**Chesapeake Bay Program**

**Beyond 2025**

**ERG Evaluation Plan**

**September 1, 2023**

# Overview

This evaluation plan provides details on the approach ERG will take in answering evaluation questions that were developed for the Beyond 2025 effort to address the Executive Council (EC) charges. This document covers only those questions where ERG has been identified as the lead. We begin the plan by presenting the three evaluation questions that ERG will lead and providing an overview of the process used in developing those questions. We then provide a brief discussion of the draft and final reports for this work. Next, for each question, we provide a more detailed discussion that includes definitions, purpose/justification, methods, and a timeline for project products. A proposed timeline appears as the last section of the plan.

# Evaluation Questions

To develop the evaluation questions, ERG reviewed a number of key documents and reports, including:

* The 2014 Chesapeake Watershed Agreement (as amended 10/5/22)
* Governance and Management Framework for the Chesapeake Bay Program (12/1/22)
* Management Strategies and Logic and Action Plans from the Strategy Review System (SRS) Process.
* Chesapeake Governance Study: Report of 2021 Decision-Maker Interview Results (“the Dartmouth report”)
* Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response, May 2023 (“the CESR report”)
* 2023 Strategy Review System (SRS) Biennial Meeting Report (ERG also attended the meeting virtually)
* Retrospective on Lessons Learned from the Chesapeake Bay Program Strategy Review System’s 3rd Cycle with Suggested Adaptations to Address Issues
* Rising Watershed and Bay Water Temperatures – Ecological Implications and Management Responses (STAC Publication 23-001)
* Enhancing Chesapeake Bay Partnership Activities by Integrating Social Science, Final Report, 2/7/23, University of Maryland Center for Environmental Science
* Charting a Course to 2025, 7/21/23 (Reaching 2025 report)

Additional materials reviewed and to be used are listed [here](https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/group/beyond-2025-steering-committee).[[1]](#footnote-1) In addition to this review of background materials, ERG also held listening sessions with subsets of the Steering Committee (SC) to discuss the EC charges and how the SC interpreted the charges. Each discussion focused on definitional issues, interpreting specific charges provided by the EC, and discussing broader issues.

Following those meetings, ERG reviewed its notes from the meetings and then identified themes in each meeting. Those themes were combined into larger topical themes (i.e., the themes among the themes) across the meetings.

Based on the themes from the meetings and the review of background materials, ERG identified three evaluation questions to consider. The questions ERG identified reflect areas where ERG expects it can provide the most value to the program in performing this evaluation, in that they are organizational in nature and could benefit from a third-party perspective. The three questions are:

* EQ1: Looking Inward: To what extent does the current organizational structure and processes support effective (1) decision-making and (2) outcome attainment?
  + If so, why?
  + If not, why not?
  + What aspects of the structure and processes need to be kept or changed to better support effective decision-making and outcome attainment?
* EQ2: Looking Outward: Does the Program know the external decision-makers it needs to reach?
  + Does the Program understand the needs of the decision-makers outside the Program?
  + To what extent is the Program providing decision-makers outside the Program with the information needed to make decisions contribute to the Program attaining its outcomes?
  + Does the current organizational structure allow for taking into account the needs of diverse stakeholder groups?
* EQ3: Logical Program Flows: What is the Program’s goal/outcome attainment logic?
  + Specifically, what are the logical flows of program activities to outputs, from outputs to outcomes, and from outcomes to goals?
  + What are the underlying assumptions that underpin the flows from outputs to outcomes and are those assumptions grounded in sound theory/logic?
  + Is the Program’s performance tracking structure aligned with the logical flow?
  + What is the unique contribution of the Partnership in terms of outcome/goal attainment (i.e., the value-added)?
  + Is the program investing in the appropriate outcomes and goals?

The set of questions we developed does not explicitly address issues related to the science being used by the program. ERG’s view is that addressing science-based content-related topics identified in the EC charges should be addressed by the SC directly through its work. ERG’s work, however, will address how science is incorporated in the program’s work and how that science is communicated. ERG will address science in the context of each evaluation question’s primary objective.

Table 1 provides an overview of how ERG’s work relates to the SC deliverables discussed at the August 24, 2023 SC meeting (and their subsequent refinement).

