

Framework for State Engagement in the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative

Background

The Great Lakes states have a vested interest in the Great Lakes to ensure the protection of the health of their citizens and their environment as well as the Great Lakes economy (jobs, commerce, recreation, etc.). Federal agencies value the perspective states bring to the implementation of the GLRI and are seeking to involve states as partners early and often in defining the best combination of programs and projects for Great Lakes protection and restoration.

For many years, Great Lakes states have been actively engaged in efforts to achieve Great Lakes restoration and protection. In 2010, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) was launched as an interagency restoration effort to protect and restore the Great Lakes. This interagency restoration effort requires ongoing coordination and collaboration between the federal agencies participating in the GLRI and numerous entities that have a vested interest in seeing the Great Lakes protected and restored.

Framework for Engagement

Successful communication, collaboration and consultation, requires all parties to be committed to the process. This framework relies on and expands on the partnerships between federal agencies and states to enhance opportunities to communicate, collaborate and consult. The following sections provide an overview of the key components of this framework.

EPA Led State Forums

Across many of its programs, EPA has utilized senior management level in-person meetings as a mechanism to engage with states on program implementation. These forums provide an opportunity to discuss overall program goals as well as discuss any recommendations or concerns the states may have related to program implementation.

For the GLRI, EPA intends to establish regularly reoccurring senior management level in-person meetings. These meetings will occur at least twice a year but could occur more often if needed. In general, these meetings are an opportunity for EPA to discuss with the eight Great Lakes states:

- EPA-led programs under the GLRI (e.g. Areas of Concern program, Lakewide Management and Action Plans, Baseline Great Lakes Monitoring programs, etc.); and
- GLRI policy and program implementation (e.g. Action Plan, long term monitoring and maintenance, etc.)

The other GLRI federal agencies will be invited to participate in these meetings particularly for those discussions related to GLRI policy and program implementation.

Existing Federal Agency State Partnerships

The GLRI is built upon many existing federal programs that further Great Lakes restoration and protection. Through these existing programs, federal agencies have already established partnerships with states related to the programs and projects they implement. This framework relies on these existing partnerships as a mechanism for the Great Lakes states to identify any state specific priorities for consideration by individual federal agencies.

Given the number of federal agencies that participate in the GLRI, it is critical that states have an ability to engage with federal agencies through these existing partnerships. In particular, states need some level of detail (who, what, when, etc.) about these many partnerships. To enhance the state's ability to maximize their opportunities to engage, GLRI federal agencies will consolidate into a single matrix the partnerships that exist between themselves and the states. The matrix will capture the following key information:

- Federal and state agency involved;
- Federal and state contacts involved;
- Federal and state programs involved; and
- Timing of partnership coordination

The GLRI federal agencies will update, and share with the states, the matrix annually.

Federal Agency and State GLRI Contacts

Given the wide range of environmental problems being addressed under the GLRI, many of the federal agencies have identified points of contact for each of the Focus Areas within the GLRI. In addition, some of the federal agencies have identified a point of contact to coordinate GLRI activities for their agency.

To ensure the states have the ability to connect with the appropriate individuals within federal agencies, GLRI federal agencies will maintain a list of federal GLRI contacts that can be shared with the states. The GLRI federal agencies will update, and share with the states, the contact list annually.

To the extent available, the GLRI federal agencies will also include in the list any state identified points of contact for overall coordination of GLRI activity or for coordination of a Focus Area.

State Input Point in the GLRI Budgeting and Planning Process

The GLRI budgeting and planning process is conducted by the GLRI federal agencies as a part of the overall budgeting process for the federal government. This process relies heavily on the concept of out-year planning – meaning the GLRI budgeting and planning process is a discussion of funding for programs and projects two-years out. For example, in fiscal year 2017, GLRI

federal agencies conducted a budgeting and planning process for funding programs and projects in fiscal year 2019.

Consulting with the states during this budgeting and planning process is critical to ensuring that state priorities are considered. While the GLRI federal agencies anticipate they will obtain information on state priorities through their existing partnership opportunities, EPA will as a part of the budgeting and planning process reach out to the states to solicit any additional input. This solicitation will generally occur around February each year with an expectation that state input would be received no later than early May each year. All state input received will be provided to EPA’s Focus Area leads for further discussion within each Focus Area. As appropriate, EPA’s Focus Area leads may request further information from a state or request a conference call/meeting with a state to ensure their input is fully evaluated. EPA will work with the GLRI federal agencies to provide feedback on which priorities and/or projects the federal agency will be able to address at the start of each fiscal year.

The following figure illustrates the timeline for the federal budgeting and planning process and identifies those points where state input will be sought.

