



# Five-Year Strategic Plan

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2016–2020

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## A Message from the ERIS Board

The adoption of this Strategic Plan marks an exciting moment for the Environmental Research Institute of the States (ERIS). Founded in 1998, ERIS is now maturing as an organization and setting goals that will allow it to grow and thrive in the coming years. ERIS provides an important additional venue for state environmental agencies to collaborate with one another and with federal, tribal, nongovernmental, and industry partners on cutting-edge environmental policy research topics. Given that research underpins much of our decision-making, ERIS' policy research focus makes it a galvanizing and relevant organization.

The ERIS Board thanks all those who took time to assist in the thoughtful crafting of this plan through the summer of 2015 and spring 2016.

We look forward to revisiting this plan often, to ensure that its goals and aspirations are achieved over time.

On behalf of the Board,



David Paylor  
ERIS Board President  
July 2016

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## Introduction and Background

The ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan is intended to complement both the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) Five-Year Strategic Plan 2016–2020 and the Interstate Technology and Regulatory Council (ITRC) Five-Year Strategic Plan 2016–2020. The ERIS bylaws outline seven distinct purposes for the organization:

- To improve the environment of the United States;
- To further the understanding of the roles and activities of the states in the federal system with respect to environmental protection;
- To conduct environmental policy research, including the dissemination of results through publications, meetings, electronic media, and similar venues;
- To act as a forum where state environmental policymakers interact with other stakeholders on US environmental policy;
- To provide education programs to assist in the development of environmental policy in the US;
- To operate ITRC, a national coalition focused on developing tools and strategies to reduce interstate barriers to the deployment of innovative environmental technologies; and
- For any other lawful purpose consistent with the provisions of the articles of incorporation.

The ERIS board recognizes that many of these purposes overlap with the mission of ECOS, and that a key purpose of ERIS, as distinct from ECOS and ITRC, is captured under the third bullet in the bylaws above—environmental policy research. This purpose is critical, as states are responsible for implementing environmental rules and regulations; however most states do not conduct their own primary research. The ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan is intended to provide a clear direction for the organization that strengthens and advances ERIS' research purpose.



## Mission

Given that environmental policy research is a primary focus of ERIS' efforts, the organizational mission upon which this strategic plan is based is summarized as follows:

The ERIS mission is to coordinate environmental research priorities among ECOS members, federal government agencies, and other key partners with environmental research and management interests, and to ensure that such research is disseminated in a practical, applicable manner.

## Vision

Successful implementation of the ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan will establish processes to identify and prioritize ECOS members' research needs. It will also incorporate these prioritized needs into the research agendas of partner organizations. The Strategic Plan will foster a well-connected network of organizations which conduct or apply environmental policy research, with ERIS positioned as a central conduit of communications and information. ERIS will ensure that all partner organizations are aware of ongoing research activities, and will facilitate access to research results for organizations facing various environmental management challenges.

