



NCAnet: Building a “network of networks” to support the National Climate Assessment

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1. What is NCAnet?

Much of the stakeholder engagement of the National Climate Assessment (NCA) will be accomplished through a network of partner organizations that can extend the NCA process and products to a broader audience. In the broadest sense, this “network of networks” (NCAnet) will include all of the organizations that deliberately work to connect the NCA with a broad array of stakeholders. More specifically, the NCA is also seeking to build long-term capacity to conduct and use assessments by cultivating partnerships with organizations that will participate in the sustained assessment process. However, not all organizations have the capacity or the interest in creating or supporting a sustained link to the NCA. Therefore, the NCA has identified three levels of partnership for organizations within NCAnet:

- Sustained process partners in NCAnet will be engaged in establishing and facilitating ongoing dialogue between the NCA central coordinating team, producers of information used in assessments, and users of assessments. Sustained process partners might work with individuals and groups within their own network(s) to develop and update technical inputs, provide and track case studies of climate impacts or human responses to climate change, identify and maintain important data sources, hold workshops or support ongoing discussions focused on specific assessment topics, create educational and outreach materials drawing on the findings of the NCA, or analyze the capacity of the NCA and its partners to conduct and support the use of assessments.
- Contributing partners in NCAnet are those that are interested in and able to make specific contributions of technical inputs or assessment capacity, but are not able or do not wish to establish a sustained link to the NCA. Contributing partners might work with individuals and groups within their own network(s) to develop technical inputs, provide case studies of climate impacts or human responses to climate change, identify important data sources, hold workshops focused on specific assessment topics, create educational and outreach materials drawing on the findings of the NCA, or conduct focused analyses of NCA processes and products.
- Communication partners in NCAnet will be engaged primarily in spreading the word about the NCA process and products, but will not play a direct role in creating products or offering assessment capacity to the NCA. Communication partners might provide space in their newsletters to announce NCA-related activities and requests, assist the NCA in identifying and contacting key representatives within their own networks that might contribute to assessment processes and products, or otherwise provide a conduit between the NCA and their stakeholders, but such partnership would be primarily on an *ad hoc* basis.

2. What partners should expect from the NCA and what is expected of partner organizations

Setting expectations for both the NCA and partner organizations is an essential step in establishing NCAnet. General expectations are described in this section. Section 3, on criteria for partnership, further explores specific criteria for partnership and the level of effort that sustained process partners, contributing partners, and communication partners might expect. Section 4, on technical inputs and assessment capacities, explores the specific contributions that partner organizations might consider making to the NCA.

The NCA coordinating team (NCA staff, NCADAC, federal agencies participating in the NCA) will

- Develop and decide on an overall strategy for the NCA
- Provide information about the NCA process, including establishing guidelines and processes related to the types of information that might be included in the NCA
- Create processes to integrate information coming from many sources as inputs to the NCA
- Build the core infrastructure needed to support ongoing engagement, dialogue, and information exchange associated with the NCA

Partnering organizations will

- Receive information from the NCA and disseminate it through appropriate channels within their own network of stakeholders
- Provide information from their stakeholders to the NCA via technical inputs and other reporting mechanisms
- Help identify individuals and groups within their networks that can actively contribute to assessment activities

3. Criteria for partnership

Building NCAnet and finding the right mixture of communication, contributing, and sustained process partners will require balancing the ability to build networks that reach a broad range of stakeholders with the ability to establish and maintain meaningful relationships with each network partner. The NCA has created a list of criteria that can assist in discussions with potential partners about the level of partnership that organizations might be interested in establishing. These criteria are:

- Organization's ability to support its own participation. The NCA does not currently, and is unlikely in the future to, have funds to support partners' development of technical inputs or facilitation of assessment-related activities such as workshops or outreach events. Therefore, partners must have the financial and human resources necessary to support their own short- or long-term participation in NCAnet.
 - Sustained process partners should have the resources to support long-term engagement in the development and continuing update of their contributions to the NCA process and products.
 - Contributing partners should have the resources to support the development and implementation of specific technical inputs and assessment capacity contributions, and may have resources to support longer-term or future inputs and capacity.
 - Communication partners should have the infrastructure to provide information to a large number of stakeholders through newsletters, email or conventional mailings, announcements at conferences or regular meetings, social media, or other means.

