



**National Tribal Air Association (NTAA)  
FY27 Clean Air Programs Budget Recommendation  
To The National Tribal Caucus of  
EPA's National Tribal Operations Committee  
February 2025**

On January 24, 1983, President Ronald Reagan promulgated a Federal Indian Policy supporting the primary role of Tribal governments in matters affecting American Indian reservations. Subsequently on November 11, 1984 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) developed the EPA Policy for the Administration of Environmental Programs on Indian Reservations. The 1990 Amendments to the Clean Air Act (CAA) authorize EPA to treat eligible federally recognized Indian Tribes in a similar manner as a state (TAS) for implementing and managing certain environmental programs. The CAA expressly provides the authority for Indian Tribes to play essentially the same role in Indian Country that states do within state lands.

Since the 1990s many Tribal governments have demonstrated their ability to manage air quality in Indian Country. Currently, out of 574 Federally recognized Tribes, 55 Tribes have Section 105 grants, and 74 Tribes have Section 103 grants. Using Section 105 authority of the Clean Air Act, Tribal agencies have developed and implemented programs for the prevention and control of air pollution and implementation of primary and secondary National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS). Using Section 103 authority of the CAA, Tribes and multi-tribe jurisdictional air pollution control agencies conduct and promote research, investigations, experiments, demonstrations, surveys, and studies related to ambient or indoor air pollution in Indian Country.

The National Tribal Air Association (NTAA) recognizes current priorities of EPA as described in the confirmation testimony of Administrator Zeldin. These focus on clean air, clean water and economic prosperity. More specifically, these priorities include:

- Building capacity for state, local and Tribal air quality management programs to carry out their primary authorities and responsibilities under the Clean Air Act;

- Accountable processes to *practical, cost-beneficial, and affordable solutions* to clean up the air, water, and soil; the results should be measured and tracked by simple metrics that are available to the public;
- Energy development while protecting air quality; and
- An accountable process for ensuring that taxpayer funding is used efficiently.

Tribes continue to be successful at addressing air quality in Indian Country. They participate as co-regulators, partner with state and local air quality management agencies, support air quality education for all citizens, operate sophisticated air monitoring systems, and address a multitude of both acute and on-going air pollution issues. As EPA moves to support local decision making and local air quality management, there is a demonstrable need to increase support for both existing and prospective Tribal air quality management efforts.

### **Air Quality & Public Health Impacts**

American Indians and Alaskan Natives are disproportionately affected by air pollution. They have a higher rate of asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) than the general population. Wildfire season has consistently intensified over the past few years, which has led to an increase in ambient and indoor air pollution and exacerbated the health of Tribal communities. Across the Nation, Tribal air pollution issues vary from permitting sources on-reservations, to monitoring for criteria air pollutants, to participating in local, state, regional, and national air quality work groups. In addition to performing emissions inventories and monitoring, other program tasks include addressing indoor air quality issues; implementing voluntary programs and education outreach efforts; and reviewing and commenting on federal air quality rules, policy, and permits issued by other agencies.

### **EPA Funding of Tribal Air Quality Management**

Subsequent to promulgation of the Tribal Authority Rule, in 1998, federally recognized Tribes compete for State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) as administered by EPA. Similarly, other targeted resources have been pursued, when available, based on specific Tribal air quality protection needs. The largest funding source available to Tribes continues to be the STAG grants. Unfortunately, only about 120 Tribal governments (out of 574 federally recognized Tribes) currently receive such awards. For the most part, available CAA grant support for eligible Tribes has hovered at around \$12M for the better part of the past 20 years. In FY2024 STAG awards for Tribes increased to \$15.5 million – an average of less than \$130,000 per successful applicant.

As one component of a relatively comprehensive needs assessment published in March, 2022, NTAA determined that the funding needed to support basic Tribal air quality management programs is \$79 million. Depending on specific local needs, Tribal air quality management programs, include but are not limited to, ambient air quality assessments, monitoring, emissions inventories, data collection and management, permitting, regulatory programs, education, outreach, and indoor air quality.