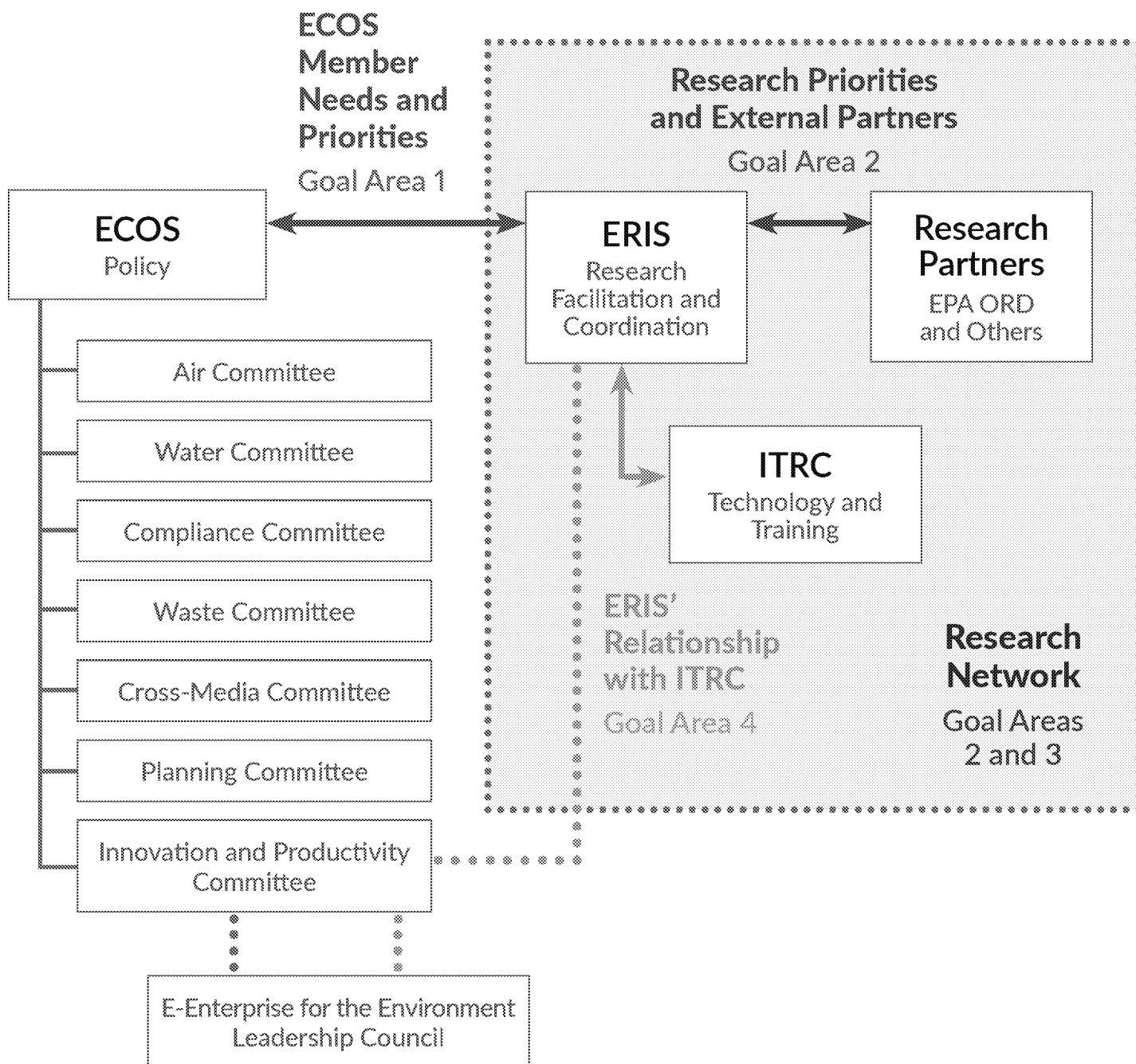
## Goal Areas

The ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan is divided into four goal areas:

- Research Needs and Prioritization
- Research Priorities and External Partners
- Research Products, Tools, and Other Information
- ERIS' Relationship with ITRC

The relationships between ECOS, ERIS, and ITRC, each organization's respective roles, and the goal areas described in the ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan, are illustrated in Figure 1 on the next page.

**Figure 1:**  
**ECOS-ERIS-ITRC-EELC Relationship**  
**and Associated Goal Areas**



## GOAL AREA

# 1

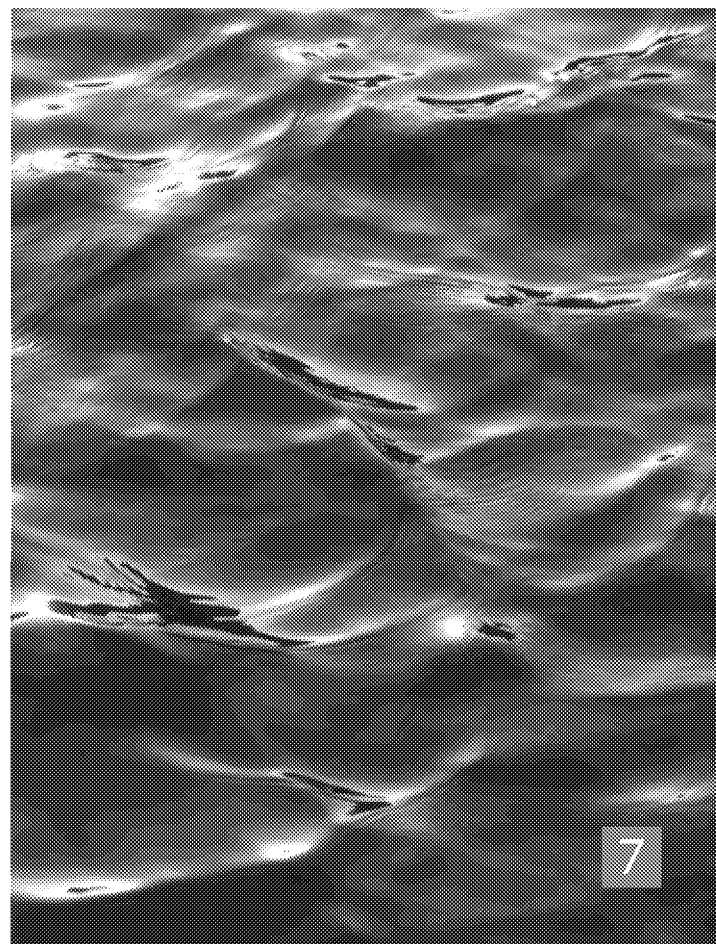
## State Environmental Agency Research Needs and Prioritization

