

**GOOD NEIGHBOR ENVIRONMENTAL BOARD (GNEB)  
FIVE-YEAR STUDY**

**FINAL REPORT**

**November 2000**



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## Acknowledgments

This document was prepared on behalf of the Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB), which established the need for its development. This document is the result of a collaborative effort between the GNEB and its sponsoring Federal agency, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The background, experiences, and insights of the following people contributed to the development of this document.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Good Neighbor Environmental Board (GNEB) was established under the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative Act of 1992 (EAIA) (7 United States Code [U.S.C.] section 5404) to advise the President and the Congress about environmental and infrastructure issues and needs in the states contiguous to Mexico. Its members are representatives of appropriate agencies of the U.S. government; the governments of Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas; and private organizations, including community development, academic, health, environmental, and other nongovernment entities that have expertise on issues of concern to the board. Under an Executive order, the administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has implementation authority over the board, which meets three times annually at a location along the U.S.-Mexico border. Under the statute, the GNEB is required to submit an annual report to the President and the Congress.

As the GNEB, which was convened in 1994, approached its five-year anniversary, the board initiated a self-assessment of its outreach activities. The GNEB established a study team to conduct such a self-assessment of those activities and the effects that its recommendations have had on environmental policies and laws that affect the border area. On behalf of the GNEB, EPA's Office of Cooperative Environmental Management (OCEM) has provided support for the conduct of a five-year study directed by a study team made up of members of the board.

The goal of the study is to propose a set of recommendations designed to increase the board's visibility and level of communication with its stakeholders.

During a brainstorming meeting in Washington, D.C. in March 2000, the members of the study team examined the purpose of the study project, the design of the study, the process by which information would be collected, and the method by which the study was to be implemented. The participants agreed that the project should:

- Focus on procedural and communication issues, rather than on content or substantive issues.
- Identify the way in which the GNEB currently provides advice.
- Identify what action Congress and the federal agencies take on the recommendations of the GNEB.
- Determine whether the GNEB's recommendations are a "value-added product."
- Identify methods of communication and information dissemination that the board has used in the past and recommend improvements in those methods.

The study team also identified themes that focus on the principal goal of the study, "to improve outreach efforts and communication to both target audiences and constituents, in order to increase the visibility and effectiveness of the GNEB." Those themes are:

- Image and Visibility of GNEB
- Annual Reports of GNEB
- Meetings of GNEB
- Effectiveness of GNEB
- Level of Participation on the Part of Outside Groups
- Measuring Resources of GNEB

The study was designed to solicit information from three groups of individuals: current and past members of the board; individuals who represent the GNEB's mandated, or primary, audiences (the White House

and members of Congress); and the board's key constituents. Some questions were asked of all participants, while other questions were targeted to a particular group. The methods used to solicit and analyze the information varied, as well. Current and past members of the board, White House staff, and representatives of participating federal agencies were surveyed through written survey instruments that consisted of both open-ended and closed-ended questions designed to elicit specific suggestions for improving the process by which the GNEB publicizes its activities and recommendations. A series of open-ended questions, distributed through an Internet e-mail list-serve, was used to survey key constituents. Telephone interviews were used to solicit information from staff of members of Congress who represent the border states.

This report presents the data gathered through the survey, organized according to the themes identified by the study team. Those data are useful in developing a forward-looking, action-oriented set of recommendations for increasing the board's visibility among and effectiveness in influencing its key constituents.

The survey was distributed to 69 current and past members and designated federal officials (DFO) of the GNEB, of whom 67 percent (well above the average rate of return for similar surveys) responded. A target group survey was sent to one White House staff member and 25 representatives of various federal agencies, of whom 50 percent (above the average rate of return) responded. Telephone contacts were attempted with 19 congressional staff members; none responded, despite extensive effort to encourage their participation. That lack of response is perhaps the result of policy common to many congressional offices not to respond to any survey. Further, only four individuals responded to the survey distributed through the list-serve; of them, one respondent did not address the questions. This lack of participation by Congressional staff and constituents calls into question the completeness and overall value of the report. This concern will need to be factored into the board's ultimate decisions about the recommendations contained in the report.

Demographic information collected through the survey indicates that the GNEB, under its mandate to maintain a diverse membership, has increased the diversity of its membership over the five years of its existence, in terms of both the ethnicity of the members of the board and the types of organizations with which they are affiliated, which include business and industry; environmental justice groups; tribal governments; nonprofit organizations; and representatives of federal, state, and local governments.

