

## Summary

# 2022 Tribal Exchange Network Conference



Photo: TENC Opening Session. Courtesy of Amanda Kapp.



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## Background

The 2022 Tribal Exchange Network Conference (TENC) convened October 18th to 20th in Flagstaff, Arizona at the High Country Conference Center and online through Zoom Events. The goal of the 2022 TENC was to support and enhance tribal participation in the National Environmental Information Exchange Network (NEIEN), or *Exchange Network (EN)*. Information-sharing opportunities and interactive sessions addressed topics related to data management, analysis, and sharing. The event also highlighted the stories of tribal environmental programs managing data using digital technology solutions. The 2022 TENC was hosted by the Tribal Exchange Network Group (TXG) and the Institute for Tribal Environmental Professionals (ITEP).

## Attendance Profile

In total, 211 individuals registered to attend the event. More than half of those who registered attended the live event virtually, in-person, or a combination of both. Table 1 specifies attendee composition.

Table 1

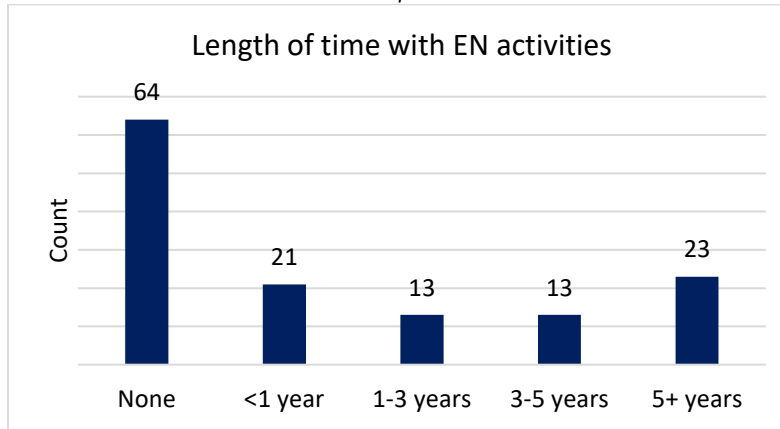
<b>Total Registration</b>	<b>211</b>
<b>Total Live Event Attendance</b>	<b>123</b>
Virtual	55
In-person	68

Image: TENC live event Attendees, in-person and online.



Almost half of those who responded to an optional question in the registration form indicated they had not been involved in EN activities of any kind. Almost a quarter had less than one year of experience with the EN (Graph 1).

Graph 1



## Agenda overview

During the two days, over thirty speakers from tribes, EPA, and other agencies discussed their experiences related to data management and the Exchange Network, including the following topics:

- Tribal EN Projects:
  - Region 8 & 9 Tribal Consortia Supporting Water Quality Data\*
  - Wabanaki Water Protection - Collaborative Improvements to Data Management and Exchange
  - Yakama Nation Fisheries Exchange Network Experiences
- A Conversation with EPA OMS and Tribes on the Exchange Network\*
- Roundtable Discussion: EN Grants Best Practices and Tips for Success\*
- ATTAINS: Tribal Mentorship Project and E-Reporting Tribal Water Quality Decisions
- Online Capacity Building & Networking Tools for Local Communities
- Site Inventory & Management Tool for Tribal Brownfields
- A Review of Online Data Analysis Services Supported by EPA's Information Access & Analytic Services Division (IAASD)

*\*Denotes most attended session.*

## Networking Forum and Poster Session

The Networking Forum and Poster Session at the end of Day 1 offered attendees time to connect with one another and browse informational posters created by their peers. The session also featured event sponsors and exhibitors. In total, three exhibits and five posters were on display, and attendees had the opportunity to casually visit with each other and the posters/exhibits throughout the session. Based on evaluation feedback, the low turnout of posters on display limited engagement and visibility of the projects. Additional posters, and a longer allotted time to browse may have increased interest and interaction, however, attendance during the session was robust and organizers felt that the goal of fostering networking opportunities was accomplished; additional strategies for increasing the number of posters will be identified for future events.

