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E C O S

Five-Year  
Strategic Plan

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**2016–2020**

# Contents

Letter from the Executive Director .....	3
Introduction and Background .....	4
Five-Year Plan Goal Areas .....	5
<b>Goal Area 1:</b> Effectiveness of State Environmental Agency Leadership .....	7
<b>Goal Area 2:</b> Effectiveness of State Environmental Agencies .....	9
<b>Goal Area 3:</b> ECOS and States' Relationship with Federal Agencies .....	11
<b>Goal Area 4:</b> ECOS as a Voice in Environmental Policy .....	13
<b>Goal Area 5:</b> ECOS Organizational Performance .....	15
Affirmation .....	17



## A Letter from ECOS' Executive Director

Benjamin Franklin is reported to have said, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." The leadership of the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) is confident of a productive, relevant, and dynamic future, and the following Strategic Plan is a critical underpinning tool which ensures that this is indeed the result going forward.

As environmental, energy, natural resource, and public health issues continue to evolve, change, and intersect, ECOS' value as an organization can only increase. ECOS is a unique place for state environmental leaders to meet with one another, to share best practices, and to increase their own knowledge and capacity as they undertake one of the most difficult positions they may hold in their careers. This Strategic Plan documents that the clear priorities of the organization are to remain whole, effective, inclusive, respectful, and sustainable. There can be no more motivating vision for the entire ECOS staff—and on behalf of all of us, I express our commitment to making this Strategic Plan a true north star as we carry out ECOS' work.

ECOS expresses its appreciation to Rob Willis and Andy Chinn of Ross Strategic for their assistance with this effort. Please contact me at any time to discuss your comments, concerns, input, or contributions. It is our collective privilege to be a part of ECOS at this time.



Alexandra Dapolito Dunn, Esq.  
ECOS Executive Director & General Counsel

## Introduction and Background

This document describes the five-year Strategic Plan for the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS). The plan is organized into five goal areas, each of which contains a statement summarizing the goal; a series of strategies by which ECOS aims to achieve each goal; and performance measures to gauge progress toward each goal. The Appendix is a table summarizing the goals, strategies, and performance measures.

The ECOS five-year Strategic Plan is built around the ECOS mission, which is encapsulated in the organizational bylaws:

The purpose of ECOS is to improve the capability of state environmental agencies and their leaders to protect and improve human health and the environment of the United States of America.

Our belief is that state government agencies are the keys to delivering environmental protection afforded by both federal and state law. Further, ECOS provides leadership on environmental issues of national importance and plays a critical role in facilitating a quality relationship among and between federal and state agencies. To fulfill its mission, ECOS will:

- Articulate, advocate, preserve, and champion the role of the states in environmental management;
- Provide for the exchange of ideas, views, and experiences among states and with others;
- Foster cooperation and coordination in environmental management; and
- Articulate state positions to Congress, federal agencies, and the public on environmental issues.

The ECOS Executive Committee and staff will reassess the ECOS five-year Strategic Plan annually to determine if the goal areas and strategies continue to provide value to the organization. ECOS leadership will adjust elements of the Strategic Plan as needed following these assessments.



## Strategic Plan Development Process

The ECOS five-year Strategic Plan was developed throughout the fall and winter of 2015 and early 2016 by the ECOS Executive Committee. Individual Executive Committee members provided input leading up to a planning retreat with the Executive Committee in Denver on November 8 and 9, 2015. During the retreat, Executive Committee members emphasized the following key points to be included in the Plan:

- Respect for diverse voices
- Ensure that ECOS resolutions, policy statements, and communications are meaningful
- Ensure that ECOS services and products are useful to members
- Emphasize increased ECOS member dialogue during calls and at in-person meetings
- Emphasize sharing innovation in state environmental management and best practices

Drafting the ECOS five-year Strategic Plan was followed by an ECOS member comment phase during March, 2016 with finalization in early April 2016, and adoption by the ECOS membership during the April 2016 ECOS Spring Meeting.

