your General Counsel incorporate food when you are in an area where breaking for lunch can be difficult. Other

Federal partners encouraged partnering with contractors to be able to address these needs as well.

- Incorporate breaks in agendas and providing agendas in advance so that people with accessibility needs can plan for their needs.
- Add budget implications and how to plan for budgeting around accessibility needs and technology.
- There was discussion around the interface between remote/virtual and in-person meetings.
 - It was suggested to have multiple people in the room to help and have backup equipment if something fails.
 - Others encouraged using captioning software during virtual meetings.
 - Another person suggested adding “pinning” views in virtual rooms to make it easier when switching between virtual speakers.
 - Others recommended having good technology and equipment for listening and seeing people who are speaking in a physical room (example: the “Owl” technology).
 - Offer two screens in-person during meetings with remote participation so that the people in the room can see the participants and the presentations at the same time.
- Steve Miller is the leader of SOAR, a program at DOE, that would be interested in being briefed on this document. SOAR is intended to suggest inclusivity, accessibility, and a positive experience for everyone with or without a disability.

Stacy and Leslie asked the Forum for thoughts on how this could best be distributed widely to Federal agencies. Forum members suggested the following:

- Post the checklist in a central place for people to access.
- Hold short webinars that are recorded so that people can use this as a continuing resource.

Stacy and Leslie encouraged everyone to reach out with any additional comments and edits on the draft document. One option they are discussing is finalizing the document and adjourning the working group if there is not a need for further tools. Please send comments to Stacy.m.langsdale@usace.army.mil and Coker.Leslie@epa.gov by Friday, October 5, 2023.

Closing Thoughts

The next meeting is projected to be in early Winter 2024.

APPENDIX A: Meeting Attendees

Name	Agency
Carolyn White	U.S. Air Force
Carrie Greco	U.S. Army
Valaria (Ria) Johnson	U.S. Army
Stacy Langsdale	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Maria Lantz	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Crorey Lawton	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Hunter Merritt	U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE)
Patricia Johnston	Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Megan Healy	Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)
Jomar Maldonado	Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ)
Terry Bowers	Department of Defense (DoD)
Steven Miller	Department of Energy (DOE)
Heather McDuff	Department of Homeland Security (DHS)
Marcia deChadenedes	Department of the Interior (DOI)
William Hall	Department of the Interior (DOI)
Olivia Walker-Chaffin	Department of Transportation (DOT)
Leslie Coker	Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
Susan Staehle	Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)
Josh Hurwitz	Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC)
Julie Minde	U.S. Forest Service
Frank Sprtel	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA)
Sandra Talley	Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC)
Seth Cohen	Udall Foundation, National Center
Marci DuPraw	Udall Foundation, National Center
Rachel Hammelman	Udall Foundation, National Center
Stephanie Kavanaugh	Udall Foundation, National Center
Elyse Magen	Udall Foundation, National Center
Brian Manwaring	Udall Foundation, National Center
Ben Zukowski	Udall Foundation, National Center
Courtney Owen	Udall Foundation, National Center
Michelle DeGrandi	Veterans Affairs (VA)

APPENDIX B: A Quick Guide for Accessibility in Public Engagement Events and Processes

A Quick Guide for Accessibility in Public Engagement Events and Processes



Introduction

The purpose of this document is to encourage and enable those planning all types of public meetings and engagement to ensure all are able to participate fully, particularly those with hidden or visible disabilities. Disability affects approximately 61 million (1 in 4; 26%) people in the United States.ⁱ Including people with disabilities enriches the diversity of input and enables agencies to implement solutions that serve the mutual interest of an organization and its customers. Furthermore, people with disabilities and activity limitations can be excellent problem solvers so can add value to complex decision-making processes.

DOI, EPA, and USACE jointly developed this guide with federal staff in mind; however, this guide is broadly applicable to anyone planning for public engagement activities.

Our agencies are committed to making our communications, activities, and facilities accessible to a wide audience, including those with disabilities. Thus, any public engagement activities need to include accessible accommodations.ⁱⁱ

Definitions

Section 508 is part of the Federal Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that requires agencies to provide individuals with disabilities equal access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) comparable to those who do not have disabilities unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency. It is everyone's responsibility to think about accessibility.

Disability affects approximately 61 million, about 1 in 4 (26%) people in the United States. About 1 in 4, or 61 million, U.S. adults report having some form of a disability. Some disabilities are visible while some are not. In communicating virtually or in-person with internal and external stakeholders, ensuring user accessibility is critical.

Accessibility is when the needs of people with disabilities are specifically considered, and products, services, and facilities are built or modified so that they can be used by people of all abilities. (CDC) An example includes wheelchair accessible sidewalks. It is everyone's responsibility to think about accessibility.

Accommodations are for individuals and are reactive. An example is providing ASL interpreters on request of a participant who is hearing-impaired. Note that for large events hosts may choose to

proactively provide accommodations.

Initial Meeting Planning (1-3 months in advance):

- Ensure a member of the planning committee is knowledgeable about and can advocate for providing accessibility.
- Provide for multiple options to participate, which could include in-person, virtual, hybrid, and/or reviewing recordings and websites and submitting written comments.
- Tour potential venues and evaluate them using the criteria listed below.
- Communicate with individuals about their specific needs for additional support to enable their full participation in the event.
 - In the invitation, provide information about accessibility of event and how to request accommodations.
 - Send invites well in advance and include a deadline for requests to ensure you have enough time to respond to their requests.
 - Designate a point of contact for support.
- For very large meetings (esp. if the need is already identified, or if the meeting will be broadcasted), hosts may choose to proactively provide accommodations such as:
 - *ASL Interpreters*
 - *Assistive listening devices*
 - *Closed-captioning*
- Design agendas to include regular breaks (approximately 20- or 30-minute health break and a 90-minute lunch break).
- Use large fonts and high-contrasting colors when designing and printing any signs, presentations, and other graphical materials.