- Interest (and experience) in climate-related issues. All levels of partnering organizations should have an interest in climate-related issues as a part of their organization's purview. This level of interest may vary widely, from a single statement or informal discussion within the organization to climate being a major focus of the organization.
 - Sustained process partners should have a long-term interest or focus on climate-related issues across their organization, or at least as a stated key interest within the organization's current and future planning.
 - Contributing partners may have either a short- or long-term interest or focus on climate-related issues, although this may not be a major area of interest across their organization.
 - Communication partners may or may not have a sustained interest in climate-related issues, although it should recognize the ways in which climate change may be relevant to its stakeholders and inform their stakeholders of such connections.

- Supports the objectives of the NCA. The objectives of the NCA encompass creating a sustainable assessment process, establishing a consistent and replicable approach to assessment, nesting specific high-priority investigations in regions or sectors within the broader assessment context, designing a centrally-coordinated but nationally-distributed assessment process that engages partners within and outside of the federal government in both the assembly and use of assessments, recognizing the international context in which the US impacts of and responses to climate change occur, and building a strong stakeholder engagement process for the assessment.
 - Sustained process partners should have an interest in supporting most or all of these objectives, especially as they will likely be active partners in the establishment of a sustained assessment process and in building distributed assessment capacity through their own networks. Sustained partners will also play a key role in creating a strong stakeholder engagement process.
 - Contributing partners should support the NCA objectives, and may play an important role in achieving one or more of these objectives, although may not be able to play a large role in implementing these objectives in the long-term.
 - Communication partners should be in agreement with these objectives, and will likely play a role in communicating about the NCA and facilitating stakeholder engagement in the NCA through their own networks.

- Ability to contribute knowledgeably and meaningfully to the NCA. Contributions from all partners should target specific needs within the NCA, ranging from inputs targeting specific topics and reporting timeframes to sustained capacity to provide information and analyses or develop and implement outreach to stakeholders.
 - Sustained process partners should be able to articulate a plan to bring their specific expertise (and that of their stakeholders) to bear on both specific informational and analytical needs (e.g., technical inputs, data and model analyses, etc.) and in providing capacity to support a sustained assessment process (e.g., interpreting assessment findings for specific audiences through outreach efforts, collecting and analyzing long-term data sets or model runs, etc.).
 - Contributing partners should be able to articulate a plan to bring their specific expertise (and that of their stakeholders) to bear on specific informational and analytical needs (e.g., technical inputs, data and model analyses, etc.) or on specific outreach or communications activities, but may not have the interest in or ability to articulate a plan for bringing such capacity to bear on the long-term assessment process.

- Communication partners will likely make their contribution to the NCA by connecting their stakeholders to the NCA process and products, but may not themselves make a significant contribution to supporting the development of products or implementation of a sustained process.
- Provide links to key regions, sectors, and stakeholder groups for the NCA. All partners should be able to identify the specific regions, sectors, or stakeholder groups to which they can connect the NCA.
- Responsive point of contact within the partner organization. All partners should be able to identify a primary point of contact within the organization that will coordinate communication and cooperation within the organization and will serve as a conduit to the NCA.
- Willing and able to meet deadlines and participate in a collaborative fashion. Any partners that include in their plan for participation in NCAnet an interest in contributing specific inputs to the NCA should be aware of and able to meet the deadlines for these inputs, and should distribute any information about the NCA process and products to their stakeholders in a timely fashion.
 - Sustained process and contributing partners should be open to collaborating with NCA staff and product and process leads from the NCA’s federal advisory committee (the National Climate Assessment Development and Advisory Committee, NCADAC), especially in developing plans for inputs and capacities that contribute to the sustained assessment process.
 - Communication partners should be proactive in working with NCA staff on developing specific announcements and communications related to the NCA process and products, especially in identifying when there are important opportunities to deliver messages to the organization’s stakeholders through newsletter, conference, or meeting announcements.

