

<h1 style="text-align: center;">OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY POLICY MEMORANDUM</h1>	NUMBER: Cal/EPA-26-01
SUBJECT: CalEPA Policy for Youth Engagement and Establishing the California Environmental Youth Advisory Council	DATE ISSUED: 06/18/2026 EXPIRES: Until Rescinded
REFERENCES:	CATEGORY: Youth Engagement and Environmental Education

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA)’s mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment, to ensure public health, environmental quality, and economic vitality for all Californians.

Young people under the age of 20 make up nearly 25 percent of California’s population of 39.5 million people. They are on the front lines of environmental activism, whether it’s learning about the effects of harmful chemicals as Toxic Crusaders or taking part in urban greening and edible food recovery as part of the California Climate Action Corps. Young leaders already shape statewide policy through the California Youth Empowerment Commission and the California Commission on the Status of Women and Girls.

California’s young people will inherit the environmental challenges we leave unresolved, as well as the improvements and protections we put in place today. They represent the next generation of environmental leaders, innovators, and policymakers. Time and time again, when California empowers its youth, they deliver tangible, innovative results.

CalEPA recognizes the need for California youth engagement on environmental policies as a key aspect of furthering its mission. Accordingly, this policy provides a framework for CalEPA and its Boards, Departments, and Office (BDOs) to enhance communication and collaboration with California’s youth by establishing the California Environmental Youth Advisory Council (Youth Council) as a CalEPA advisory body. This advisory body will have three core functions:

- (1) Serve as a platform to engage California’s youth in meaningful dialogue with CalEPA and its BDOs on environmental issues;
- (2) Create space for mentorships and education on environmental advocacy that would empower young people to contribute to environmental stewardship; and

- (3) Elevate youth perspectives and priorities to be recommended in state-level environmental decision-making processes.

BACKGROUND

The CalEPA Office of the Secretary oversees and coordinates the activities of six BDOs: the Air Resources Board; the Department of Pesticide Regulation; the Department of Toxic Substances Control; the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery; the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment; and the State Water Resources Control Board.

California's environmental regulatory system is a complex framework, with compliance assistance, inspection, permitting, enforcement, and training activities carried out by federal, state, and local government agencies. CalEPA and its BDOs understand that protecting California's environment is a major undertaking that involves communicating and collaborating with numerous stakeholders, including other governmental entities, nongovernmental and nonprofit organizations, community groups, and members of the public. To provide for more input and participation from all people served by our government, CalEPA is increasing the pathways for participation by California's youth.

Of California's 39.5 million residents, 9.75 million—or nearly 25 percent—are people under 20 years of age. Young Californians have demonstrated their passion for the civic process and shown their desire for change in social and public policy. There is a growing need for additional ways to engage youth directly with state-level environmental policymakers in a manner that will provide meaningful opportunities for youth to acquire knowledge and develop skills in environmental advocacy and engagement.

Establishing a youth advisory council at the state agency level increases these opportunities, providing a structured mechanism for youth to engage with CalEPA and its BDOs on pressing environmental issues. By including youth perspectives, the Youth Council will enhance the effectiveness of CalEPA's and its BDO's environmental initiatives, strengthen community engagement, and expand the pipeline of future environmental leaders.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

To improve communication and collaboration with California's youth, CalEPA and its BDOs should, to the extent legal and practicable, be guided by the following principles and best practices. CalEPA and its BDOs shall:

1. Recognize youth as inheritors of both environmental challenges and environmental

progress, acknowledging their unique perspectives and long-term interests in shaping positive environmental outcomes.

2. Facilitate the communication of youth perspectives to CalEPA and its BDOs, reflecting California's geographically, culturally, socioeconomically, and racially diverse communities, including Tribes and communities disproportionately burdened by environmental and health hazards.
3. Promote evidence-based discussions of environmental issues, programs, and policies, centering on environmental justice concerns and drawing upon youth's lived experiences.
4. Promote civic leadership and capacity building by equipping youth with knowledge, skills, and networks to become effective future environmental policy leaders.
5. Facilitate meaningful youth participation by providing young people with relevant information and genuine opportunities to engage on policies and programs, as appropriate, at CalEPA and its BDOs.
6. Encourage innovation and creative problem-solving by creating space for youth to propose solutions to issues under the purview of CalEPA and its BDOs.
7. Support youth autonomy to set priorities, develop recommendations, organize their work, and bring their environmental advocacy to their schools and communities.