Survey recipients were asked a series of questions about awareness on the part of the board's target audiences and constituents and about activities and methods that would help increase such awareness. Their responses are summarized below by type of audience.

### **Image and Visibility of GNEB**

- **Member audience:** Overwhelmingly, both current and past members of the GNEB indicated that proactive and face-to-face encounter-type activities, such as the conduct of informational meetings to explain the activities of the board and briefings by members of the board during public meetings, are the most effective means of increasing visibility among members of both target audiences and constituents and in publicizing issues and the recommendations of the board. They also suggested that reports distributed by mail should be brief and targeted and expressed a strong preference for receiving updates on the board's activities by electronic means. Respondents also indicated forcefully that the GNEB's annual reports should be improved and that outreach activities should be better emphasized.
- **Target audience:** Most respondents indicated that they are aware of the activities of the board and that they had spoken with members of the board about its activities. Half responded that they had heard friends or colleagues discuss the GNEB. Respondents generally agreed with respondents to the member survey about the effectiveness of various means of increasing the board's visibility, with the exception that they endorsed much less strongly the effectiveness of delivering briefings at public meetings. Like respondents to the member survey, they expressed a very strong preference for receiving updates on the board's activities by electronic means, with half preferring monthly updates and half quarterly. Individual respondents suggested the following specific means of delivering

updates: briefings for target audiences, updates delivered during meetings related to the Border XXI program, and the establishment of media points of contact for the border.

- **Constituent audience:** All three respondents indicated that they are very familiar with the board, primarily through personal interaction with several of its members, attendance at meetings of the board, and through information disseminated in a variety of ways.

### **Annual Reports of GNEB**

- **Member audience:** Almost all respondents indicated they had received at least one annual report and had read at least portions of the reports they had received. However, only one-third indicated that they had used information from the reports in their day-to-day work. Generally, respondents indicated that the reports were informative, but they expressed much less positive opinions of the visual appeal of the reports, overwhelmingly recommending that the use of graphics be increased. One respondent suggested that the reports make specific recommendations. Despite finding the reports informative, respondents indicated that the reports could provide even more information.
- **Target audience:** Although two-thirds of the respondents indicated that they had received at least one annual report, only one-fifth indicated that they had used information from the reports in their day-to-day work. Almost half of the total respondents, however, noted that they had shared such information with their colleagues. Only two reported using the information in formulating policy. Generally, these respondents found the reports less informative than did the members surveyed; they agreed that the visual appeal of the reports should be improved. Half the respondents supported the inclusion of summaries of board meetings in the reports.
- **Constituent audience:** The three respondents indicated that they had read at least one report. One noted that the report is not relevant to community groups; the two respondents representing policy organizations characterized the report as substantive. One respondent suggested that the board also prepare position papers on key proposals discussed in the reports.

### **Meetings of GNEB**

- **Member audience:** All respondents indicated they had attended at least one meeting of the GNEB and most had been invited by the DFO or a representative of EPA OCEM. Almost two-thirds called for increased visibility for the board's work groups.
- **Target audience:** Half the respondents reported they had not attended a meeting of the GNEB. Most of the remaining respondents had attended three or more meetings. Almost all respondents indicated that members of the target audience should be invited to attend meetings and to provide information to the board for their consideration and use during their deliberations.
- **Constituent audience:** Two respondents stated that they had attended a meeting of the GNEB; their responses to this and other questions indicate that they have attended many such meetings.

### **Effectiveness of GNEB**

- **Member audience:** Respondents consistently indicated that they had benefited personally from activities of the board, that they had engaged in efforts to influence policy, and that their constituencies had benefited, as well. They consistently recommended that the board conduct annual assessments of its effectiveness. They also endorsed proactive, face-to-face activities as the best means of communicating the board's views and concerns to decision makers.
- **Target audience:** Respondents agreed almost unanimously with respondents to the member survey about what GNEB must accomplish if it is to be effective. They provided numerous specific suggestions, with many noting that the board should develop a system for monitoring progress with and action taken on its recommendations.

- Constituent audience: One respondent noted that vacant positions on the board are not filled promptly; another pointed out the lack of communication with constituent organizations.