## Five-Year Plan Goal Areas

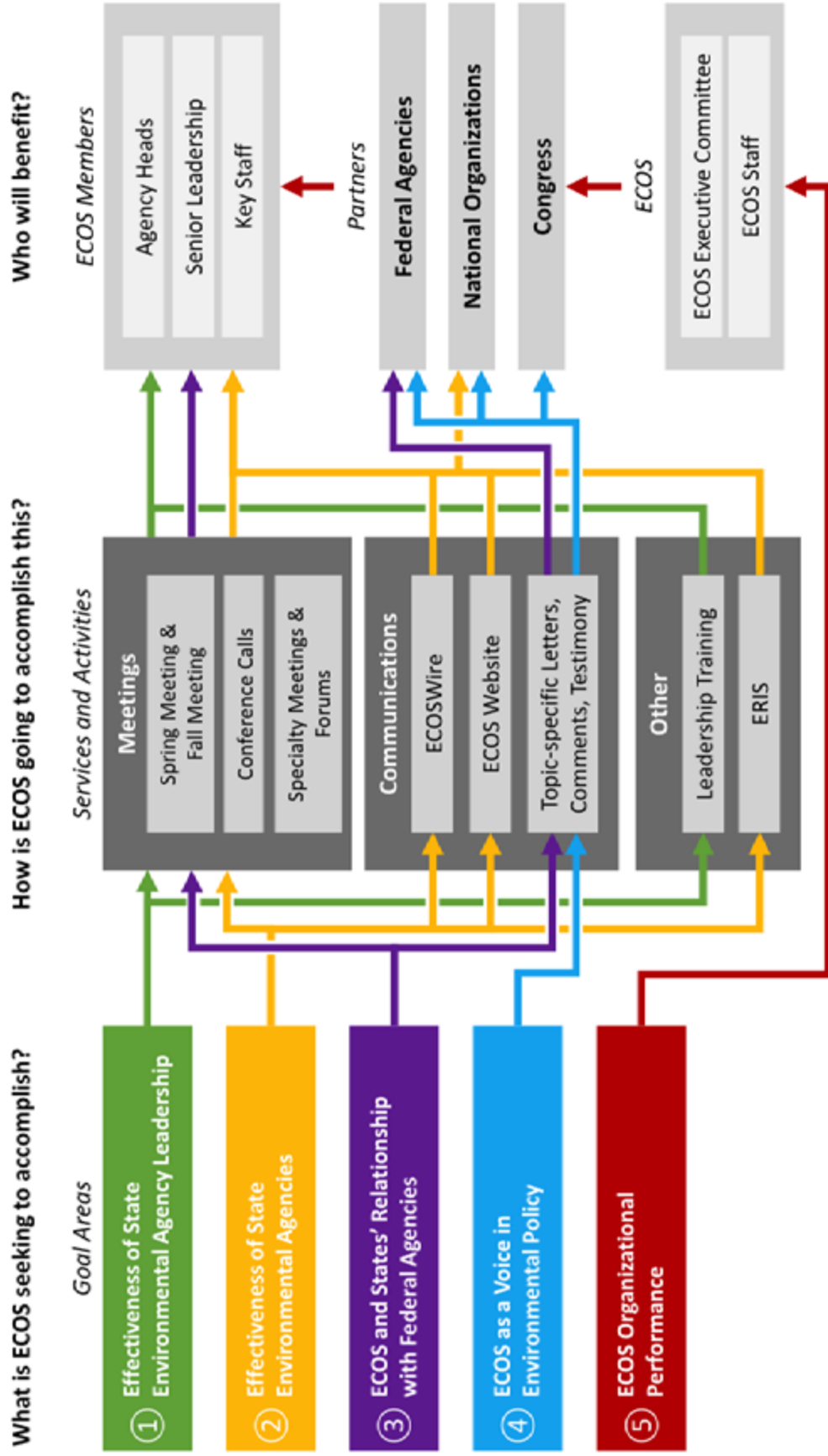
ECOS' Strategic Plan is divided into five goal areas:

- Effectiveness of State Environmental Agency Leadership
- Effectiveness of State Environmental Agencies
- ECOS and States' Relationship with Federal Agencies
- ECOS as a Voice in Environmental (and Related) Policy
- ECOS Organizational Performance

The goal areas for the ECOS five-year Strategic Plan are described in detail below, with associated strategies, and measures to gauge progress toward each goal. It is important to note that the goal areas and strategies do not create new organizational roles or responsibilities; rather, they enhance existing capabilities and/or redesign existing ECOS services to better reflect and serve the needs of ECOS members. Also note that several strategies are cross-cutting under multiple goal areas.

