

**Chesapeake Bay Program
Beyond 2025
ERG Evaluation Plan
September 20, 2023
(Revised October 4, 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. Next, for each question, we provide a more detailed discussion that includes definitions, purpose/justification, methods, and a timeline for project products. A 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](#).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

¹ SC members should feel free to provide ERG with additional materials they feel are important to this work.

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 a set of evaluation questions to consider and provided those in a draft plan. ERG then solicited feedback on the draft plan from SC members using an online form as well as holding two additional listening sessions on the questions and plan. Finally, ERG presented a revised set of questions at the September SC meeting, made revisions to the questions during the meeting, and then obtained SC approval to move forward.

The final 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. 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? [Note: Each question above should address diverse and disadvantaged populations.]
- 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?

A consideration throughout these questions will be to include how the CBP uses and disseminates science.

Table 1 provides an overview of how ERG's work relates to the SC deliverables discussed at the August 24, 2023 SC meeting and subsequently refined for the September SC meeting.

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

Deliverable and Description		Role of ERG's Evaluation Work
Where we are	<p>Assessment of where we are with the 2014 Watershed Agreement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>E.g., Reaching 2025 Report</i> 	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.
Where do we want to be	<p>Vision Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Reaffirm or modify?</i> 	Indirect role. ERG's work on the assessment will inform any changes to the vision currently reflected in the Agreement.
What We Do	<p>Impact Assessment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What is the ability of the partnership to positively impact each goal and outcome?</i> • <i>Do we have the right outcomes for our goals and the right goals for our vision?</i> 	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.
How we work	<p>Assessment of and recommendations for our overall partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Partnership structure</i> • <i>Governance and Adaptive Management</i> 	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.
Path Forward	<p>Recommendation on what to do with the Watershed Agreement post-2025 and Recommendations for overall Partnership.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Amend and extend?</i> • <i>Reform and rewrite?</i> 	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.

OVERALL PROJECT PRODUCTS

At the completion of the work discussed below, ERG will develop a draft report that combines the work 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 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 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?

Definitions

Program: The set of groups defined in and/or covered by the Governance document and the activities that those groups are directly responsible for.

Structure: All levels including and below the Management Board (e.g., Teams, Committees, Workgroups, STAR, STAC), including how the Management Board interacts with levels above and below it.

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 the SC and 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 the SC and 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

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? [Note: Each question above should address diverse and disadvantaged populations.]

Definitions

Stakeholders: Individuals or entities who are external to the Program (as defined under EQ1) that have an interest in the Program’s goal attainment, primarily focusing on those individuals or entities who reside within the watershed.

Decision-makers: Individuals or entities 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, businesses, landowners, farms and other businesses, and residents living in the watershed.

External to the Program: Entities or individuals that are not regular participants in Program meetings and/or processes.

Information: Materials and communications that are distributed or could be distributed by the Program including science-based information and/or outreach materials.

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 the SC and 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.

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)

EQ3: 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? [Note: This question involves use of/articulating of the Program's logic model and theory of change (defined below).]

Definitions (relevant for methods section below)

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 its goals and outcomes. A good definition of logic models can be found [here](#).

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](#).

Purpose and Justification

This question is designed to focus on how CBP activities contribute to outcome and goal attainment and the value that the Program brings to goal/outcome attainment. The question also addresses the appropriateness and completeness of the current goals and outcomes.

Methods

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

- **Articulate a program logic model and associated theory of change (see definitions).** ERG will review the Management Strategies and Logic and Action Plans documents developed by each outcome in the Agreement. ERG will also solicit feedback from subject matter experts. From those documents and feedback, 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 and subject matter experts.** 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. ERG will also solicit feedback from subject matter experts who can speak to the Program logic model.

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.

Products	2023			2024									
	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct
EQ1 - Looking inward													
Content analysis		█	█										
Process maps			█	█									
Interviews					█	█							
EQ2 - Looking outward													
Content analysis		█	█										
Interviews with CBP					█	█							
Interviews with external				█	█								
EQ3 - Logical flow													
Content analysis	█	█	█										
Input from GITs		█	█	█									
Summary Items													
Draft report							█	█					
SC Review									█				
Final report										█			

Figure 1 - Proposed Timeline