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# ECOS Strategic Plan

## 2022-2026

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### Goal 1: Shape the national dialogue on significant environmental and public health issues

ECOS is the singular venue for State environmental executives to convene, deliberate, collaborate, share, and act collectively on the most pressing national environmental and public health issues. ECOS remains committed to leading the state dialogue and shaping the national dialogue on ongoing national environmental and public health issues, as well as efforts to address proactively pressing issues as they arise.

**Approach:** Given the potential number of important issues for state environmental agencies, it is critical to narrow the ECOS focus on a specific subset. ECOS will undertake an annual process to survey its membership about issues of importance and evaluate the findings to understand which issues are of sufficient significance to warrant all-member dialogues and/or issues where developing state positions or policy options is warranted. ECOS can use the knowledge gained from the all-member dialogues and subsequent work to proactively shape the national dialogue on those selected issues.

**Success:** Success for this goal is measured in two ways. This goal outlines an annual process to engage ECOS membership regarding issues of significance and completing this process is a measure of success. The process is a prerequisite to enable ECOS to shape the national dialogue. Measuring whether and how ECOS has shaped the national dialogue is an inherently subjective process and the ECOS officers should annually seek to gather feedback (e.g., from congressional staff) regarding the value and efficacy of ECOS.

#### **Strategy 1.1: Provide an ongoing venue for all-member dialogues on pressing environmental and public health policy issues to better understand all perspectives and policy options**

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As the ‘voice of the states’, ECOS must support expansive and inclusive dialogue among its members to understand the landscape of perspectives and policy options. However, consensus is not a prerequisite for engaging in conversations on topics of interest to ECOS members, and diversity of state perspectives is an asset around which healthy dialogue among states, and between states and federal partners, can occur. ECOS will use multiple approaches to support this dialogue among the states, including the committee structure, and all-member calls, to ensure full ECOS member participation. As a 50-state organization with a diversity of positions, ECOS does not expect consensus from its members across the full range of environmental and public health policy issues.

## **Strategy 1.2: Evaluate the range of national environmental and public health topics and focus ECOS to develop states' perspective and positions on those most critical and timely to ECOS membership.**

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ECOS plays a pivotal role in convening the states in a structured multi-party dialogue around the most pressing environmental and public health topics. Using the learnings from the dialogue in strategy 1.1, ECOS staff and the ECOS Executive Committee will regularly identify which topics meet the standard of importance for concentrated attention by ECOS members. Through this strategy, ECOS will define the process by which each issue precipitates to prominence and how the dialogue will occur among states.

## **Strategy 1.3: Find, create, and leverage forums to instill the voice of the states to shape the national dialogue**

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This strategy emphasizes the importance of identifying and proactively providing forums for ECOS to express the voice of states. Existing forums include the Spring ECOS meeting, federal agency rulemakings, congressional testimony, etc. ECOS will also serve as a proactive resource to educate around the 50-state perspective on key topical issues through letters, ECOS resolutions, and responding to EPA/Congressional requests for state input.

## **Goal 2: Pursue appropriate federal resources for states' capacity to effectively implement federally sponsored or delegated environmental programs**

**Description:** As 'frontline' providers of environmental protection, State environmental agencies effectively implement both state and federal laws, with increasing annual workloads and, at best, flat federal funding. The federal government should financially support state implementation efforts commensurate with the complexity and breadth of federal requirements. When states implement newly established federally delegated authorities, the federal government must provide a level of resources to support these responsibilities. In the event there are decreases in the level of support for the operation of federally delegated programs by either federal or state governments, it is critical that there be a shared understanding, and transparency around, what may no longer be possible given these constraints.

**Approach:** Most day-to-day environmental protection management is done by states. Ensuring adequate capital and operating resources to fully implement federal environmental laws has been and must remain a priority focus. ECOS will accomplish this goal by annually working with its members to understand existing resource needs, gaps or pinch points, areas for improved efficiency, and anticipated resource needs. This goal involves both being a voice for states' needs through advocacy and telling the story of state performance, but also through working with EPA to best align resources and responsibilities. This goal is complementary with Goal 1 and Goal 3.