ACTION PLAN

To achieve these guiding principles and to the extent legal and practicable, CalEPA, in cooperation with its BDOs, will implement the following actions:

1. Establish the California Environmental Youth Advisory Council. Council members will be California residents and/or members of California Native American Tribes between 14 and 20 years of age. The Youth Council will be composed of 10 to 20 California youth representing California's geographically, culturally, socioeconomically, and racially diverse communities, including Tribes, urban and rural communities, and communities disproportionately burdened by environmental and health hazards. At least one seat on the Youth Council is reserved for a member of a California Native American Tribe. The authority to select Youth Council members rests with the Secretary for Environmental Protection or her designee, with input and recommendations from BDOs.
2. Designate a liaison within CalEPA and within each BDO as a central point of Agency or BDO contact for the Youth Council.

3. Facilitate meetings between those liaisons and the Youth Council on an up-to-quarterly basis to share information and updates about Agency and BDO policies and programs, and to engage in discussions with the Youth Council on policies and programs, which may include but is not limited to, climate programs, multi-national memorandums of understanding on climate actions, water policy, waste reduction, circular economy, pesticides use, hazardous waste disposal and cleanup, Tribal environmental concerns, and environmental justice and equity initiatives.
4. Work with the inaugural Youth Council members to develop and implement governance documents such as charter, operating procedures, application and selection guidelines, and meeting protocols.
5. Outside of the aforementioned periodic meetings with Agency and BDO liaisons, establish regular coordination between the Youth Council and other Agency and BDO officers or staff as necessary to support the Youth Council's purposes.
6. Provide resources that enable Youth Council members to effectively fulfill their advisory role, such as education on CalEPA and BDO areas of work, advocacy skills workshops, and access to publicly available environmental data and policy materials.
7. Solicit Youth Council input on proposed Agency and BDO regulations, programs, and initiatives, and demonstrate how the input was integrated or if not integrated, considered.
8. Develop strategic partnerships with educational institutions, other government entities, nonprofit organizations, Tribes, and community groups to enhance the Youth Council's capacity and expand youth engagement in general.
9. Generally promote youth environmental programs across California, which may include supporting youth-led initiatives and expanding environmental education.
10. Provide training to appropriate executive staff, managers, supervisors, and employees as necessary to implement this policy.

DISCLAIMER

This policy is intended solely for the guidance of employees of CalEPA and its BDOs and does not extend to other governmental entities. This policy is not a regulation, and it does not create, expand, limit, waive, or interpret any legal rights or obligations. Nothing in this policy shall be

construed to prevent CalEPA or its BDOs from taking timely action to fulfill their legal obligations to protect the public health and safety and the environment, or to carry out federally mandated duties under delegated federal programs.

CalEPA shall not be responsible for any costs to members of the Youth Council, except as may be agreed in advance in writing. In all cases, the provisions of the State Administrative Manual, any other relevant state guidance, and as appropriate, federal regulations, shall govern the conduct of the Youth Council's business affairs.

STATUTORY REFERENCES

Federal

Title 42 United States Code section 4332: The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) requires federal agencies to the fullest extent possible to encourage and facilitate public engagement in decisions that affect the quality of the human environment, including meaningful engagement with communities with environmental justice concerns.

State

Government Code section 65040.12(e): Provides a definition of environmental justice with regard to the Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation as the coordination agency on environmental justice programs, in consultation with the Secretary for Environmental Protection and others: "the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of people of all races, cultures, incomes, and national origins, with respect to the development, adoption, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies."

Public Resources Code section 21000 et seq.: The California Environmental Quality Act of 1970 (CEQA) declares that it is state policy to "develop and maintain a high-quality environment now and in the future, and to take all action necessary to protect, rehabilitate, and enhance the environmental quality of the state."

Public Resources Code section 71110: "The California Environmental Protection Agency, in designing its mission for programs, policies, and standards, shall do all of the following: (a) Conduct its programs, policies, and activities that substantially affect human health or the environment in a manner that ensures the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and income levels, including minority populations and low-income populations of the state. (b) Promote enforcement of all health and environmental statutes within its jurisdiction in a manner that ensures the fair treatment of people of all races, cultures, and income levels, including

minority populations and low-income populations in the state. (c) Ensure greater public participation in the agency's development, adoption, and implementation of environmental regulations and policies. (d) Improve research and data collection for programs within the agency relating to the health of, and environment of, people of all races, cultures, and income levels, including minority populations and low-income populations of the state. (e) Coordinate its efforts and share information with the United States Environmental Protection Agency. (f) Identify differential patterns of consumption of natural resources among people of different socioeconomic classifications for programs within the agency.”

Public Resources Code section 71304(a): The Office of Education and the Environment in the Department of Resources Recycling and Recovery, a department overseen by CalEPA, shall in coordination with CalEPA “be responsible for the statewide coordination of regulatory administrative decisions that require the development or encourage the promotion of environmental education for elementary and secondary school pupils.”

QUESTIONS

Please direct all questions regarding this policy to Yvonne Chi, the Deputy Secretary for Environmental Justice and Equity, at Yvonne.Chi@calepa.ca.gov or (916) 882-1399.



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