## Mini workshops

The end of Day 2 consisted of four separate mini workshop sessions which introduced a software, data-related topic or tool followed by interactive, small-group discussions. Organizers cancelled one session prior to its start time due to unforeseen schedule conflicts; the remaining three sessions conducted were:

- Creative Map Visualizations for a Changing World

- How to Plan Ahead for Waste Management During a Disaster and be More Resilient: Waste Management Planning Tool
- R Tools & Tribal Case Studies using R\*

*\*Denotes most attended session.*

In general, participant feedback from the workshops highlighted positive experiences because of the topics and information presented, the intimacy of the small groups, presenter delivery, and a resources list that included free tools. Areas of improvement noted a need for training on data management planning and more tribal case studies. One commenter requested individual, one-on-one training.

### Mentoring Appointments

Throughout the event, conference attendees had the opportunity to request one-on-one chats with a tribal data mentor. These mentors offered guidance, insight, and a connection to further assist or develop their mentees' interests and capabilities based on their individual experiences. A total of eleven individuals served as mentors and conducted twenty separate meetings with mentees during the 2022 TENC.

Both mentors and mentees concluded that the activity was worthwhile, with suggestions for minor improvements. Participants appreciated learning about the programs and support offered, as well as the ability to share their experiences assisting other tribal professionals. Conversation topics ranged from information technology challenges, EN funding support, and their respective tribal programs. Mentoring meetings at future TENCs may benefit from being separate from conference sessions, rather than concurrent. In addition to sharing contact information, connecting beforehand could also assist mentors in researching to provide accurate answers to mentee questions.

### Event Platforms

As the first TENC since 2018 and the first in-person event since 2019, the 2022 Conference continued to be a platform for discussions on EN resources, funding opportunities, and technical support. A new component of this year's event was the hybrid approach, intended to allow online participation for those who were unable to join in-person, along with an integrated space for all attendees to access presentations, speaker information, and live and recorded sessions during and after the event.

The ITEP staff created an event website ([www.nau.edu/tenc](http://www.nau.edu/tenc)) using the free Google Sites tool, to serve as a pre-event space with an agenda overview, onsite and health/safety information, and forms for attendee registration, sponsor/exhibitor submissions, and session proposals (Image 1).

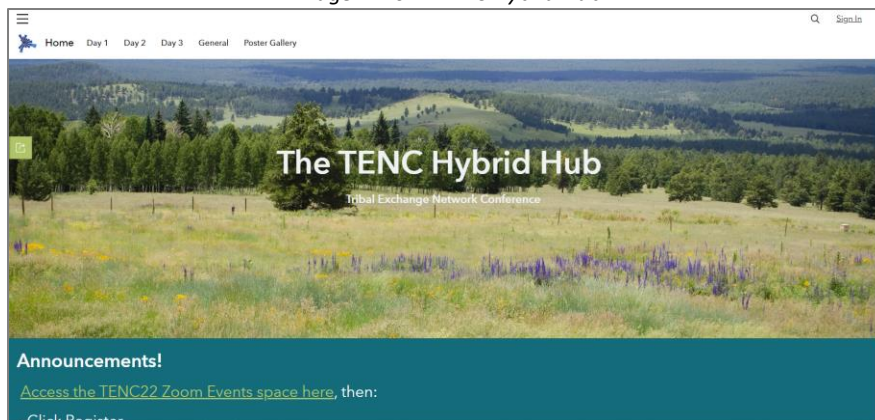
*Image 1: 2022 TENC website*





A [Hybrid Hub site](#), created with time volunteered by the Muscogee (Creek) Nation’s geospatial information systems staff, also provided a space for participants to view announcements, daily agendas, access Zoom links, view virtual posters, and respond to poll questions during the live event delivery. ITEP and TXG collaborated with MCN to determine what content to include in the Hub (Image 2) and provided updated materials as needed for the final event delivery.

