Exchange Network Forum

Thursday, August 14

1:00 – 2:00 PM ET

Welcome

Alex O’Neill, *EPA Office of Information Management (OIM), Office of Mission Support (OMS)*

* Alex O’Neill welcomed participants to the Forum and noted that the format is designed to be an open meeting that encourages interaction between participants.
* The meeting materials, including the summaries from the Forum meetings are available on the [Exchange Network website](https://exchangenetwork.net/exchange-network-forum/).
* Alex reviewed the agenda:
  + Welcome from the Office of Information Management
  + Message from the Chief Information Officer
  + Future of the Exchange Network
  + Open Forum

Message from the Chief Information Officer

Carter Farmer, *US EPA Chief Information Officer*

* Carter Farmer overviewed how the collection and exchange of environmental data are crucial for effective environmental protection. Data informs decision-making, evaluates the impact of investments in water quality, shapes policies to mitigate air quality issues, and optimizes resource allocation. Additionally, data helps communicate the significance of our work, enabling engagement with communities through shared insights.
* Engagement with the states and tribes is critical to EPA’s success, and to the success of EPA’s Chief Information Officer. Carter emphasized the importance of cooperative federalism and the Agency’s relationships with states and Tribes, as this relationship is key to achieving EPA’s mission and those of state and Tribal environmental organizations. He recognized that our different organizations may work differently, but being able to share information, data, and technical capability is key.
* High-quality, interoperable data could lead to more efficient processes and innovative solutions for EPA and its state and Tribal partners. Being able to share and use data enables organizations to engage with communities more effectively. It fosters transparency and accountability, allowing communities to see the tangible results of environmental initiatives. By presenting clear and compelling data, organizations can illustrate the significance of their efforts and garner support and understanding from the public.

Future of the Exchange Network

Dwane Young, *Acting Director, Office of Information Management (OIM), Office of Mission Support (OMS)*

* Dwane opened with updates on structural changes at the US EPA.
  + Dwane has assumed a new role as the Acting Director of the Office of Information Management. Dwane was previously the Deputy Director of the Office of Information Management.
  + Jennie Campbell has assumed a new role as the Deputy Chief Information Officer. Jennie was previously the Director of the Office of Information Management.
* The [US EPA Administrator’s five pillars](https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-administrator-lee-zeldin-announces-epas-powering-great-american-comeback) were highlighted as they relate to Exchange Network principles. Dwane focused on clean air, land, water, permitting reform, cooperative federalism, and AI development.
  + *Pillar 1: Clean Air, Clean Land, Clean Water*: Dwane discussed how Pillar 1 underscores the importance of collaboration between states, Tribes, and the EPA for achieving environmental goals. He highlighted how environmental programs are interconnected across organizational and political boundaries, giving an example of watersheds, with 1/3 of watersheds crossing state boundaries.
  + *Pillar 3: Permitting Reform and Cooperative Federalism*: The Exchange Network aligns quite closely with this pillar given the delegated authorities given by the US EPA to state and Tribal environmental organizations. Dwane emphasized that the Exchange Network supports these efforts by facilitating efficient data exchange between Exchange Network partners, which is crucial for streamlining permitting processes, enhancing collaborative governance, and enabling cooperative federalism.
  + Pillar 4: AI Development: Young discussed the focus of this pilar being on having the regulatory framework in place to support the development of data centers to make the US a leader in AI. However, this pilar has also provided focus to what we, as an Agency are doing on AI, highlighting the potential of AI to enhance program efficiency. He stressed that the community involved in the Exchange Network is pivotal in determining how AI can be integrated into environmental programs, noting that quality, standardized, and interoperable data are essential for effective AI implementation.
* Dwane addressed budget constraints, including potential changes to the Exchange Network Grant program, citing the President's 2026 budget. He encouraged discussion on the future of the exchange network, emphasizing the importance of data interoperability, collaboration, and sharing capabilities even without grant funding.
* Young posed a critical question to the community: What is the role of the Exchange Network without the grant program? He emphasized the continued importance of data interoperability, standards, and collaboration, regardless of funding availability. The discussion focused on finding ways to maintain these efforts and adapt to changing circumstances.
  + During the discussion, state and Tribal partners emphasized the importance of EN Grants for driving IT innovations at their respective organizations. They view these funds as essential for upholding their delegated authority, as grant funds support both data collection and sharing efforts.
  + Several states, including Massachusetts and Wyoming, emphasized the importance, value, and outcomes of EN Grant-funded projects for expanding their IT systems used to share data with the US EPA. The general sentiment was that state may revert back to the bare minimum requirements for data sharing rather than innovating new solutions that widen the base of data providers and users if EN Grants cease.
  + As to the value of the Exchange Network, some states asserted that effective environmental management requires effective communication across partners involved in environmental management. The EN Grant program is an outgrowth of needing to communicate (large data) via technology between partners in support of effective environmental management. The EN exists independent of the EN Grant Program, but the EN Grants make environmental management across partners effective at scale and cost as do the parallel adoption of various types/levels of standards and governance.
  + Several Tribes emphasized the importance of EN Grants for capacity building. Future capacity building efforts in Alaska may be stalled if the EN Grant program does not persist.
  + Several Tribes noted the importance of the EN-funded Tribal Exchange Network Group for its advocacy and support of Tribal environmental programs, which has made significant progress in recent years. Tribal partners emphasized that the loss of the EN Grant Program would be detrimental, especially as communities are beginning to access and benefit from these grant programs.

Future of the Exchange Network

* Can you provide more information on RCRAInfo’s REST API-based method for data exchanges?
  + The RCRAInfo team responded that they are building REST APIs for state partners to interact with RCRAInfo for both inbound and outbound data exchanges. They noted that this approach aligns with modern data transfer protocols and responds to requests from state partners for more efficient data exchange methods.
  + The API approach has been successful in collecting over 10 million manifests from industry over the past seven years, demonstrating its effectiveness and reliability.
* When did the EN begin?
  + The Environmental Information Exchange Network (EN) was officially launched in 2002 as an inter-governmental, collaborative partnership of EPA, states, territories, and tribes to foster better environmental management and decision-making through increased access to timely, high quality environmental information.
* What is the status of the FY25 EN grant cycle?
  + The Exchange Network grant process is stalled. Anybody who submitted an application during the earlier open application period (in February/March) will have the opportunity to resubmit an application (addressing any changes to our project narrative guidance) when we are able to publish again.