Figure 1 (next page) illustrates primary, but not exclusive, connections among the goal areas, ECOS services, and ECOS members.

Figure 1:  
ECOS Strategic Plan Circuit Board—Overview Map of Goal Areas to Services and Beneficiaries



GOAL  
AREA  
1

## Effectiveness of State Environmental Agency Leadership

*ECOS facilitates peer support and learning among state environmental agency leadership.*

### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 1 aims to enhance ECOS' roll in facilitating peer support and learning among state environmental agency leadership. ECOS historically facilitated peer support and learning through various activities; this five-year Strategic Plan seeks to enhance and more formally delineate this role. ECOS leadership acknowledges that ECOS members place significant value on interacting with—and learning from—their leadership peers. This learning and interaction ranges from overall leadership to general organizational performance (such as staff recruitment, retention, and transition).

ECOS leadership also recognizes the value of providing a knowledge base and support for new state environmental agency leadership as ECOS members. As a national organization, ECOS is in a position to provide capacity building and orientation for new members on a variety of topics, including: federal agency processes; interactions with Congress; and ECOS' structure, opportunities, and services.

Under this goal area, ECOS will also enhance the effectiveness of state environmental agency leadership by redesigning both in-person meetings and conference calls to foster more state-to-state interaction and address issues that are timely and relevant for ECOS members.

### Strategies and Actions

ECOS will use the actions listed in Table 1 (next page) to estimate progress in goal area one. ECOS staff, in consultation with leadership, will develop performance measures and phase in / operationalize the actions below.



*Table 1:  
Goal Area 1 Strategies and Associated Measures*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ECOS facilitates peer support and learning among state environmental agency leadership.</i></b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
<b>1.A.</b> Provide leadership and professional skills development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Design webinars and engage ECOS members to identify topics of interest related to key professional skills (e.g., high performing organizations, transferrable best practices)</li> </ul>
<b>1.B.</b> Provide new ECOS member capacity building and orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop curricula for new ECOS commissioner orientation</li> <li>■ Pilot member orientation</li> <li>■ Develop list of alumni mentors for new ECOS commissioners</li> <li>■ Consider formation of alumni resource board or Council of Past Presidents</li> </ul>
<b>1.C.</b> Design in-person meetings to foster more state-to-state interaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Additional state focused sessions during spring and annual meetings</li> <li>■ Increase networking opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>1.D.</b> Conduct monthly ECOS calls/webinars focused on timely issues relevant to ECOS members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identification of formal and informal processes to identify relevant topics</li> <li>■ Refine presentation mode to ensure relevance and quality of presentation</li> </ul>



GOAL  
AREA  
2

## Effectiveness of State Environmental Agencies

*ECOS facilitates peer support and learning among state environmental agency leadership.*

### Goal Area Description

Goal Area 2 focuses on supporting the effectiveness of state environmental agencies as they carry out their core responsibilities. Whereas the beneficiaries of Goal Area 1 are primarily environmental agency leadership, the beneficiaries of Goal Area 2 are environmental agency staff who are responsible

for day-to-day environmental management. In order to maximize their organizations' limited resources, ECOS members look to their peers to gain insights and best practices for environmental management; to this end, ECOS will redesign existing services to support this goal area. In particular, the ECOS standing committees will be re-envisioned to support sharing of ideas and best practices, and will be the forum in which resolutions are developed, refined, and adjusted. Rather than follow a set schedule, ECOS committee meetings will be scheduled as needed/requested. ECOS will redesign its website to better capture and organize examples of states' best practices for environmental management, and ECOS will design and execute an annual STEP event. ECOS will also continue to connect the work of the Environmental Research Institute of the States (ERIS) and the Interstate Technology and Regulatory Council (ITRC) with states' needs, and incorporate ERIS' work into ECOS activities (see sidebar).