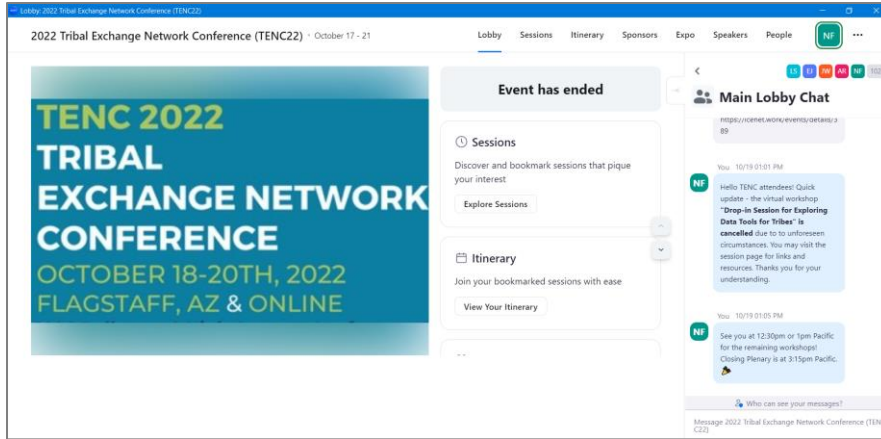
*Image 2: 2022 TENC Hybrid Hub*



Results from the online evaluation indicated that the Hub was easy and straightforward to navigate, helpful, and an excellent addition.

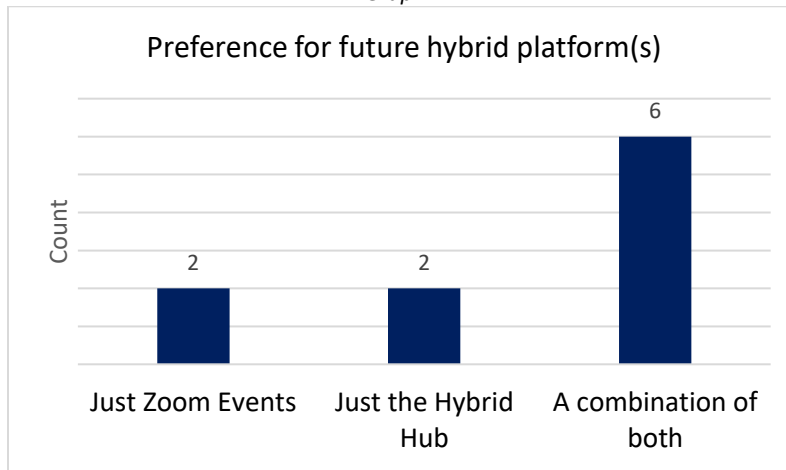
ITEP staff also utilized the Zoom Events platform for its virtual Lobby, Session links, registrants’ itinerary, Sponsors tab, Expo space, Speakers list, and attendee profiles. The site also housed presentation recordings at the end of the event (Image 3).

*Image 3: 2022 TENC Zoom Events lobby*



Feedback in the online evaluation noted an almost equal amount of positive and negative experiences with Zoom Events. Although users appreciated the ease and simple navigation, others pointed out the lack of content (Speaker information) and several steps needed to access the Lobby space. The hybrid approach also created unexpected technical difficulties for staff and presenters due to the added steps for hybrid audiences and audio-visual support; consideration of the needs and requirements for each audience type will be important to improve future hybrid events. Overall, most evaluation respondents were inclined to use a combination of both Zoom Events and a Hybrid Hub for future event platforms (Graph 2).