### Recent EPA Tribal Air Program Funding

Year	Total Available Awards
FY 2023	\$12.5 million
FY 2024	\$15.5 million
FY 2025	Currently Unknown

### FY26 & FY27 Funding Recommendation for STAG

Year	Funding Recommendation for Tribal Air Quality Management Programs	Average Inflation Rate Increase 2023 3.4%	Average Civilian Worker Wage Increases for 2023 4.2%	Equipment Cost Increase 0.3%
2026	\$79 million (FY25)	\$2.69 million	\$3.32 million	\$.24 million
<b>Recommendation for FY26:</b>				<b>\$85.25 million</b>
2027	\$85.25 million (FY26)	Average Inflation Rate Increase for 2024 is 2.9%	Average civilian Worker Wage Increases for 2024 3.8%	Equipment Cost Increase 3.3%
<b>Recommendations for FY27:</b>				<b>\$94 million</b>

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As a result, the NTAA recommends \$94 million for Tribal air quality management programs for FY27. These funds are necessary to support very basic air quality management efforts for all eligible Tribes, and a modest increase in available resources for established and proven Tribal programs. Such available funding will demonstrate the recognition of federal trust responsibility to sovereignty and self-governance of American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages

<sup>1</sup><https://www.usinflationcalculator.com/inflation/current-inflation-rates/#:~:text=To%20find%20annual%20inflation%20rates,average%20inflation%20rate%20was%204.1%25>. US Inflation Calculator

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/eci.pdf>

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/ppi.pdf>

consistent with EPA’s stated priorities.

A \$94 million budget would on average provide each of the 574 federally recognized Tribes with approximately \$164,000 for FY27. This investment will assuredly increase collaboration and engagement with state and local air agencies and help to reduce air pollution and improve public health for all citizens.

In addition, there are other sources of funding for Tribal air quality management programs important to protect public health. NTAA supports on-going funding including tribal “set asides” from these important programs to ensure that Tribes continue to have access to these funds. These programs include:

### **State Indoor Radon Grants (SIRG)**

The national long-term goal of the United States with respect to radon levels in buildings is that the air within buildings in the United States should be as free of radon as the ambient air outside of buildings. (Pub. L. 94–469, title III, §301, as added [Pub. L. 100–551, §1\(a\), Oct. 28, 1988, 102 Stat. 2755.](#)) State and Tribal radon programs are critical to the Agency's national goal of minimizing and preventing radon-related lung cancer. States and Tribes receive grant funds from EPA that help finance their radon risk reduction programs.

In FY24, EPA Revised SIRG Allocation Methodology and allowed each regional office to establish Tribal allocations. Approximately 6% of these grants (variable among regions) was made available to Tribes. Radon is the second leading cause of lung cancer in the United States – and the leading cause of lung cancer mortality among non-smokers – accounting for about 21,000 deaths per year.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, risks from radon have been reduced in millions of homes, but there are millions more still in need of mitigation. Additionally, Tribal communities lack access to resources to address radon. This voluntary program promotes partnerships among national organizations, the private sector, and more than 50 state, local, Tribal, and territory governmental programs to reduce radon risk.

NTAA appreciates the effort of EPA to increase Tribal participation in SIRG and supports continued allocations for this vital health protection initiative.

### **Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA)**

The Diesel Emissions Reduction Act (DERA) grant program provides support for emission reductions from existing diesel engines through engine replacements, including zero emission replacements, retrofits, and rebuilds; switching to cleaner fuels; idling reduction; and other emission reduction strategies. The DERA program was initially authorized in Sections 791-797 of

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<sup>2</sup> EPA Radon Health Risks: <https://www.epa.gov/radon/health-risk-radon>

the Energy Policy Act of 2005 and reauthorized by the Diesel Emission Reduction Act of 2010 and in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021.

Tribes are active participants in the DERA competitive grant program, utilizing support from the program to replace inefficient diesel engines, including diesel-powered vehicles, with less polluting new diesel technology and efficient power sources. The DERA grant program has made a positive impact within Tribal communities throughout the United States. Competition for the grant program often outstrips the funding available, demonstrating need and support from Tribal governments. The NTAA supports Tribal eligibility and grant allocations from this important law.

### **About the NTAA**

The National Tribal Air Association (NTAA) is a member-based organization with 160 principal member Tribes. The organization's mission is to advance air quality management policies and programs, consistent with the needs, interests, and unique legal status of American Indian Tribes and Alaska Natives. Although NTAA always seeks to represent consensus perspectives on any given issue, it is important to note that the recommendations expressed by the NTAA may not be agreed upon by all Tribes. Also, it is imperative that EPA recognizes that Tribes are sovereign governments as established in treaties, congressional actions, and court decisions. In the 1990 amendments to the Clean Air Act, Congress emphasized the need to treat Tribes in a government-to-government relationship, and specifically in Section 301(d) stipulated that Tribes can be "treated in a manner similar to States" in implementing that statute. With the recognition of the status of Tribes as sovereign governments, and in full recognition of the EPA's stated priorities, the NTAA is pleased to provide these budget recommendations for FY27.