**Success:** Success for this goal is measured in two ways. This goal outlines an annual process to engage ECOS membership to understand existing and emerging federally generated responsibilities and resulting resource needs. The process is a prerequisite to enable ECOS to then have conversations with Congress and EPA regarding resource alignment. Measuring success for this goal in an inherently

subjective process and the ECOS officers should annually seek to gather feedback (e.g., from congressional staff) regarding the value and efficacy of ECOS.

### **Strategy 2.1: Convene ECOS members to understand state priorities and funding shortfalls**

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ECOS provides states with the opportunity to discuss priorities, identify areas of mutual interest, and any gaps in resources and capacity to effectively address these priorities. This will provide a more coordinated and consistent message around states' needs.

### **Strategy 2.2: Advocate for sufficient federal resources to support states' work**

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ECOS will help states make the case through direct advocacy to Congress for an increase in federal resources and/or methods to decrease inefficient federally imposed state requirements when circumstances warrant doing so by enabling states to illustrate the impact on their responsibilities and draw attention to the results of state actions to date and any additional effort needed to provide adequate environmental protection.

### **Strategy 2.3 Coordinate state and EPA efforts around annual budgeting and work planning**

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ECOS will provide input to EPA as it develops its annual budget and will work with the National Program Managers on annual objectives to be used in establishing Performance Partnership Agreements and Performance Partnership Grants (PPAs and PPGs).

## **Goal 3: Build enduring institutional connectivity with EPA**

**Description:** Institutional connectivity refers to the shared building blocks of the state-EPA working relationship, and the ability of states and EPA to work productively within these building blocks. There are currently several building blocks of productive state and EPA relationships that can be assessed/improved upon within the timeframe of this strategic plan. EPA and states' working relationship should be continually reviewed and improved to maximize the collective strength of the state and federal relationship in key areas, including establishing shared expectations on state discretion in policy decisions, procedures regarding early engagement, and how EPA conducts its oversight role. A clear elevation policy, establishing formal procedures for addressing issues in disagreement within a reasonable time frame, should be completed with EPA. Considering the shared responsibility of federal and state governments, ECOS will concentrate on how regional and national consistency on implementation can be harmonized with state flexibility and innovation.

**Approach:** For the states and EPA to function at optimal efficiency, they must agree on the 'shape' of day-to-day interactions and work to collectively establish policies and procedures (i.e., the organizational infrastructure) to reflect that interaction. There are several facets to the state/federal relationship that are important to understand. In those areas where federal authority is delegated/authorized to state agencies, states and EPA should focus on establishing appropriate expectations regarding state discretion in decision-making and programmatic oversight. For those areas where the state/federal relationship is dependent upon on one another (e.g., permitting review) or areas of shared functions (e.g., research) states and EPA must continually seek to improve processes and

establish expectations regarding performance (e.g., permit review timelines) and interactions (e.g., deference or issue elevation).

**Success:** The timeline for ascertaining this goal's success will take several years and will be indicated by changes both at ECOS and within EPA. In the near-term, success for this goal is establishing shared expectations for state policy decision making, early engagement procedures, issue elevation and resolution, and EPA oversight. Over the long-term, success will be indicated by whether these measures are adopted by states and EPA.

### **Strategy 3.1: Establish expectations with EPA about key shared functions and critical dependencies**

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ECOS will work with EPA to establish and reinforce mutual expectations around regular working interactions such as federal deference to states, the timing and process by which issues are elevated, and the need for early engagement around critical topic areas to ensure the states' perspectives are considered, incorporated and addressed. Topics on which states and EPA also interact include but are not limited to development of the federal budget, establishment of national program objectives and metrics, continued implementation of E-Enterprise, coordination on inspections, compliance, and enforcement especially as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and development of approaches, policies, and programs to address emerging environmental and public health issues such as PFAS, environmental justice, etc.