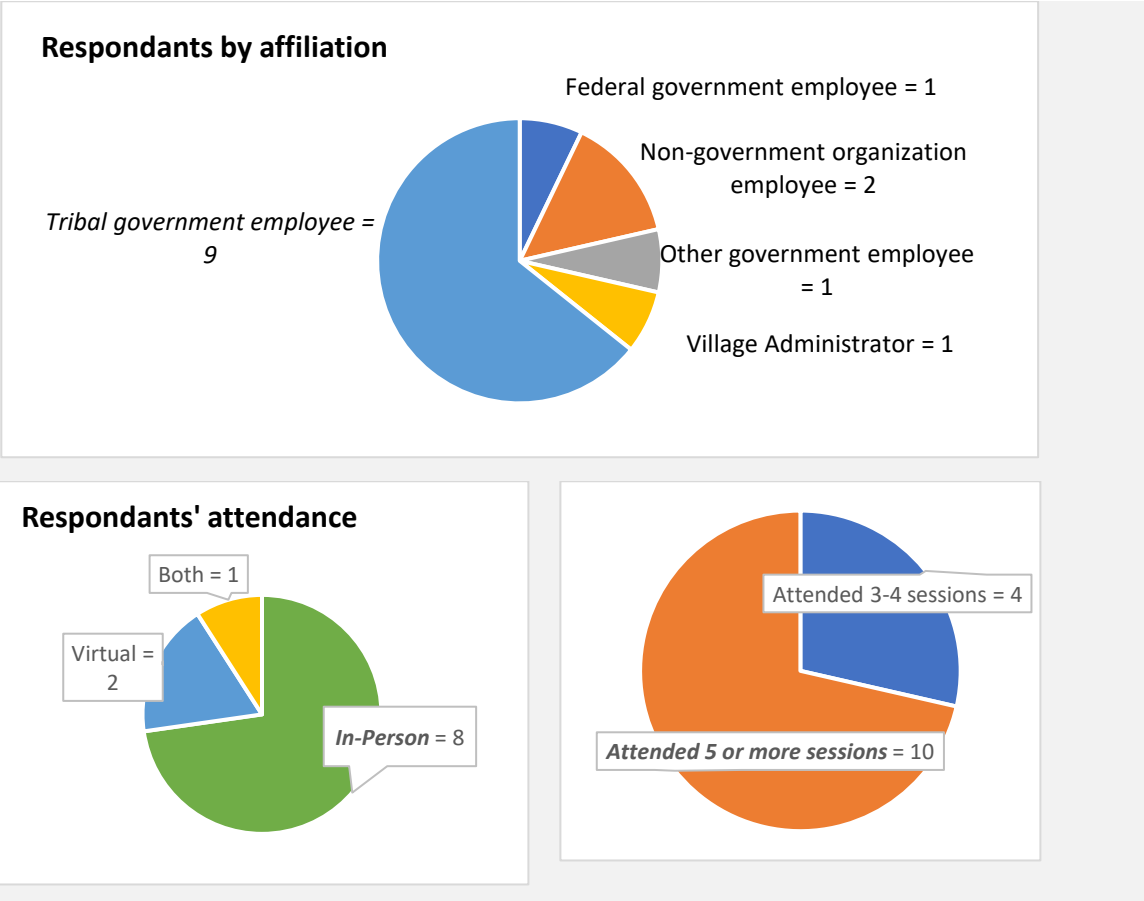
Graph 2



## Takeaways and Feedback

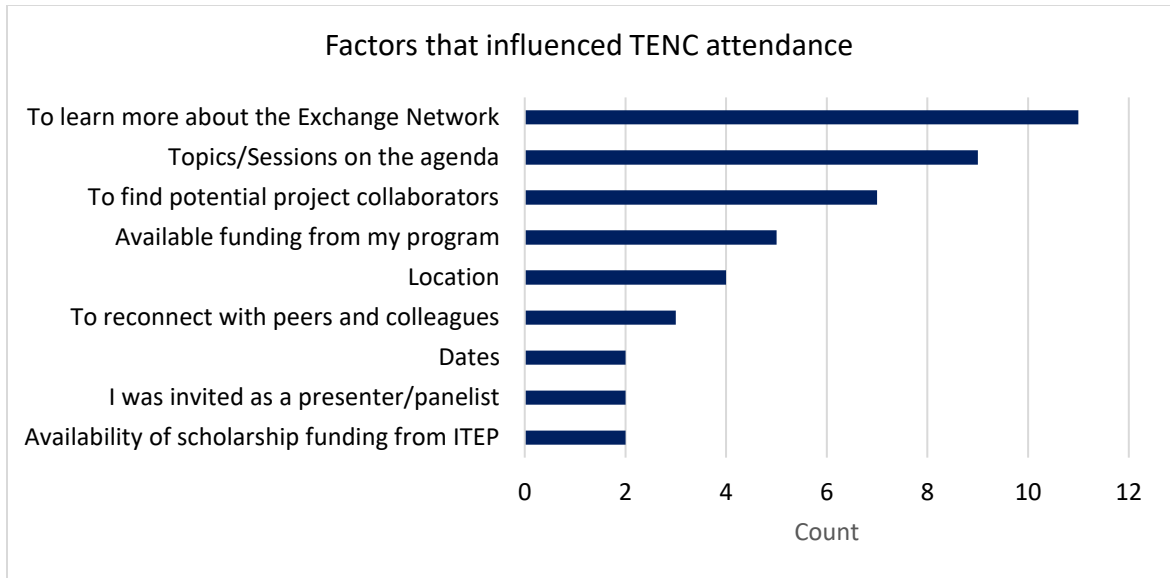
Based on direct and anecdotal participant feedback received and the debriefing discussions of the conference planning team, the 2022 TENC was a success. Attendance numbers and speaker engagement exceeded expectations, with the most resounding comment being an appreciation for the opportunity to reconnect and/or establish new connections for the professionals working with various Exchange Network-related topics. The experience reiterated the importance of being able to connect tribal professionals directly with each other, as well as with other individuals and entities working to protect human health and the environment using data and technology.