### **Level of Participation on the Part of Outside Groups**

- Member audience: Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that each of the 13 entities suggested to them should receive the board's annual reports and other updates, with the exception of citizens living in the border area and citizens in general. Most believed that federal agencies, state and local governments, tribal governments, and community groups should provide information to support the board's analyses and recommendations. Generally, respondents rated the board moderately effective in reaching out to and informing outside entities, but found the board ineffective in outreach to citizens and community groups involved in border issues.
- Target audience: Of the seven entities suggested to them, respondents overwhelmingly indicated that each should receive the GNEB's annual reports and other updates. Respondents also strongly indicated that congressional staff and representatives of federal agencies should provide information to support the board's analyses and recommendations.

### **Measuring Resources of GNEB**

Respondents representing all audiences clearly indicated that priority should be given to outreach and communication activities. Their numerous recommendations related to outreach and the preparation of the board's annual report might signal a need to reexamine how the board uses its current resources, as well as a need for increased resources. They also clearly indicated the need for an effective network of communication among parties that have an interest in border issues.

### **Recommendations**

Recommendations based on observations about the views expressed by respondents to the survey, and tactics those responses indicate the board might adopt, include:

- Image and visibility of GNEB
  - Employ more proactive means of gaining visibility among both target audiences and constituencies and publicizing issues and recommendations
  - Increase use of electronic means of communication and provide regular updates of the board's activities to all audiences
- Annual reports of GNEB
  - Make annual reports more visually appealing and include in them information adequate to support the board's recommendations
  - Supplement annual reports with other periodic communications, including issue-oriented reports and papers
- Meetings of GNEB
  - Focus deliberations by limiting and controlling the number of topics addressed during meetings and ensure better audience participation in deliberations
  - Initiate other face-to-face methods of communicating with both target audiences and constituents
- Effectiveness of GNEB
  - Expand the activities of the board beyond its mandated responsibilities of holding meetings and issuing annual reports
  - Make use of management tools to foster such expanded activities

- Level of Participation on the Part of Outside Groups
  - Target activities and products more precisely to the state and local government level
  - Target activities to local residents and community groups in the border area, as well
- Measuring Resources of GNEB
  - Think strategically about the use of available resources
  - Define measurable outcomes to be used in determining the effectiveness of ongoing and future efforts
  - Consider the conduct of a planning session to identify strategic directions based on the results of the survey
  - Examine the effect of implementation of respondents' recommendations on allocation of resources



## Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for the consideration of the GNEB that may help improve outreach efforts and communication to both target audiences and constituents to increase the board's visibility and effectiveness. The recommendations are based on observations about the perceptions and viewpoints expressed by respondents, as presented in Section 2.0 of the report and trends evident in survey responses that identify specific methods and activities that the board might adopt. Recommendations and related proposed actions are presented below.

### Image and Visibility of GNEB

The GNEB should develop a planned program of “proactive” efforts to increase its visibility and publicize the issues it addresses and the recommendations it makes. Such efforts should be designed to establish and maintain effective channels of communication with the board's target audiences and its constituents. Specific actions proposed are:

- Develop a detailed strategy for internal communication, including the development of an e-mail distribution list of current members to be used to communicate administrative information about the GNEB that is of use and interest to current members.
- Prepare a specific communications strategy for external communication. The primary purpose of that strategy would be to distribute information consistently and routinely and in a manner on which members, representatives of target audiences, constituents, and other concerned individuals can rely. Publicize the GNEB web site.
- Develop an Internet e-mail distribution list or list-serve that includes current and former members, representatives of target audiences, and other key individuals; the list would be used to communicate information about the activities of the board. Such information would include:
  - Announcements of upcoming meetings
  - A newsletter that reports the results of deliberations after they have been made final by the board and forwarded to the appropriate party for consideration.
- Develop and maintain a mailing list that includes demographic information (such as type of organization represented, key interest areas, and other pertinent items) that will support the preparation of targeted mailings.
- Focus deliberations on specific themes that highlight the priorities identified by the board. Such a focus would reinforce the role of the board in the ongoing debate about border issues, emphasize the board's mission and priorities, and support efforts to “educate” target audiences about the board.
- Work as individuals or in designated, organized groups to initiate contact with, arrange meetings with, and participate in forums attended by members of the target audience and constituents. Members could serve as invited guests representing the GNEB and its positions or prepare and deliver presentations for such forums.
- Routinely provide monthly updates to members of the board by group e-mail messages or by posting on an electronic bulletin board.