**Table 1. Link Between Steering Committee Deliverables and ERG Evaluation Work**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Deliverable and Description** | | **Role of ERG’s Evaluation Work** |
| Where we are | Assessment of where we are with the 2014 Watershed Agreement   * *E.g., Reaching 2025 Report* | ***Indirect role***. ERG’s work would be informed by this information. Additionally, ERG’s work can also inform this deliverable by reviewing the flow of program activities/outputs to outcomes/goals. |
| What we do | Value assessment of the 2014 Bay Watershed Agreement   * *What is the ability of the partnership to positively impact each goal and outcome?* * *Do we have the right outcomes for our goals and the right goals for our vision?* | ***Direct role***. ERG’s EQ3 will provide an assessment of how the program is structured to meet its outcomes and goals. Understanding the flow of activities to output to outcomes and (ultimately) goals will provide the program with an assessment of how value is being created. |
| Where we want to be | Vision Statement   * *Reaffirm or modify?* | ***Indirect role.*** ERG’s work on the assessment will inform any changes to the vision currently reflected in the Agreement. |
| Potential changes | Recommendation on what to do with the Watershed Agreement post 2025   * *Amend and extend?* * *Reform and rewrite?* | ***Indirect role***. ERG’s work will provide broad assessments of what has been working and what needs to be improved. This information could/should be used in thinking about what the Agreement looks like after 2025. |
| How we work | Assessment of and recommendations for our overall partnership   * *Partnership structure* * *Governance and Adaptive Management* | ***Direct role***. Answering EQ1 and EQ2 will provide a detailed assessment of the structure and processes of the CBP (EQ1) and how the CBP works with external stakeholders (EQ2). The answer to EQ3 will provide details on the logic and reasoning on why the work of the CBP will lead to its outcomes and goals. |

# Overall Project Products

At the completion of the work discussed below, ERG will develop a draft report that combines the key products listed below. ERG will share an outline of the report with the SC in the late winter/spring of 2024. We expect the report to be organized around the evaluation questions. Following review and comments by the SC and other CBP bodies that need to review, ERG will provide a final report reflecting our findings. Based on the timelines discussed below, we expect to deliver the draft report in May 2024. A final report will follow the review process. A full proposed timeline for the products discussed below appears in as the last section of this plan.

# EQ1: Looking Inward

*To what extent does the current organizational structure and processes support effective (1) decision-making and (2) outcome attainment? If so, why? If not, why not? What aspects of the structure and processes need to be kept or changed to better support effective decision-making and outcome attainment?*

## Definitions

* **Structure:** All levels including and below the Management Board (i.e., Teams, Committees, Workgroups, STAR).
* **Processes**: The processes specified in the Governance document (SRS, etc.), as well as other informal processes to be identified as work progresses.
* **Decision-making** defined as any decisions made by Program entities in administering the Program (excluding decisions where the Program has no/little control; e.g., state laws).

## Purpose and Justification

This question looks at the structure and processes that the CBP uses to meet its outcomes and goals. The program functions as a distributed partnership and uses a number of teams, committees, and working groups to accomplish its goals. The partnership also has a set of processes in place (formal and informal) that defines how the partnership functions. Understanding how the structure of the program and its associated processes enable or inhibit effective outcome and goal attainment will be important in moving beyond 2025.

## Methods

ERG will answer this evaluation question using the following methods and data collection approaches:

* **Content analysis of previous internal and external reports**. ERG will review the prior work concerning the CBP (e.g., the reports listed above and others that are made available) and extract relevant aspects from those reports on the processes and structures of the CBP. ERG will then develop summaries of that information.
* **Process mapping**. ERG will develop a set of process maps for a defined number of formal and/or informal processes used by CBP to conduct its work. ERG will work with EPA to define a set of core processes (e.g., resource allocation, consensus process, SRS). ERG will develop process maps depicting the flow of the work and based on our review of documents (above) and interviews (below), we will flag areas of concern in each process that may lead to issues in goal/outcome attainment.
* **Interviews with key informants**. ERG will perform a set of interviews with key informants using an interview guide developed to expand on the topics of the evaluation question. The interviews will also include discussion of the process maps (depending on how relevant the processes are for the interviewees). ERG will work with EPA to determine who to interview; we expect to conduct between 15 and 20 interviews (some interview may include more than one person).

## Timeline

* Content analysis (Nov 23 – Dec 23)
* Process maps (Dec 23 – Jan 24)
* Interviews (Feb 24 – Mar 24)

# EQ2: Looking Outward

*Does the Program know the external decision-makers it needs to reach? Does the Program understand the needs of the decision-makers outside the Program? To what extent is the Program providing decision-makers outside the Program with the information needed to make decisions contribute to the Program attaining its outcomes? Does the current organizational structure allow for taking into account the needs of diverse stakeholder groups?*

## Definitions

**Decision-makers**: Individuals who are external to the Program who make decisions that can impact the Program’s goal attainment. This includes (but not limited to) local government officials, landowners, farms and other businesses, and residents living in the watershed.

**Outside the Program**: Entities or individuals that are not regular participants in Program meetings.

**Information**: Materials and communications that are distributed or could be distributed by the Program.

**Decisions**: Actions that could be taken (or not taken) that would impact the Program’s goal attainment. (With some limits on what could be reasonably be affected by the Program.)

