

ANNUAL REPORT 2024

EDGI Environmental Data
& Governance Initiative

A Letter from Our Advisory Committee

As 2024 unfolded, we didn't know what lay ahead in 2025. Yet the importance of remaining consistent and nimble in our constantly shifting environmental policy landscape is more clear now than ever, and we have balanced short-term responsiveness with long-term preparation and strategy.

For most of 2024, EDGI's core focus was supporting participatory democracy and advocating for long-

term, robust interventions to achieve more just environmental governance. With the Biden administration's government-wide environmental justice (EJ) work, EDGI's primary strategy for impact was to expand our role as a boundary organization, deepening our relationships with EJ communities and other movement partners as well as with federal agency personnel. We facilitated relationship building, conducted research, and developed tools, resources,

and services to support people in leveraging data and information in their civic engagement.

To this end, in 2024, EDGI: (1) launched our Public Comments Initiative to help guide the public through the process of researching and writing effective public comments; (2) pioneered Community-Based Participatory Historical Research, including FOIA projects to support EJ communities to utilize public records in their advocacy; and (3) developed workshops for building and using civic technologies for environmental data justice.

In the latter part of the year, our strategies adapted to the shifting political landscape. We focused the final months of 2024 on preparing to safeguard federal environmental data and information and document and analyze changes to public data, information, and governance practices. The foundations we laid through relationships with advocates, activists, academics, and agencies made it possible for us to pivot and prepare for what was to come.

To begin safeguarding information, we: (1) joined the End of Term Archive team; (2) re-launched our

Website Monitoring Program; and (3) spearheaded an environmental data preservation coalition, the Public Environmental Data Partners.

The Environmental Right to Know is more important than ever, as data and information are scrubbed from federal websites, government programs are shuttered, and agency personnel are laid off in droves. EDGI's most critical short-term interventions right now come in the form of public knowledge. We will watchdog, and we will play the long game to develop and prototype solutions to build justice-based environmental governance.

We are grateful to do this work and to be in partnership with so many others who are united in this purpose. Collectively, we will succeed. Thank you for being a part of this work.

In Solidarity,
EDGI's Advisory Committee

Mission & Approach

EDGI is an action-oriented research collaborative dedicated to strengthening the Environmental Right to Know (ERTK). To us, ERTK means:

- People should be able to know and make decisions about environmental conditions of concern affecting their livelihoods and maintain rights of consent, refusal, and self-determination in environmental decision-making.
- The collection and stewardship of environmental information should equip people, communities, and workers to protect their health and support the flourishing of surrounding ecosystems.
- All people, but especially minoritized communities who experience disproportionate harms, should have equitable access to comprehensive and legible environmental information in order to seek redress for past and accumulated harms, if they so desire, and build relations that emphasize responsibility and accountability.

We apply three key strategies to work towards this mission:

Information: We develop, envision, and critique practices and tools to generate, analyze, steward, and improve environmental data and information. We take a feminist approach to contextualize information with its social, political, and personal histories; question how different types of knowledge are perceived as more legitimate than others; and respond in ways that value diverse backgrounds and perspectives.

Boundary Org: We connect across organizations and agencies to demonstrate problems and solutions for better environmental governance and are a trusted partner and resource to diverse groups, including minoritized communities, communities of practice, academics, and civil servants.

Network: We foster a thriving, cross-disciplinary network of activists, researchers, and the wider community envisioning how environmental information can support governance and be governed democratically in a manner that promotes environmental data justice. We cultivate spaces that promote non-hierarchical and open engagement with integrity.

Our Working Groups in 2024

Environmental Data Justice

The Environmental Data Justice (EDJ) working group works with the productive frictions between emerging data justice concerns and long-standing principles of environmental justice, uniting research communities to struggle together across these differences with a commitment to intersectional justice. We are concerned with all forms of environmental harms, particularly corporate and government practices of manipulating and withholding data, and government failures to adequately collect and use data. We aspire to move beyond theories of change based primarily on proving environmental harms and instead facilitate collaborative, action-based research that creates civic technologies, environmental data infrastructures, and equitable and transparent data care practices. To this end, our work includes critical assessments of existing models, infrastructures, and practices of data collection, storage, and dissemination, as well as projects that generate alternative kinds of knowledge, technologies, and imaginaries towards more just worlds.

Our main project at the moment is the Environmental Enforcement Watch (EEW), which explores open environmental datasets in partnership with community groups using data science tools. EEW's strategic goals are to: 1) draw large-scale public attention to the lack of environmental enforcement; 2) work with partner organizations, especially marginalized communities, to build data efficacy through mutually beneficial relationships; 3) prototype community-oriented structures for environmental data; 4) inform EPA visions of alternative forms of public engagement—a Green New Deal for environmental data; and 5) bring attention to the relationship between environmental enforcement, environmental racism, and

other interlocking forms of oppression (particularly white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy).