*ERIS coordinates, prioritizes, and communicates environmental research needs among ECOS members.*

### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 1 describes the three-step process by which ERIS determines ECOS members' research needs, prioritizes these needs, and communicates the results of the prioritization process to ECOS members. To date, ERIS has completed a two-phase biennial survey of ECOS members to determine research needs; the prioritization process following the survey was completed using staff time funded by an ERIS Board member. For the ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan, ERIS will seek to memorialize the process by which the biennial survey instrument is administered, as well as the process by which the survey results are analyzed and prioritized. ECOS will provide staffing for the survey work. Once completed, the survey results, together with the tools and processes that created it, will be made available to ECOS members (e.g., by posting on the ERIS website) to ensure full process transparency.

Following the research needs prioritization exercise, the final step under this goal area is to communicate the prioritization results to ECOS members. This can be accomplished through a variety of communications tools, including *ECOSWire*, ECOS media committee calls, and in-person ECOS meetings. The ERIS Board will also, as part of this goal area, develop a communications plan around the prioritized list of research needs.



*Table 1:  
Goal Area 1 Strategies and Actions*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ERIS coordinates, prioritizes, and communicates environmental research needs among ECOS members</i></b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Associated Actions</b>
<b>1.A.</b> Determine ECOS members' most pressing issues, and what research projects could address them	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Design and implement biennial survey of ECOS members to determine most pressing and widely held environmental issues</li> </ul>
<b>1.B.</b> Prioritize ECOS members' common research needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Refine and memorialize the process by which research needs identified in the biennial survey are prioritized; include regular process review and refinement opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>1.C.</b> Communicate identified priorities to ECOS members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Refine and memorialize the process by which prioritized research needs are communicated to ECOS members</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA

2

## Coordinate Research Priorities

*ERIS coordinates state environmental agency research needs and priorities with external partners.*

### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 2 describes the coordination of ECOS members' research priorities with the research agendas of external partners. Currently, EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD) is the primary external partner with which ERIS collaborates. Goal Area 2 aims to strengthen this working relationship and ensure its longevity through leadership and staffing transitions. The ERIS Board, in collaboration with ORD, will consider methods by which the relationship and associated processes can be memorialized (e.g., a memorandum of understanding or other instrument). The actions under this goal area will also involve joint ERIS-ORD determination of the optimal timeframe for incorporating ECOS members' research priorities into ORD's research agenda, considering ORD's timing and process for developing its annual research plan.

Goal Area 2 also describes approaches to expanding the network of environmental research partners beyond ORD. The ERIS Board will consider possible partners to include in the research network; initial suggestions include the National Academy of Sciences, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the US Department of Agriculture, the United States Geological Survey, the Department of Defense, academic institutions, and other national organizations such as the Water Environment Federation and the American Water Works Association. Once potential partners are identified, ERIS will apply a process to develop relationships based on the ERIS-ORD collaborative model.



