Beyond 2025 Program Evaluation

Presentation of ERG INTERIM REPORT

DRAFT FINDINGS AND DRAFT CONSIDERATIONS

April 25, 2024

Outline of the Presentation

▶ Overview (5-10 minutes)

▶ Findings (15-20 minutes)

▶ Considerations (20–25 minutes)

▶ Discussion (45 minutes)

▶ Note: <u>clarifying</u> questions at end of Findings

　　▶ We have time to discuss!

> Note: ERG uses "considerations" instead of "recommendations" since the SC will need to make its own recommendations.

Overview

- ERG was tasked with developing an evaluation to address aspects of the EC's Beyond 2025 Charge

- Contracted to EPA HQ under EPA's Conflict Prevention and Resolution Contract

  - Under a Technical Direction from CBPO

  - ERG is contracted as an independent evaluator

- We are bounded by our scope as defined in the evaluation questions

- Comments requested on Interim Report by May 10, 2024

Evaluation Questions - Overview

- Evaluation questions (study questions) form the basis of our work

- We held a series of small group discussions back in the spring and summer to better understand the needs

- Developed draft evaluation questions

- SC signed off on those questions at June meeting

Evaluation Questions

- Evaluation Question (EQ1). To what extent does the current organizational structure of the Program and adaptive management framework used by the Program support: (1) effective science-based decision-making, (2) outcome attainment, (3) collaboration, (4) use and dissemination of science, and (5) functioning as a partnership? If so, why? If not, why not? What aspects of the structure and processes need to be kept or changed to support those aspects?

- EQ2. To what extent does the Program know the external decision-makers and stakeholders it needs to reach? To what extent does the Program understand and support the needs of the decision-makers and stakeholders inside and outside the Program? To what extent is the Program providing decision-makers and stakeholders inside and outside the Program with the information needed to assist the Program in attaining its Agreement Outcomes?

- EQ3. 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? Are there missing goals and/or outcomes?

Scope – What's outside our scope

- Efficacy or effectiveness of the 2014 Agreement

- Content for an enhanced, modified, or new agreement
  - "How", but not the "what"

- Anything governed by Congress
  - Authorizations and appropriations

Approach

- Content analysis
  - Reviewed documents and identified themes from those documents (EQ1, EQ2)

- Group discussions mainly focused on those in the Program (EQ1 – EQ3)

- Outcome assessment (EQ3)

Report Formulation

▶ Each approach component has a set of "themes" that come from the work

▶ Combined the themes into "Findings"
   ▶ Where do we see trends? Commonalities? Connections?

▶ Combined Findings into Considerations

▶ Caveat: Scope and depth of our considerations reflect the data and information we have available

‣ Findings

F1: The Program and its key components are viewed as being complex and the level of complexity is a concern to stakeholders.

- Repeated concern across many facets of the Program

- GITs in particular

- "Plate of spaghetti"

- Difficult for external stakeholder to understand how the Program works

F2: There is a question of transparency in how the Program operates, especially regarding using science for decision-making and in how Goal Implementation Teams (GITs) function.

▶ Repeated issue

▶ Needed for effective partnership

▶ GITs and use of science in decision-making

F3: There is a perception that the voices of external stakeholders are not being listened to.

- Repeated theme

- Both internal and external voice

- Use of science in decision-making

F4: The program operates in a set of silos and these silos decrease the ability of the program to operate effectively as a partnership.

- ▶ Repeated theme

- ▶ Lack of understanding of what other GITs do

- ▶ "Commonly recognized"

F5: The Program components, especially the GITs, operate in a situation of constrained capacity in terms of both personnel time and funding.

- GIT members are sometimes performing Program work "in addition" to regular duties
  - "Volunteer"

- People are committed.. But over-extended

F6: Combined finding – The combined impact of complexity (F1), potential lack of transparency (F2), perception of not listening to external stakeholders (F3), siloed operations (F4), and constrained capacity (F5) may add to more than the sum of the individual findings.

F7: The SRS process is a valued part of the Program but is not meeting (or attaining) its full potential.

- Cycle for review is too short

- Management Board sometimes does not have the required experience some issues brought to it

F8: Social science is an emerging need for the Program.

- Repeated concern

- Report

- People are part of the equation here

F9: The Program appears to be trying to do too many things.

- 31 outcomes under 10 goals

- Focus on water quality

- Outcomes vs. outputs

F10: In many cases, there is a disconnect between the actions being performed by the Program and goal/outcome attainment.

▶ Noted in the group discussions in some cases

▶ Lack of a logic model

▶ Some outcomes were noted as "tangential" to the Program's overall goals

F11: The Program's logical outcome structure contains components that are not defined properly as outcomes and lack measurable qualities.

- Outputs vs. outcomes

- Either way, the items defining success must be measurable

F12: The Program has produced a vast amount of data and scientific findings, but it can improve access to those data and findings.

- ► Micro-sites

- ► A lot of information

Considerations

Note: ERG uses "considerations" instead of "recommendations" since the SC will need to make its own recommendations.

The Steering Committee should consider…

C1. Developing a logic model that works backward from the ultimate goals to appropriate activities incorporating a theory of change that reflects how outcomes can be obtained from activities and outputs.

- Activities → Outputs → Outcomes → Goals
  - How does the Program work
  - Map it BACKWARDS

- Theory of Change: why do those linkages happen?
  - What need to occur to make them happen?

- Activities and their outputs (items under Program control) need to lead to outcomes

- Note: resources (funding, staff) feed activities
  - Less resources feeding an activity leads to lower ability to attain outcomes

C2. Reducing the number of medium- or long-term outcomes in any changed or future Agreement to better focus the Program at achieving its outcomes.

- ▶ Builds on the last consideration

- ▶ Distinguish between outcomes and outputs

- ▶ Provides better Program focus

C3. Exploring ways to streamline and simplify the Program's organizational structure to reduce its complexity.

- ▶ Reduce complexity

- ▶ Consider organizing strongly around outcomes
    - ▶ Could lead to more "GIT" style groups than now

C4. Placing an emphasis on eliminating a siloed approach to Program design.

- ▶ More people need to work cross-team and in a matrixed approach

- ▶ Maybe a cross-GIT/outcome team

- ▶ Goal: get to a point where your core people have a firm understanding of what goes on in other areas

C5. Identifying need for and ways to improving Program transparency to all stakeholders.

- ▶ Centered around how decisions are communicated

- ▶ "We're not sure what the reasoning was.."

- ▶ Document some set of decisions

- ▶ Communicate the decisions

C6. Ensuring an accessible data and information repository.

- Develop some form of repository

- NOAA's Digital Coast as an example
    - Also a partnership

- There are plenty of other examples

C7. Increasing the use of social science in achieving Program outcomes.

- Better understanding of people and their motivations can improve outcome attainment

- CESR report's implementation gaps

- Social science is beyond effective communication
    - It's understanding people

C8. Allowing for flexibility in the SRS review cycle.

▶ One size does not fit all

▶ Set a review cycle and process that makes sense

▶ Let the outcome "owners" define it

C9. Making recommendations to ensure the Management Board accesses the appropriate expertise and experience during the SRS process.

- ▶ Get the right people in the room each time

- ▶ The work being done under the SRS process has value
  - ▶ That value needs to be recognized and appreciated

C10. Continuing the reach out to Tribal entities in ways that allow consideration and incorporation of their viewpoints.

- The environmental representatives we spoke with want to be at the table

- It's complicated

C11. Finding ways to ensure those working on GITs (or other teams) feel supported in their work.

▶ Address in job descriptions?

▶ The work is important
  ▶ People want to know their role is valued