### Strategies and Actions

ECOS will use the actions listed in Table 2 (next page) to estimate progress in Goal Area 2. ECOS staff, in consultation with leadership, will develop performance measures and phase in / operationalize the actions below.

#### Environmental Research Institute of the States (ERIS) and the Interstate Technology and Regulatory Council (ITRC)

ECOS provides leadership on environmental issues of national importance and facilitates a strong relationship between federal and state agencies. ECOS also oversees the Environmental Research Institute of the States, Inc. (ERIS), its wholly owned 501(c)3 education and research organization. The ERIS mission is to identify current and future state environmental challenges and priorities and to connect those needs with the research priorities and initiatives of EPA/ORD and other science-based organizations with the goal of focusing science and research priorities to improve the environment of the United States. In addition, ERIS operates the Interstate Technology and Regulatory Council (ITRC). In carrying out the ERIS mission, the ITRC is used as the delivery mechanism to work with states, federal, tribal, industry partners and the public, to increase knowledge and break down barriers to the use of innovative, cost-effective environmental technologies and solutions.

Table 2:  
Goal Area 2 Strategies and Associated Measures

Goal Statement: <b>States' environmental management capacity is supported by ECOS.</b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
<p><b>2.A.</b> Re-envision standing committees as idea incubators, promoters of best practices, and forums for resolution development and refinement as appropriate</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Actions under this strategy are described under other goal areas</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.B.</b> Focus resources to identify, share, and promote transferrable practices and experiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Redesign the ECOS website to allow easier access to examples of transferable practices from states</li> <li>■ Highlight transferrable practices in regular ECOS communications (i.e., <i>ECOSWire</i>)</li> <li>■ Offer transferrable lessons learned discussions at ECOS meetings</li> <li>■ Continue annual award program to recognize ECOS member agency innovations</li> <li>■ ECOS Staff will proactively identify, document, and disseminate transferable practices and experiences</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.C.</b> Cultivate interfaces with ERIS to connect science and research opportunities with ECOS activities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Develop annual survey to proactively assess ECOS members' science and research priorities</li> <li>■ Ensure regular interfacing of ERIS and ECOS leadership, including through liaison positions</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA  
3

## ECOS and States' Relationship with Federal Agencies

*ECOS invests in assuring a constructive relationship with federal agency partners.*

### Goal Area Description

ECOS plays an important role in cultivating and maintaining a positive working relationship among state agencies and the federal government, based on the principle of cooperative federalism. Although U.S. EPA is the federal agency with which state environmental organizations primarily interact, Goal Area 3 applies to states' relationships with agencies throughout the federal government. The goal area includes strategies intended to illustrate the elements of a positive working relationship, such as process flexibility, conflict resolution methods, collaboration, and engagement on key issues. Within this goal area, ECOS will also work to proactively reach out to leadership during periods of political transition, and will continue to move forward with joint initiatives that increase program efficiency.

Through the Environmental Research Institute of the States (ERIS), ECOS has also begun the process of improving alignment between states' science/ research priorities and those of the federal government, presently working with EPA's Office of Research and Development (ORD). ECOS will continue this process and will pursue opportunities to further align state and federal research needs.



### Strategies and Actions

ECOS will use the actions listed in Table 3 (next page) to estimate progress in Goal Area 3. ECOS staff, in consultation with leadership, will phase in / operationalize the actions below.