Policy Monitoring and Interviewing

The Policy Monitoring and Interviewing working group analyzes changes to federal environmental, energy, and climate policy and institutions. Our group focuses on analyzing environmental agencies: assessing their expertise, use of science, culture, budgets, regulation, and enforcement. Interviews, Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, agency data and documents, and other sources form the basis of our research. We produce in-depth reports, white papers, StoryMaps, searchable and public documentary repositories, public comments, fact sheets, letters to Congress, and FOIA requests, among other resources. We have also coordinated with and advised other non-governmental groups and government agencies. Recently, we have also delved into what federal policy-making means on the ground for communities facing cumulative environmental and other impacts.

In 2024, our group focused our research and monitoring efforts on the ways federal agencies have dealt with the “cumulative” character of environmental impacts, exposures, and risks. Conducting interviews and gathering and analyzing documents, we scrutinized how EPA has struggled to deal with “cumulative impacts,” particularly in its risk assessment process. We also engaged in community based participatory research in two communities. In Alaska, we worked with Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT) to research and document government decision-making about the partial clean-ups of military waste sites alongside Indigenous communities on Sivuqaq (St. Lawrence Island) in the Bering Strait. In Port Arthur, Texas, we worked with the Community In-Power Development Association (CIDA) to gather and synthesize data and documents on the changing impacts of the petrochemical industry on this community, to support local advocacy efforts. Finally, in partnership with Toxic Docs, based at Columbia University's Center for the History and Ethics of Public Health, and a committee of more than 20 environmental and open-government groups coordinated by Sierra Club, we continued our work building a public repository of documents successfully

“FOIA’d” (i.e., obtained under the Freedom of Information Act) by EDGI and other organizations. Two NSF grants funded much of this research as well as our work on EPA’s regulation of chemicals impacting children’s health.

Website Governance

Our Website Governance working group analyzes federal environmental information and advocates for digital information policies that protect public information, foster scientific literacy and learning, and provide opportunities for public oversight and agency accountability. We build civic technologies to monitor changes to federal websites and we assess the quality and accessibility of federal digital information, press agencies to improve its presentation and dissemination, and document instances of information suppression and censorship. We also develop guides and build technological infrastructure to support people to find, interpret, and leverage federal information in their advocacy, particularly through public comments.

In the first half of 2024, we focused on helping people leverage public information in environmental advocacy. We launched EDGI’s Public Comments Initiative to bolster the public’s ability to actively engage with and influence the rulemaking process. The initiative includes guides to different parts of the public comment process, such as how to conduct research to inform a public comment, including tips for how to use different types of resources; how to write an effective public comment; and other ways to engage with federal agencies outside of the public comment process. It also includes links to public comments written by EDGI regarding expanding public participation in rulemaking. In 2025 we are developing infrastructure to collate resources about existing and proposed rules, so the public can easily find critical information and leverage it in upcoming public comment periods.

In the second half of 2024, our Website Governance working group focused on preparing to safeguard federal data and information. We identified approximately 6,000 federal environmental agency webpages to monitor, largely related to

environmental justice and climate change, revamped our Website Monitoring software, and reestablished a Website Monitoring Team. EDGI participated in the End of Term Archive team and launched a companion project to archive copies of federal environmental data. As this data archiving project grew, we invited several other organizations to form a new data preservation coalition, the Public Environmental Data Partners, to archive and provide public access to copies of federal environmental data and tools. These efforts are a core focus of our work in 2025.

“Our multidisciplinary approach to problems — and solutions — is one of EDGI’s core strengths for responding thoughtfully and efficiently to changing environmental and political landscapes. We’re able to step up effectively because we bring a multifaceted analysis and a diversity of skillsets to our work.”