When Choosing a Location for an In-Person Event:

- When evaluating physical accessibility of facilities, keep in mind the full array of mobility aids (e.g. wheelchairs, walkers, crutches, forearm canes, scooters, strollers). Also consider the needs of those with visual or hearing impairments.
- Select a location that is serviced by accessible transit services.
- Ensure a reasonable number of accessible parking spots are already marked or could be designated for the event. (Note the 2010 ADA Standards for Accessible Design require one accessible space/25 parking spaces).
- Ensure clear physical access up to building entrances. This includes obstacle free pathways, curb cuts, and entrance ramps.
- Ensure the building is accessible, including automatic doors, elevators or ramps if multiple floors, and accessible restrooms. Evaluate the meeting room, including any platforms or podiums, and seating.
- Provide tactile signage and auditory signals.
- Ensure visual emergency devices are present.
- Confirm bright, adjustable room lighting to allow for increased contrast for audiovisual materials.

When Choosing a Platform for a Virtual Meeting:

- Consider accessibility features when choosing virtual platform and planning for interaction. For example, the platform should have options for simple keyboard

shortcuts for those that do not use a mouse.

Preparation 1-2 weeks in advance of event:

- ❑ Distribute presentation materials and documents ahead of the meeting to allow participants to read in advance.
- ❑ Make sure meeting hosts know accessibility emergency plans.
- ❑ Provide an opportunity for participants to test access to the virtual platform prior to the meeting.

Event Set-Up:

- ❑ In winter, ensure any snow is adequately removed to provide clear access.
- ❑ Set up all elements of the room to be accessible (seating, tables, displays, and refreshments).
- ❑ Provide preferred seating for individuals making use of sign language interpretation.
- ❑ Provide an appropriate number of seats without arms or attachment to tables.
- ❑ In a virtual setting, enable closed captioning and any other accessibility features.

During the Event:

- ❑ Provide guides who can help orient those who need assistance by providing oral or electronic descriptions/maps of meeting room layouts, emergency exits, and other amenities or navigation of the technical environment. If virtual, have the chat monitor be ready to address any accessibility requests in the moment.
- ❑ Allow for service animals to accompany individuals to all areas of the facility and provide a service animal relief area.
- ❑ Provide real-time captioning, translators, ASL, and notetakers.
- ❑ Minimize movement during the meeting.
- ❑ Reduce background noise. In a virtual setting mute microphones of those not speaking.
- ❑ Verbally describe images, graphics, charts, animations, and video. This includes verbalizing visual cues such as “I see some people are nodding” and repeating questions posed by the audience into the microphone. In a virtual setting, consider that people have different screen sizes which may limit their ability to see shared screens.
- ❑ *(Virtual)* When presenting, turn your camera on to enable lip reading. Ensure that you have adequate lighting, wear high contrast clothing, and prepare a quiet meeting space.
- ❑ Refer to people by name or ask them to identify themselves before they begin to speak.
- ❑ Gather feedback on participants’ experience, including their ability to participate in the meeting.

Follow-up

- ❑ Send meeting minutes and action items, if appropriate.
- ❑ Send any electronic links or copies of resources.

DRAFT DATE: September 2023

Please send comments to: Stacy.m.langsdale@usace.army.mil and Coker.Leslie@epa.gov

Additional Resources

[GSA Create Accessible Meetings](#)
[DC Government Guide on Accessible Meetings and Conferences](#)
[University of Washington Accessibility and Universal Design of Online Meetings](#) [Cornell Accessible Meeting and Event Checklist](#)
[University of Kansas Best Practice Guidelines for Planning and Accessible Event Seeds for Change Facilitators Guide to Making Meetings Accessible](#)
[Columbia Health Disability Services Event Accessibility Checklist](#) [Southeast ADA Center Disability Civic Engagement Guide](#) [Medical News Today What Types of Mobility Aids are Available?](#)

Agency Contacts

EPA 508 Team,
section508@epa.gov **USACE EEO Specialist** 202-761-1716 **DOI 508 Coordinators** 202-219-0963
DOI Office of Diversity, Inclusion and Civil Rights (202) 208-5693
DOI EEO Specialist 771-888-4918

ⁱ Source: Okoro CA, Hollis ND, Cyrus AC, Griffin-Blake S. Prevalence of Disabilities and Health Care Access by Disability Status and Type Among Adults — United States, 2016. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2018; 67:882–887. DOI: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/67/wr/mm6732a3.htm?s_cid=mm6732a3_w

ⁱⁱ [EPA Accessibility Statement](#)

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is committed to making its websites accessible to the widest possible audience, including people with disabilities, in accordance with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act ([29 U.S.C. 794d](#)). ([EPA Accessibility Statement](#) | [EPA@Work](#))

[Department of the Army \(DA\) Accessibility Statement](#)

DA is committed to meeting or exceeding the accessibility requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Architectural Barriers Act of 1968. Accessibility is addressed in terms of (1) Information and Communication Technology, (2) Facilities and Physical Infrastructure, (3) Reasonable Accommodation and Personal Assistance Services, and (4) Access to All Programs and Activities Conducted or Funded by DA.

[Department of the Interior Accessibility Statement](#)

The U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) is committed to making its information and communication technologies accessible to individuals with disabilities by meeting or exceeding the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Section 508 is a Federal law that requires agencies to provide individuals with disabilities access to electronic and information technology and data comparable to those who do not have disabilities, unless an undue burden would be imposed on the agency. To meet this commitment, our web templates have been designed to meet or exceed the Section 508 standards and to conform to the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, Level AA.