4. Technical inputs and assessment capacities

Partner organizations may contribute a number of technical inputs and assessment capacities to the short- and long-term NCA process. Potential contributions are described below; partner organizations may also suggest additional types of contributions not on this list.

Technical inputs

A. Literature reviews, discussion papers, and other review papers. Papers synthesizing recent work in relevant fields might, for example, review recent findings and advances in the field of interest, consider available assessment and synthesis methods, or highlight important questions that require additional research or analysis. One particularly useful approach would be synthesizing important recent advances in understanding of specific aspects of climate science, sectoral or regional impacts, cross-cutting topics, manager and decision maker information needs related to climate and global change, or adaptation and mitigation options.

B. Case studies. Case studies might illustrate the particular set of climate change-related issues and opportunities faced by a specific community (e.g., ecological system, watershed, or human community). Case studies may also describe the specific climate and global change information decision makers and resource managers need and how they are preparing for and responding to climate change challenges through adaptation, mitigation, and other activities. These could be viewed as topical assessments that might be “nested” within a larger regional, sectoral, or cross-cutting topic.

C. Modeling results, interpretation of data, and topical reports. Modeling runs, data development, and corresponding topical reports are encouraged. However, it is strongly preferred that data inputs or modeling runs be analyzed and synthesized in an accompanying report. Where such analyses are undertaken, data submissions should include metadata based on existing standards, including documentation of who collected the data when, why, and for whom; how data were compiled and analyzed; and the methods used for quality assurance and quality control.

Assessment Capacities

A. Meetings and workshops. Meetings and workshops are viewed as an effective means for bringing diverse and broad-ranging scientific and technical capabilities to bear on topics and to begin synthesis across disciplinary boundaries. Reports from meetings and workshops can serve as a primary vehicle for documenting inputs from participants, and should address specific topics in the draft NCA outline and process as much as possible. In-person or virtual meetings and workshops might discuss topics such as:

- Proposed assessment products and outlines for product content
- Team building, networking, and roles and responsibilities for ongoing assessment efforts
- Risk and vulnerability assessments; assessments of adaptation capacity related to specific regions and sectors
- Prioritizing questions and issues for the region, sector, or cross-cutting topic (see draft Outline for topics)
- Identification of data sets already in use, data gaps, and suggested ways to address gaps
- Identification of existing impact assessment tools and further needs
- Identification of reports and activities already completed or in process that might contribute to the NCA
- Development of proposed indicators to be used in tracking the impacts of climate change within regions or sectors, documentation of changes in underlying vulnerabilities, and changes in climate drivers
- Building regional or sectoral scenarios for climate change
- Evaluation of possible “climate futures” for the region
- Effectiveness of existing institutional structures in responding to climate and global change challenges and capacity building needs and plans

A number of the above topics build on process workshops convened under the auspices of the INCA Task Force in 2010-2011, and teams are encouraged to use the outputs of these workshops as a basis for discussion (for more information on these workshops, please visit <http://www.globalchange.gov/what-we-do/assessment/nca-activities/supporting-documents>). In addition, it may be possible and desirable to include assessment activities in future professional meetings and workshops, by proposing special sessions that address particular NCA topics. Such approaches are welcome and pose opportunities to reduce the costs associated with convening separate events.