## Purpose and Justification

In order to achieve the outcomes and goals of the Agreement, the CBP will need people and entities outside of the program to make decisions and take actions that contribute the program’s outcomes. Furthermore, the people and entities who live in the watershed are stakeholders just by being in the watershed and communicating results to them is important. During the small group discussions, there was significant discussion around how to effectively reach and communicate with external stakeholders. The SRS Biennial meeting report also extensively discussed the need to reach external stakeholders effectively.

## Methods

ERG will answer this evaluation question using the following methods and data collection approaches:

* **Content analysis of previous internal and external reports**. As with EQ1, ERG will review the prior work concerning the CBP (e.g., the reports listed above and others that are made available) and extract relevant aspects from those reports on the processes and structures of the CBP. ERG will then develop summaries of that information.
* **Interviews with key CBP informants**. ERG will perform a set of interviews with key informants within the program using an interview guide developed to expand on the topics of the evaluation question. ERG will work with EPA to determine who to interview; we expect to conduct between 15 and 20 interviews (some interview may include more than one person). We also expect that some of the interviews conducted under EQ1 will cover topics under this question as well.
* **Interviews with key external stakeholders**. ERG will perform a set of interviews with external stakeholders using an interview guide based on the topics in this evaluation question. The Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA), however, would limit the number of interviews we could conduct to fewer than 10.
* **Proposed survey**. ERG expects that some form of a survey of external stakeholders would be a productive tool for fully answering this evaluation question. During our work under this EQ, ERG will assess whether it would be useful and, if so, the nature of the survey that should be performed. The PRA, however, limits EPA and its contractors from collecting data from 10 or more people without explicit Office of Management and Budget approval through a process known as an Information Collection Request (ICR). The ICR approval process can often take 8-12 months to complete given legally mandated review times. Thus, ERG’s role in the survey would be to develop instrument (questionnaire) and (possibly) the necessary materials for submission to the ICR approval process. The implementation and analysis of those data would take place after the work the SC is complete, however. The purpose of developing the survey under this project is to speed up the process of collecting these data in the future.

## Products and Timeline

* Content analysis (Nov 23 – Dec 23)
* Interviews with CBP informants (Feb 23 – Mar 23)
* Interviews with external stakeholders (Jan 23 – Feb 23)
* Draft survey and ICR materials (Apr 23 – May 23)

# EQ3: Logical Flows

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[Note: This question is meant to better articulate the CBP’s logic model and theory of change, two terms used by program evaluators in assessing programs. These two terms are defined below.]

## Definitions

* **Program logic model**: The *flow* from program activities to outputs to outcomes to goals. Logic models are used to define how a program is intended to meet is goals and outcomes. A good definition of logic models can be found [here](https://www.cdc.gov/evaluation/logicmodels/index.htm).
* **Theory of change**: A theory of change for a program are the collective set of assumptions that describe how the program’s activities will lead to the desired outcomes and ultimately the goals. We note that logic models and theories of change go hand-in-hand; while a logic model depicts the flow from activities to goals, a theory of change explains why those flows should be expected to occur. A good definition of the theory of change concept can be found [here](https://www.aecf.org/resources/theory-of-change).

## Purpose and Justification

This question is a foundational one and is designed to make explicit the underlying logic and assumptions embodied in the program’s operations. Most evaluations involve the development of a program logic model (if one is not already available) or review of existing program logic models. The small group discussions related to evaluation questions involved some discussions on how activities related to one outcome could be used in meeting other outcomes as well. Furthermore, the focus on EQ1 on structure and processes and the focus on EQ2 on meeting external stakeholder needs necessitates a detailed understanding of intended program functioning.

## Methods

ERG will answer this evaluation question using the following methods and data collection approaches:

* **Content analysis of program strategy documents**. ERG will review the Management Strategies and Logic and Action Plans documents developed by each outcome in the Agreement. From those documents, ERG will formulate logic models. We expect our initial logic models will have gaps. We will also make an attempt to articulate theories of change from the available documents.
* **Input from CBP Goal Implementation Teams**. ERG will provide the logic models to each relevant Goal Implementation Team (GIT) and then solicit feedback on the gaps we identify and on our initial takes on the theories of change.

## Products and Timeline

* Logic model for each outcome (Oct 23 – Dec 23)
  + Product: Initial/draft logic models
* Input from GIT (Nov 23 – Jan 23)
  + Product: Logic models

# Proposed Timeline

A graphical representation of the timeline for this work appears in Figure 1 as a Gantt chart on the next page.



Figure - Proposed Timeline

1. SC members should feel free to provide ERG with additional materials they feel are important to this work. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)