## **Goal 4: Inspire peer sharing, collective joint learning, and innovation among state environmental agency leadership**

**Description:** This goal is one of the primary mechanisms through which ECOS fulfills its mission of supporting state capacity development. ECOS members find significant value in learning from their state agency leadership peers. ECOS has a valuable role in facilitating this peer support and learning, including providing opportunity for state innovation efforts to be shared, vetted, and brought to scale. ECOS also provides a knowledge base and support for new state environmental agency leadership. ECOS will continue to provide high level support to environmental agency leadership on key topics of interest through ECOS meetings, workgroups, and ad hoc joint efforts.

**Approach:** Because ECOS is the central point of coordination for states, it is uniquely positioned to distribute best practices and innovation among its members. There are two complementary strategies under this Goal: 1) Cataloguing innovations and providing mechanisms by which those innovations can be shared; 2) Hosting events that highlight or focus on peer sharing, collaborative learning, and innovations.

**Success:** For this goal, success is reflected by continuous innovation and peer learning. Tools and mechanisms to document and share must continually reflect this development and growth. Example tools include the use of the E-Enterprise Community Inventory Platform (EECIP) and other methods for cataloguing and sharing information, and member satisfaction as expressed in annual surveys is a potential indicator of success.

#### **Strategy 4.1: Catalogue and diffuse innovations, best practices, and lessons learned using EECIP, the ECOS website, social media, green reports, webinars, and other outreach mechanisms**

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One of ECOS's key roles is to aggregate and distribute information that will assist state environmental and public health leaders do their jobs more effectively and efficiently. Dissemination can occur through various outreach mechanisms and relevant materials will be gathered, developed, and disseminated appropriate to ECOS members' capacity to effectively review and utilize the information.

#### **Strategy 4.2: Host and support members in participating in existing peer sharing and learning venues (e.g., coffee chats, STEP meetings, bi-annual meetings) between state agency directors around innovation and best practices, including what is not working well**

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ECOS plays an important role in providing forums for peer learning and sharing and will continue to do so with a continuous improvement approach to meet members' needs. This strategy includes support to new commissioners. Newly appointed environmental commissioners greatly value the opportunity provided by ECOS to interact with peers who are undergoing the same learning processes, from tasks such as hiring an executive management team to the more detailed nuances of dealing with legislators. It will be important for ECOS to provide the option of virtual participation at future events to accommodate tighter travel budgets and the new paradigm that COVID-19 operations have created. ECOS will coordinate with media associations and other partner organizations to ensure effective coordination on issues of mutual concern and consider holding potential biennial supra-meetings of all related organizations to discuss common issues.

### **Goal 5: Advance organizational financial sustainability and organizational effectiveness**

**Description:** The focus of goal area five is mostly concerned with ECOS as a functional organization and is intended to support ECOS as an effective, high-performing organization. This includes maintaining the organization's long term financial sustainability by developing and maintaining a reserve fund and ensuring that ECOS is an organization that can accommodate a broad range of state perspectives on important issues without fear of losing external financial support.

**Approach:** Evolve the organizational financial approach to improve long-term stability through actively managing the reserve fund and establishing a proactive, consistent strategy for securing federal funding. Improve organizational effectiveness through proactive engagement of leadership and members so that ECOS is consistently adding value for its members.

**Success:** ECOS establishes a schedule for soliciting and receiving federal funding and actively manages its reserve fund to a sustainable level.

### **Strategy 5.1: Establish a transparent and proactive schedule for ECOS to solicit and receive federal funding for providing an ongoing forum for soliciting state views and engaging states in issues of mutual importance**

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Recognizing that some degree of federal funding is necessary for ECOS to function in its important capacity of providing collective state action for the federal government to use as it discharges its responsibilities, this strategy seeks to reliably receive this funding while affirming that such funding is not contingent on ECOS members always agreeing with federal actions, positions, or policy direction. ECOS will also maintain broad-based financial stability through membership dues, meeting revenues, sponsorships and through examining opportunities for foundation grants.

### **Strategy 5.2: Develop a path to ensure organizational financial resilience**

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ECOS will work toward long-term financial resilience by actively managing the reserve fund to a sustainable level.