*Table 2:  
Goal Area 2 Strategies and Actions*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ERIS coordinates state environmental agency research needs and priorities with external partners.</i></b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
2.A. Incorporate ERIS survey results and prioritization into ORD's research efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Work with ORD to refine and memorialize the process by which ECOS members' prioritized research needs are incorporated into ORD research priorities (e.g., memorandum of understanding)</li> </ul>
2.B. Expand the network of research partners beyond ORD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify other relevant partners, including states, and establish a similar process to build or strengthen the network (potential partners could include National Academy of Sciences, NOAA, USDA, USGS, DoD, national media associations, academia)</li> <li>■ Collect information on significant ongoing research efforts and applicable research results from network partners</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA

3

## Research Products, Tools, and Other Information

*ERIS facilitates sharing of research materials and related tools.*

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### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 3 builds on the first two goal areas by ensuring that research and related tools in priority areas are shared throughout the research partner network (to be developed under Goal Area 2, above). This will advance practical applicability of research results as well as minimization of duplicative efforts. This goal area will involve development and refinement of communications tools, such as a directory of important points of contact for ECOS members and external partners, to break down barriers to information flow among organizations working on common environmental issues.

A key element of Goal Area 3 is ensuring transferability of research materials and tools in a manner that facilitates practical application toward common environmental issues.



*Table 3:  
Goal Area 3 Strategies and Actions*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ERIS facilitates sharing of research materials and related tools.</i></b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
3.A. Communicate and coordinate ongoing research and completed research activities among ECOS members and partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Produce and distribute regular communications for ECOS members and other partners to describe ongoing research efforts and completed research products</li> <li>■ Create a searchable directory of key points of contact for ECOS members, EPA (headquarters, program, regional, ORD), and other partners; host directory on the ERIS website</li> <li>■ Create and enhance a web-based clearinghouse of research results and products</li> </ul>
3.B. Ensure transferability of research materials and tools for ECOS members and other partners facing similar environmental challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Host and promote events (such as ORD Regional Tools Cafés) at ECOS meetings and elsewhere</li> <li>■ Vet new and innovative technologies that are not yet in full-scale use, and referring such technologies to ITRC for further research</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA  
4

## ERIS' Relationship with ITRC

*ERIS continues its oversight role with ITRC.*

### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 4 describes the relationship between ERIS and ITRC. ERIS intends to continue its established oversight role with ITRC while strengthening this relationship in order to minimize duplication of effort, and to leverage respective organizational strengths.

ERIS will also work to advance a strong working relationship between ERIS and the E-Enterprise Leadership Council (EELC) into the future, given the complementary elements of each organization's efforts. Both ERIS and EELC serve to better coordinate and leverage environmental protection efforts between ECOS members and EPA; however ERIS' focus is on

identifying and coordinating environmental research needs and research efforts, whereas the EELC's focus is on modernizing the business of environmental protection through joint governance, shared services, and streamlined processes.



*Table 4:  
Goal Area 4 Strategies and Actions*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ERIS continues its oversight role with ITRC.</i></b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
4.A. Continue ERIS' role and responsibilities with respect to ITRC while seeking opportunities to improve and strengthen the relationship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify opportunities to improve and strengthen ERIS-ITRC relationship to maximize organizational strengths</li> <li>■ Appoint an ERIS Board Member Liaison to ITRC to ensure oversight of its activities</li> </ul>
4.B. Maintain a strong working relationship with the E-Enterprise Leadership Council (EELC) to ensure that key personnel are engaged in information exchange activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identify opportunities to improve the ERIS-EELC relationship over the long term (e.g., designation of ERIS board liaison to EELC)</li> </ul>

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## Conclusion

### Implementing the ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan

Taking action around implementation is critical to the success of the ERIS Five-Year Strategic Plan, and several implementation steps will occur following its adoption:

1. **Resources and Responsibilities.** This step involves decision-making by the ERIS Board around roles and responsibilities for ERIS Board members and ECOS staff.
2. **Priority Setting.** The ERIS Board will consider whether any of the actions described in the Five-Year Strategic Plan should be prioritized.
3. **Process Development.** The ERIS Board will develop processes described under each strategy area, or will assign responsibility for development of these processes.
4. **Accountability.** The ERIS Board will develop accountability mechanisms, including indicators and timeframes for the completion of key actions, to ensure the effectiveness of the Five-Year Strategic Plan.
5. **Execution.** ERIS Board members and ECOS staff will move forward with their assigned actions.
6. **Monitoring and Feedback.** The ERIS Board will revisit the Five-Year Strategic Plan regularly to affirm organizational direction and provide course corrections as needed.



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