

Highlights of [GAO-12-77](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, Committee on Science, Space, and Technology, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is responsible for promoting environmental justice—that is, the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people in developing, implementing, and enforcing environmental laws, regulations, and policies. In January 2010, the EPA Administrator cited environmental justice as a top priority for the agency.

GAO was asked to examine (1) how EPA is implementing its environmental justice efforts, and (2) the extent that EPA has followed leading federal strategic planning practices in establishing a framework for these efforts. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed EPA strategy documents and interviewed agency officials and key stakeholders.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that EPA develop a clear strategy to define key environmental justice terms; conduct a resource assessment; articulate clearly states' roles in ongoing planning and future implementation efforts; and develop performance measures to track the agency's progress in meeting its environmental justice goals. GAO provided a draft of this report to EPA for comment. EPA disagreed with two of GAO's recommendations, partially agreed with one recommendation, and did not directly address the remaining recommendation. GAO believes that the recommended actions will help EPA ensure clear, consistent, and measurable progress as it moves forward in implementing Plan EJ 2014.

View [GAO-12-77](#) or key components. For more information, contact Carolyn Yocom at (202) 512-3841, or yocomc@gao.gov.

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ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE

EPA Needs to Take Additional Actions to Help Ensure Effective Implementation

What GAO Found

In recent years, EPA has renewed its efforts to make environmental justice an important part of its mission by developing a new strategy and approach for integrating environmental justice considerations into the agency's programs, policies, and activities. Under Plan EJ 2014, the agency's 4-year environmental justice implementation plan, EPA's program and regional offices are assuming principal responsibility for integrating the agency's efforts by carrying out nine implementation plans to put Plan EJ 2014 into practice. An important aspect of Plan EJ 2014 is to obtain input on major agency environmental justice initiatives from key stakeholders, including the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the Federal Interagency Working Group on Environmental Justice, impacted communities, and states.

In developing its environmental justice framework, which consists of agency initiatives, including Plan EJ 2014 and the implementation plans, EPA generally followed most of the six leading federal strategic planning practices that we selected for review. For example, EPA has generally defined a mission and goals for its environmental justice efforts, ensured leadership involvement and accountability for these efforts, and coordinated with other federal agencies—all consistent with leading practices in federal strategic planning. However, EPA has not yet fully (1) established a clear strategy for how it will define key environmental justice terms or identified the resources it may need to carry out its environmental justice implementation plans, (2) articulated clearly states' roles in ongoing planning and environmental justice integration efforts, or (3) developed performance measures for eight of its nine implementation plans to track agency progress on its environmental justice goals. Without additional progress on these practices, EPA cannot assure itself, its stakeholders, and the public that it has established a framework to effectively guide and assess its efforts to integrate environmental justice across the agency.

Extent to Which EPA's Environmental Justice Efforts Followed Selected Leading Practices in Federal Strategic Planning

Selected leading practices in strategic planning	Extent followed
Define mission and goals	●
Define strategies to address management challenges and resource needs	◐
Ensure leadership involvement and accountability	●
Involve stakeholders	◐
Coordinate with other agencies	●
Develop and use performance measures	◐

Legend: ● Fully followed ◐ Partially followed

Source: GAO analysis of EPA data.