### Annual Reports of GNEB

The GNEB should make every effort to prepare annual reports that meet the expectations of its members, in terms of both greater visual appeal and the provision of adequate information. Further, the GNEB should not rely on its annual reports as its only means of written communication with its target audiences and its constituents. Specific actions proposed are:

- Redesign the annual report to make each more visually appealing and to clearly set forth recommendations made and actions to be taken. Include sufficient information to adequately support the recommendations presented in the reports (thereby increasing the likelihood that the report will influence the decisions of the board's target audiences).
- Include in annual reports updates about progress on previous recommendations.
- Encourage the GNEB's work groups to prepare brief position papers that summarize the results of their deliberations and that support the recommendations each makes to the board. Incorporate the papers into the annual report.
- Prepare and distribute to target audiences and constituents three to four concise "position papers" that describe an issue, as perceived by the board, and identify specific recommendations for consideration, including quick-turnaround items.

### Meetings of GNEB

The GNEB should conduct its official deliberations in a manner that addresses the two most pressing concerns of its members. First, by controlling the number of topics discussed and the amount of time spent on each topic, the board can select issues on the basis of the immediacy of the issue, the necessity of quickly formulating positions and recommendations to increase the board's influence, and the opportunity to report the board's views appropriately. Second, by ensuring appropriate audience participation during the deliberations of the board, the board can increase its name recognition, enhance the perception that it is open to community view, and gain influence among groups most affected by border issues. For similar reasons, the board should develop means, other than its official deliberations, of communicating with its constituents. Specific actions proposed are:

- For each meeting, select a single theme (or prepare a short list of directed questions to be addressed by the board). Prepare an agenda that is designed to elicit discussions that will assist the board in formulating recommendations related to that theme. Invite selected representatives of the target audiences, as well as members of affected communities, to participate in formal discussions of the theme.
- Provide access to copies of transcripts, primarily through the GNEB web site. To reduce use of paper and to facilitate conversion, consider preparing the transcript in a four-page-on-one-page format.
- Employ face-to-face methods beyond official deliberations (including scheduled meetings and forums and participation in events at which members of the board's target audiences and constituents may be present) to solidify and maximize the board's name recognition and stature.

### Effectiveness of GNEB

The GNEB should go beyond the activities it traditionally has undertaken (its mandated role) to realize the influence the board can have on policy and legislation. However, activities undertaken by any member or group of members as a board initiative or activity should be planned for and coordinated among all board members. The importance of doing so is twofold: (1) the nature of FACA committees encourages the expression of a variety of opinions about topics and issues and (2), when such opinions differ, they should be discussed and weighed adequately and comprehensively. Specific actions proposed are:

- Determine and adopt criteria for seeking consensus when formulating and presenting recommendations.
- Prepare and conduct formal orientation of members about membership on a federal advisory committee. Such orientation should focus on requirements related to the role of such committees, restrictions on the type of outreach such committees and their members may participate in, and similar matters (see the program offered by the National Environmental Justice Advisory Committee [NEJAC]).

- Develop a method of tracking recommendations and action items identified by the board. Such a tracking system should identify who has responsibility for follow-up, as well as when such action should be taken.

### **Level of Participation on the Part of Outside Groups**

The GNEB should develop a planned program of “proactive” efforts to increase its visibility and publicize the issues it addresses and the recommendations it makes. Such efforts should be designed to establish and maintain effective channels of communication with the board’s target audiences and its constituents. Specific actions proposed are:

- Prepare and distribute formal meeting announcements, rather than relying on informal methods of word-of-mouth or the limited reach of the required Federal Register notice. The announcement can be posted on the board’s web site, distributed electronically through an e-mail distribution list or list-serve, and distributed through U.S. mail to persons on the mailing list.
- Invite and encourage the active participation in the deliberations of the board of representatives of target audiences and other relevant constituent organizations and members of affected local communities and governments. Such participation can include making presentations, serving on panels, or offering formal comment.
- Establish a formal period for public comment, including it in the Federal Register notice. Before holding the first such formal comment session, prepare guidelines for the conduct of such sessions that identify the length of comments, determine the use of external aids such as audiovisual equipment, identify who may and may not offer comment (for example, the board may restrict representatives of the target audiences from offering comment because they are the organizations to which the board is providing recommendations). The guidelines also should outline whether, how, and by whom follow-up on comments will be provided.

### **Measuring Resources of GNEB**

The GNEB should think more strategically about the use of the board’s available resources. Further, the GNEB should define and agree upon some level of measurable outcomes to be used in determining whether ongoing and future activities are having an effect. The specific action proposed is:

- Conduct a strategic planning session at which members will identify specific goals and priorities for the board, as well as specific milestones to be accomplished.