The final evaluation form received a total of fourteen responses, which ITEP shared via email and made available online to all attendees for 2 weeks following the event. More than half of the respondents were tribal employees and most attended the event in person.



The main factor that influenced TENC attendance was the opportunity to learn more about the Exchange Network and its related topics. The specific agenda sessions and opportunities to find collaborators were also strong factors for participation. Nearly all respondents to the final evaluation form indicated they left the event **inspired to learn more** about how the Exchange Network can help them address an existing challenge. Additional comments and observations shared by respondents are listed below.





**Suggestions for future TENC topics:**

- *Would like to see an encore presentation of the various consortia projects: NAEPC, South Central, NWIFC [Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission], others. It really shows the power of the group effort for tribes.*
- *Data management and development of workflows*
- *I hope to present on our radon data project next year.*
- *I could present on our grassroots organization, Tutsqwaw Oqawtoynani, and the ongoing work to clean our Mesa of Trash.*
- *Yes! When the LEAN platform is fully developed.*

**Comments on missing topic areas or areas for improvement:**

- *Nothing missing - but do think it would be helpful to divide into groups during the first day plenary to discuss what "environmental data" means to folks and have everyone briefly state why they decided to attend. Every person at each table could use sticky notes to give their input and then a lead person from each table could "report out" to the full session.*
- *maybe a field trip*
- *I took away many things from this conference and taking the next steps in initiating those plans.*
- *I was happy with what I learned and hoping to connect with mentors in my field.*
- *A hands-on to get an idea which would work best for my tribe.*
- *more "success stories" or stories by tribes or organizations on how they used the data software, successes, and challenges, and such.*
- *I think a tribal group rap session would have been awesome.*
- *Online networking time slot for virtual attendees.*

**Additional comments not addressed above:**

- *Would recommend the EPA Listening Session (if repeated) be a plenary event so folks do not have to choose between a session of interest and providing feedback, concerns, etc. to the Program leads and management.*

- *The area of the training was nice, and we did not have to worry about parking. The conference rooms were within walking distance. The food and snacks provided were great.*
- *I thought this was an EPA related conference, but I think this needs to also be presented to our leaders. They need to see the changes that are out there and how we need to keep up. I also feel this workshop could have helped other programs, so building that network by reaching out to other tribal programs (which I also plan to do).*
- *I would have liked a complete agenda pdf to download. Also, I appreciate when the speaker/session leader names/orgs are listed on the agenda. Sometimes people say their name and org/acronym so quickly, it is hard to get the info down for follow up later.*
- *Is there an online hub of tribal network people?*
- *I think for having a hybrid after the pandemic, it went well. Food was good.*

Suggestions for workshops, webinars, or other forms of training on topics related to data management, data analysis, information management, or Exchange Network:

- *Recommend keeping the mentoring/tech assist sessions and extending them to 1 hour to allow for good conversation. Would recommend a short field trip to round out the fast-paced agenda.*
- *This was my first time, so it would be great if we can have future trainings/workshop relating to data management, analysis, or information management. I have made it a priority for us to learn more about this, doing our own on-line learning and reaching out to the mentors. But waiting for another year is too long, so mini workshops would be helpful.*
- *More tools to help analyze data to see if there are potential anomalies. I especially appreciate comparison tools.*
- *Tribes available to present on the work they have begun, accomplishments, and growing pains.*
- *I suggest you offer more opportunities for community colleges.*