**Table 3:**  
**Goal Area 3 Strategies and Associated Actions**

Goal Statement: <b><i>ECOS invests in assuring a constructive relationship with federal agency partners.</i></b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
<p><b>3.A.</b> Provide forums through which states, EPA, and other federal agencies can work to meet joint responsibilities in protecting human health and the environment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ As noted in other goal areas, this strategy will be accomplished through monthly member and on demand committee calls to identify current topics of interest</li> <li>■ Maintain an active venue for EPA (and other federal agencies as appropriate) to gather real-time state input</li> <li>■ Support, as requested by ECOS members, formal and informal interactions between state and federal partners on issues of relevance to groups of states in a manner consistent with ECOS policy and resolutions</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.B.</b> Promote early, substantive, and meaningful engagement around federal processes, including but not limited to the EPA budget and rulemaking processes and other issues of national significance</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Participate in EPA's annual budget and priority-setting meetings</li> <li>■ Engage with EPA on state and federal priorities</li> <li>■ Partner with other federal agencies on their budgets and state and federal priorities</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.C.</b> Reach out to EPA and other agencies' leadership during times of transition</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Communicate with leadership</li> <li>■ Focus on state-federal collaboration during ECOS meetings, building partnerships, and in between, on collaborative initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.D.</b> Advance states' and EPA commitment to advancing efficient operations through E-Enterprise for the Environment and process improvement programs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support the ongoing work of E-Enterprise for the Environment and affiliated groups</li> <li>■ Involve ECOS members and staff in efficiency programs and initiatives</li> <li>■ Seek joint governance opportunities</li> <li>■ Collaborate with EPA in advancing processes improvement initiatives</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.E.</b> Cultivate principles of cooperative federalism to allocate responsibilities for actions in various environmental arenas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Actions under this strategy are described under other goal areas and are implicit in other strategies</li> </ul>
<p><b>3.F.</b> Connect, through ERIS, states' research needs and priorities with federal agency research agendas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ongoing through ERIS and ITRC (refer to ERIS and ITRC Strategic Plan)</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA  
4

## ECOS as a Voice in Environmental Policy

*ECOS is a trusted source of states' perspectives, developed through principles of openness, respectful dialogue, scientific rigor, and pragmatic experience.*

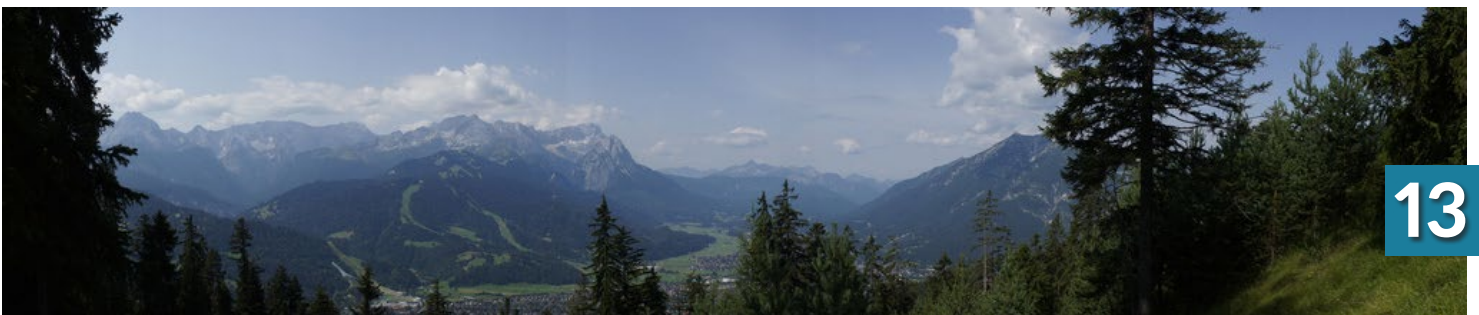
### Goal Description

The overarching intent of Goal Area 4 is to solidify ECOS' position as the primary point of contact for state perspectives on environmental policy. ECOS leadership recognizes the need to design the committee structure such that the diversity of state perspectives on key environmental policy issues is an asset to be built upon, rather than an impediment. Diversity of state perspectives will be a prominent feature of ECOS' role as a voice in environmental policy through ECOS' public communications such as written statements, testimony before and submitted to federal agencies and Congress, and other channels. The ECOS website will be redesigned, and maintained, for better access to ECOS documents and communications materials. Alignment with other national organizations is also a featured strategy under this goal area (note that this strategy is crosscutting and is also featured under goal area 5).

ECOS leadership recognizes that where a high level of consensus exists, resolutions can be an effective and powerful tool for communicating the states' position on important issues. When broad perspectives among states prevent a high level of consensus, other approaches more effectively communicate the range of state views. Goal Area 4 calls out a strategy to restructure the resolution process to ensure resolutions are pursued when they are the most appropriate tool, and to advance other approaches to policy issues where a broad range of views exists among the members.