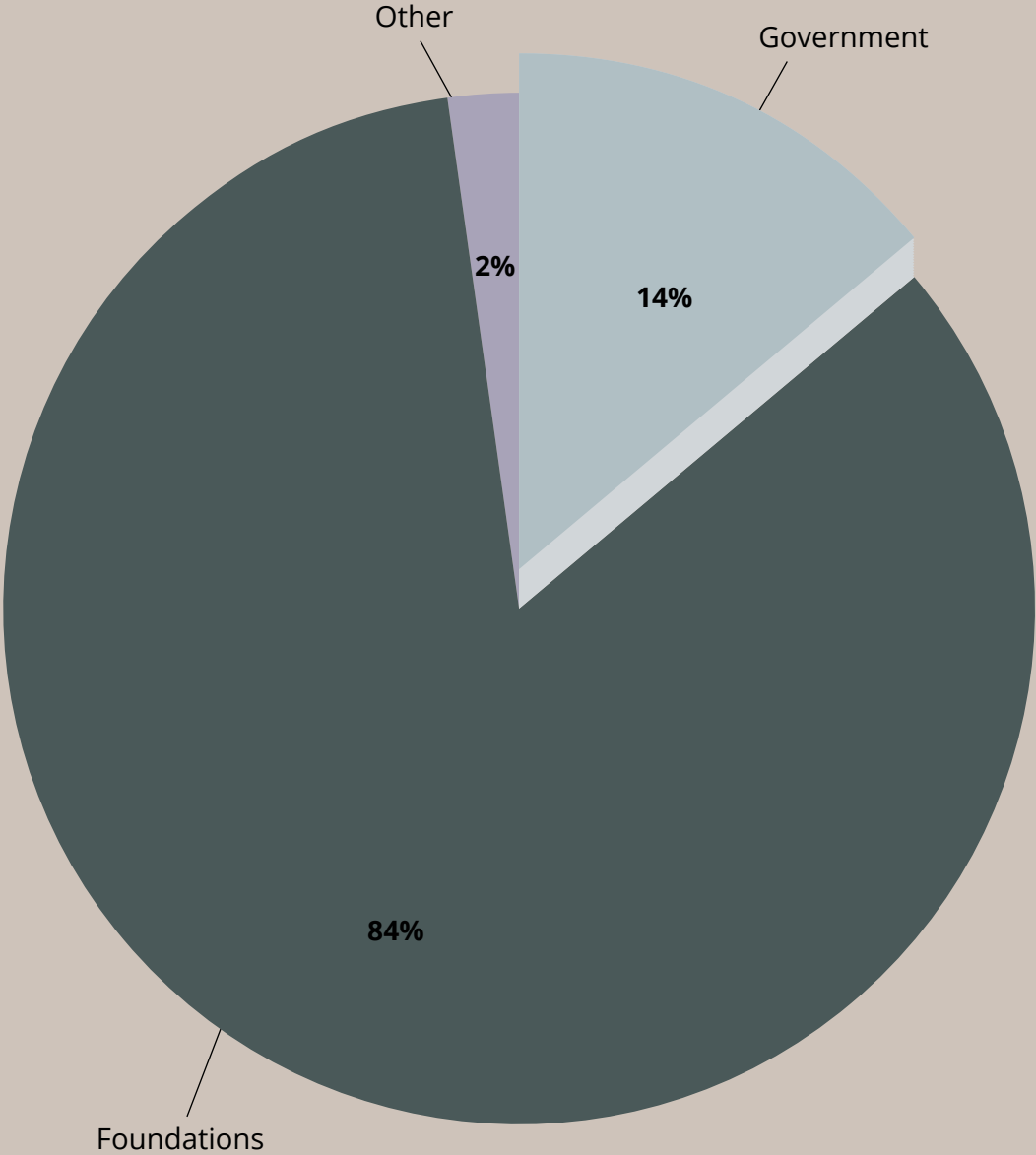
Gretchen Gehrke, EDGI Co-founder

Highlights from 2024

- EDGI launched the [Public Environmental Data Partners](#), a new data preservation coalition of organizations dedicated to making public, accessible archives of federal environmental and climate data.
- We identified thousands of web pages on climate change and environmental justice to monitor in 2025 and track with our [Federal Environmental Web Tracker](#).
- We were a participating partner in the 2024 End of Term Web Archive.
- We developed alternative [tools](#) to help the public contextualize and understand hard-to-access EPA data and hosted several public workshops with registrants from governments, community-based organizations, non-profits, and academia.
- We launched our [Public Comments Initiative](#), a project that guides the public through the process of researching and writing effective public comments.
- With our partner Alaska Community Action on Toxics, we created a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) [repository of documents](#) related to governmental decision-making around and clean-up of military waste in Alaska.
- With our partner Community In-Power Development Association, we began work on an [ArcGIS StoryMaps collection](#) on the impacts of oil and petrochemical industries in Port Arthur, Texas.
- We began work on analyzing EPA's Risk-Screening Environmental Indicators model, linking estimates of risks to public health from toxic pollution to industry compliance and environmental justice measures.
- We presented a paper on embodied data at the Conservation Data Justice workshop in Girona, Spain.
- We presented as part of the National Center for Ecological Analysis and Synthesis's Diversity Equity Inclusion and Justice seminar series.

Financials

Revenues



Expenses