B. Supporting indicator systems. It is anticipated that physical, ecological, and societal indicators will be selected as a part of the ongoing NCA process to increase understanding of rates of change, thresholds, etc., in support of decision making. Specific foci within this topic include:

- Identifying key existing monitoring and observing systems and networks that will provide the data needed to support NCA indicator systems

- Developing plans for maintaining indicator networks for use by NCA, including monitoring and reporting protocols
- Helping to integrate data systems and analytical tools to support NCA indicator systems
- Identifying existing indicator efforts that may complement or form a key piece of the NCA indicator systems

C. Stakeholder analyses. Understanding how various users of assessment products currently view climate change and climate change science and how they get new information about these topics can ultimately help improve the NCA's delivery of assessment products. Specific stakeholder analyses that might be useful include studies of current knowledge and attitudes about climate change and climate change science among various stakeholder groups, studies of the dissemination of climate information within and across stakeholder groups, and social network analyses showing how various stakeholder groups are connected with each other.

D. Communicating with stakeholders. The NCA needs assistance with developing communications, outreach, and educational materials that can extend the NCA process and findings to a broad range of audiences. Activities that focus on developing such materials and disseminating them to various stakeholder groups, especially those that include follow-up studies of how materials were used, how effective such materials were in communicating the NCA process and products, and in how stakeholders' knowledge and attitudes about climate change and climate change science change in the short- and long-term with access to these materials can be useful in designing future communications, outreach, and education efforts.

5. Questions for use in discussions with potential partner organizations

The following set of questions is meant to help potential partner organizations think about both what they would like to get out of the NCA process and products and what they might be able contribute. Organizations should think about these questions in advance of discussions with the NCA coordinating team, as they will form a basis for planning how organizations might be a partner in NCnet.

- A. How can the National Climate Assessment process (including the staff, the NCADAC, the 2013 report, and the post-2013 ongoing assessment) help you?

Please consider your regular activities and services to your stakeholders, contributors and partners (e.g., circulation of newsletter, webpage development, meetings) as well as any related or aligned one-time events or activities (e.g., a big upcoming conference, a stakeholder survey). How might information from or about the National Climate Assessment be useful to you? Specifically:

- 1) What information do you most need about the National Climate Assessment process?
- 2) In what form(s) would this information be most useful to you?
- 3) How can we help you meet the information needs of your stakeholders?
- 4) In what other ways could the process help you assess and address the risks associated with climate change?
- 5) Do you need help in designing effective stakeholder engagement processes?

- B. How can you help the National Climate Assessment process?

As you are considering providing some form of input to the NCA, there are many ways in which you can help the ongoing assessment process, both in the near-term (with a focus on the 2013 assessment report) and in the long-term (building a sustained assessment capacity). The following questions may help you decide the level and type of commitment you wish to make:

1) Technical inputs

- Do you have or can you produce syntheses of available scientific or technical literature, discussion papers, white papers, reviews of recent advances in the field in which you are an expert?
- Do you have case studies written up that illustrate key climate risks or ways in which entities have reduced their climate related risks?
- Do you have new modeling results, data sets or topical reports that are relevant to the topics that the NCA will cover in its 2013 report?

2) Assessment capacities

- Have you assessed the needs of your stakeholders relevant to climate change information? If so, can you provide us with the results of that assessment? If not, can you conduct such an assessment?
- Can you conduct vulnerability and climate risk assessments with your own or independently obtained resources?
- What kind of research do you conduct on an ongoing basis that is relevant to the NCA? Do you manage or have access to an ongoing data collection effort that is currently producing or will soon produce results relevant to monitoring changes in the climate and/or impacts of climate change in a particular region or sector?
- How can you see yourself assisting the ongoing assessment effort past the 2013 report?

3) Stakeholder engagement

- Who else (which other stakeholders) can you help to engage in the National Climate Assessment process? Could you play a networking role? What else can you do to help create an ongoing National Climate Assessment process?
- Could you organize and facilitate NCA-related meetings and workshops (virtual or in-person)?
- Could you help with information dissemination, communication, and effective engagement of stakeholders (in your region or sector or among your members)?