### Strategies and Actions

ECOS will use the actions listed in Table 4 (next page) to estimate progress in Goal Area 4. ECOS staff, in consultation with leadership, will develop performance measures and phase in / operationalize the actions below.



*Table 4:  
Goal Area 4 Strategies and Associated Actions*

Goal Statement: <b><i>ECOS is a trusted source of states' perspectives, developed through principles of openness, respectful dialogue, scientific rigor, and pragmatic experience.</i></b>	
<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Associated Actions</b>
<b>4.A.</b> Design committee structure and re-orient ECOS staff to add value to dialogue around environmental issues whether or not consensus exists among states on the underlying science or potential policy approaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reestablish the goals and focus of ECOS standing committees</li> <li>■ Engage ECOS staff in the ECOS Strategic Plan as they carry out Committee work</li> <li>■ Reorient other forms of communication (e.g., letters, Congressional testimony, informal communications) to carry forward the diversity of state perspectives</li> <li>■ Actively participate in environment public policy forums</li> </ul>
<b>4.B.</b> Amplify states' voices through alignment with other national organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue active communications and engagement with leadership from other national organizations</li> </ul>
<b>4.C.</b> Revamp the purpose and process for resolutions to better advance ECOS purpose and mission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Update ECOS bylaws to reflect changes to purpose and process for resolutions</li> </ul>
<b>4.D.</b> Redesign ECOS website to enhance ECOS' role as a trusted source for state perspectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Design and maintain website to allow policy statements and other documents to be more easily accessed by stakeholders</li> </ul>

GOAL  
AREA  
5

## ECOS Organizational Performance

*ECOS is an effective, high-performing organization.*

### Goal Description

The focus of Goal Area 5 is mostly inward 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 (similar to elements of Goal Area 4) ensuring that ECOS is an organization that can accommodate a broad range of state perspectives on important issues. ECOS leadership also recognizes in this goal area the importance of connecting to a broad array of state and federal agencies with knowledge and expertise that overlaps with the environmental policy arena, such as agriculture, energy, transportation, and public health. ECOS has traditionally held strong relationships with other key national organizations, in particular those organizations with environmental media missions; as part of Goal Area 5, ECOS leadership will continue to invest in these relationships. Finally, as part of Goal Area 5, ECOS will continue its emphasis on high-quality staff that provide value to process as well as substance.



### Strategies and Actions

ECOS will use the actions listed in Table 5 (next page) to estimate progress in Goal Area 5. ECOS staff, in consultation with leadership, will develop performance measures and phase in / operationalize the actions below.

Table 5: Goal Area 5 Strategies and Associated Actions

Goal Statement: <b>ECOS is an effective, high-performing organization.</b>	
Strategies	Associated Actions
<b>5.A.</b> Maintain long term financial sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Work with leadership to develop a reserve fund policy that advances ECOS' stability</li> </ul>
<b>5.B.</b> Foster an inclusive organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ At a minimum annually, assess staff satisfaction and provide opportunities for staff to provide input to organizational advancement strategies</li> </ul>
<b>5.C.</b> Cultivate relationships and project opportunities with a variety of federal and state agencies, as well as private foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Support staff in efforts to develop grant and cooperative agreement proposals</li> <li>■ Proactively explore new federal funding opportunities</li> </ul>
<b>5.D.</b> Develop and invest in relationships with other key national environmental management organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Enhance effectiveness of quarterly informal leadership meetings with national media organizations</li> <li>■ Seek involvement of key national and regional organizations in ECOS calls and meetings</li> </ul>
<b>5.E.</b> Cultivate a staff that advances subject matter expertise and a high degree of professionalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ As resources allow, provide training opportunities to ECOS staff; in hiring and retaining staff, include subject matter expertise as a valuable/core skillset</li> <li>■ Create an office environment that supports learning, teamwork, and information sharing among ECOS staff</li> </ul>



## Affirmation

*Through the goal areas and strategies outlined in the five-year Strategic Plan, ECOS affirms its commitment to provide the highest level of service in support of its members. The five-year Strategic Plan is intended to guide ECOS' actions and will be adapted as needed.*



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