### **Strategy 5.3: Engage ECOS leadership**

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ECOS will engage its leadership and membership to tap the collective experience of state leadership to contribute to ECOS's organizational performance and promote the broad understanding of ECOS's importance and impact.

Note: Asterisks indicates metrics determined during annual end-of-year surveys during which time members would be asked to provide their perspective on ECOS’s progress/action under the associated strategy. For example, under Goal 1, Strategy 1.1, the survey would ask “On a scale of 1 – 10, how do you feel about ECOS, as an organization, converging around key topics? (1 = not much convergence, many topics and 10 = significant convergence).

\* = ECOS Member Survey

\*\* = Executive Committee Survey

Goal	Strategy	Possible Metrics
1: Shape the national dialogue on significant environmental and public health issues	1.1: Provide an ongoing venue for all-member dialogues on pressing environmental and public health policy issues to better understand all perspectives and policy options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convergence around key topics*</li> <li>• Process for implementing dialogue</li> </ul>
	1.2: Evaluate the range of national environmental and public health topics and focus ECOS to develop states perspective and positions on those most critical and timely to ECOS membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Committee identifies critical environmental and public health topics**</li> <li>• Executive Committee prioritizes and elevates topics**</li> <li>• Number of issues upon which ECOS develops states’ positions</li> </ul>
	1.3: Find, create, and leverage forums to instill the voice of the States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECOS provides input to federal agency rulemaking (number will vary annually)</li> <li>• ECOS actively participates in topical congressional hearings (number will vary annually)</li> <li>• ECOS will survey the landscape and select one additional forum (minimum) for each issue that ECOS developed a position on</li> </ul>
2: Seek appropriate federal resources for states’ capacity to effectively implement federally delegated environmental programs	2.1: Convene ECOS members to understand state priorities and funding shortfalls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECOS understanding of state priorities and funding shortfalls*</li> </ul>
	2.2: Advocate for sufficient federal resources to support states’ work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECOS advocacy for sufficient federal funding*</li> </ul>
	2.3: ECOS will coordinate state and EPA efforts around annual budgeting and work planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordination of state/EPA efforts*</li> </ul>
3: Build enduring institutional connectivity with EPA	3.1: Establish expectations with EPA about key shared functions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual establishment of shared state-EPA expectations (after initial establishment, annual affirmation and revision as needed)</li> <li>• Establishment of elevation policy with EPA</li> <li>• Coordination with ORD on state-generated research priorities**</li> <li>• Annual ERIS-ITRC Research Agenda developed and implemented</li> <li>• E-Enterprise selects the next set of issues in which to invest</li> </ul>

Goal	Strategy	Possible Metrics
4: Inspire peer sharing, collective joint learning, and innovation among state environmental agency leadership	4.1: Catalogue and diffuse innovations, best practices, and lessons learned using EECIP, the ECOS website, social media, green reports, webinars, and other outreach mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual increase in EECIP participation and use as measured by site visits and number of states actively entering information</li> <li>• Annual increase in ECOS website visits</li> <li>• Up to three ECOS-hosted webinars on innovation, best practices, and lessons learned</li> </ul>
	4.2: Host and support members in participating in existing peer sharing and learning venues between state agency directors (e.g., coffee chats, STEP meetings, bi-annual meetings) around innovation and best practices, including what is not working well	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ECOS hosts eight coffee chats annually</li> <li>• ECOS hosts one STEP meeting per year</li> <li>• ECOS hosts bi-annual meetings</li> <li>• ECOS hosts an annual new commissioner meeting during the ECOS spring meeting</li> </ul>
5: Advance organizational financial sustainability	5.1: Establish a transparent and proactive schedule for ECOS to solicit and receive funding from EPA for providing an ongoing forum for soliciting state views and engaging states in issues of mutual importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual funding schedule established and followed</li> </ul>
	5.2: Develop a path to organizational financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain a sustainable reserve fund</li> </ul>
	5.3 Engage ECOS leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of ECOS successes through leadership channels</li> </ul>