



8484 Georgia Avenue, Suite 230  
Silver Spring, MD 20910

January 16, 2024

Office of Environmental Justice and External Civil Rights Docket  
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency  
Washington, DC 20460

**REF: Docket Number EPA-HQ-OEJECR-2023-0326 (Draft Achieving Health and Environmental Protection Through EPA's Meaningful Involvement Policy)**

The Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments on the draft policy, *"Achieving Health and Environmental Protection Through EPA's Meaningful Involvement Policy."* SWANA's comments in this document are organized by the section names in the draft policy.

SWANA is an organization of 10,000 public and private sector professionals committed to advancing from solid waste management to resource management through a shared emphasis on education, advocacy, and research. Our membership includes young professionals, the next generation of resource management. SWANA provides members with resources to understand and engage on public policy issues that impact their work. For more than 50 years, SWANA has been the leading association in the solid waste management field.

SWANA supports the efforts of the EPA to engage the public in regulatory and program decisions through the development and promotion of this policy. SWANA has a strong commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and is supportive of policies that advance these goals. This *Meaningful Involvement Policy* will provide an updated, agency-wide approach to guide EPA employees with reaching members of the public and guiding effective public participation.

**Key Concepts**

The definition of "Meaningful Involvement" is clearly stated and inclusive.

The definition of "the public" includes organizations such as SWANA which represent industry professionals. SWANA strongly supports this definition. SWANA alerts members of public policy updates, gathers feedback, and shares member feedback with the policy makers, including the EPA.

When SWANA and similar groups engage with the EPA, it is on behalf of a diverse membership located across the country. Our members include individuals from the largest waste management companies and largest cities in the country, as well as medium and small businesses and government organizations. The smaller groups often have limited resources to track and respond to proposed policies, so they rely on SWANA to keep them informed of policy updates and to advocate on their behalf for the interests of the industry. It is important that EPA recognizes the input of organizations like SWANA that represent the input of many organizations and individuals.



### **EPA's Meaningful Involvement Approach**

EPA's Public Participation Spectrum is designed to support EPA teams "in establishing and communicating clear expectations about how they intend to provide opportunities for meaningful involvement" (page 10). SWANA supports the intent to provide transparency in the public's role in participating in each instance. SWANA suggests that the EPA consistently refers to this Public Participation Spectrum. When there is an opportunity for public participation, EPA should clearly share with the public which of the five levels of public participation is applicable so that expectations are clear among all parties.

SWANA suggests that a helpful addition to the Public Participation Spectrum would be actual examples of activities or policies for each of the five levels. For example, showing where "*Achieving Health and Environmental Protection Through EPA's Meaningful Involvement Policy*" would fall on the spectrum.

### **Identifying the Public**

The section "Identifying the Public" recommends developing a jurisdictional network map of agencies and organizations (page 18). SWANA supports the development of such a map and suggests that EPA make it available for public use and keep it regularly updated.

### **Consider Providing Technical or Financial Assistance to the Public**

SWANA supports the intent to provide assistance to the public when additional support may be needed, as this supports the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion that SWANA champions. SWANA suggests making it clear in the document whether EPA needs Congressional or other approvals for technical or financial assistance actions.

### **Provide Information and Outreach**

SWANA supports the approaches described in this section which seek to provide the public with accurate, understandable, and timely information (page 25) and recommends that EPA continue to explore how to make information clear and engaging. For example, the creation of simple fact sheets and background documents that are visually appealing and easy to share would be useful for the public to understand complicated policy activities.

### **Conduct Public Consultation and Participation Activities**

#### ***Timing of Public Participation Activities***

This section states that EPA typically allows at least 30 days for public comment (page 35). SWANA recommends that this standard timeline be extended to allow more time for meaningful review and comment. When member groups such as SWANA are providing feedback, it can be a lengthy process to gather multiple rounds of member input, align on positions, and prepare comments. This is likely also true of any organization that represents multiple stakeholders. 30 days can be a tight timeline when attempting to reach all members and to allow time for discussion.



In addition, the standard timeline should allow even more additional time when there are factors that may result in the public needing additional time, such as an especially lengthy or complex policy for review, when there are multiple related documents with comment periods open simultaneously, or when there are holidays occurring during that time frame.

SWANA would like to thank EPA for issuing the proposed *Achieving Health and Environmental Protection Through EPA's Meaningful Involvement Policy* and for considering SWANA's comments. If you have any questions about these comments, please contact Kristyn Oldendorf at [koldendorf@swana.org](mailto:koldendorf@swana.org) or 240-494-2237.

Sincerely,

Kristyn Oldendorf  
Director of Public Policy  
Solid Waste Association of North America (SWANA)