

EPA GROUP ON EARTH OBSERVATIONS (GEO) CHARTER

Background

The EPA Group on Earth Observations, known as “EPA GEO,” was established by the Agency’s Science Policy Council (SPC) in April 2005 to coordinate EPA’s internal role in the Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) and benefit from it. The Group on Earth Observations (GEO) is an intergovernmental, international effort to develop GEOSS, an integrated approach to comprehensive, coordinated and sustained observations of the Earth system. The GEO vision reflects a global scientific and political consensus that assessing the state of the Earth will assist in making informed environmental and public health decisions on personal and global levels.

For EPA, benefitting from GEOSS requires an evolution in the way we collect, manage and analyze Earth observations and deliver this information to environmental decision makers. Our existing collection of systems, which are largely single-purpose systems designed to fulfill specific missions, needs to evolve into an interoperable “system of systems” that supports multiple uses with greater efficiency, public accessibility and analytical value and is connected to the greater global information commons embodied in GEOSS. This evolution requires investments in infrastructure that may not have direct or immediate benefits for decision support.

Purpose

EPA GEO’s primary goal is to facilitate EPA’s response and contribution to the development of GEOSS. The ultimate goal of GEOSS is to provide decision makers with scientific information that can advance societal benefit areas including human health, ecosystems, climate change and air and water quality. The GEOSS architecture integrates environmental observation, monitoring data and measurements with modeling to support decision making. In addition to transferring currently funded research to decision support and initiating new projects, EPA GEO’s primary responsibility is to directly support the Agency’s Science Priorities while leveraging capabilities across its program and regional offices, as well as partnering with states, other federal agencies and the international community. These efforts should guide the Agency to integrate monitoring and observational data, modeling results, technology and decision tools.

Scope of Activity

EPA GEO is expected to function as the SPC’s internal GEOSS coordinating forum where Agency-wide issues are raised and deliberated, and recommendations are made about EPA’s role in GEOSS. Primary activities to be addressed by EPA GEO include, but are not limited to:

1. Ensure a credible and transparent EPA GEO organization and Advanced Monitoring Initiative (AMI)/EPA GEO project selection process.
2. Develop a set of EPA GEO strategic actions and investments that further the development of GEOSS, support the SPC science priorities and benefit EPA’s mission.

3. Enhance communication and coordination of related activities across EPA program and regional offices, especially through the SPC Steering Committee and other SPC committees (councils, forums, etc.).
4. Enhance the accessibility and application of EPA Earth observation data and products.
5. Contribute to and influence the development of GEOSS beyond EPA by partnering with states, other federal agencies and the international community, to advance monitoring and modeling technology and the development of decision tools for integrated problem solving through relevant communities of practice.

Membership

EPA Science Policy Council members designate the membership of EPA GEO, as appropriate. Members of EPA GEO represent their SPC member and are expected to have science and policy expertise relevant to monitoring, modeling, Earth observations, remote sensing, or development of decision tools. In addition, EPA GEO members are expected to routinely work with their SPC and SPC Steering Committee counterparts.

Organization

Reporting/Authority

The EPA GEO was established by and reports to the Science Policy Council. All EPA GEO decisions should be discussed with the Earth Observation Systems Executive and presented to the Chief Scientist for concurrence.

The SPC, generally, will review and approve the EPA GEO charter every three years.

Chair

The EPA Science Advisor in his/her role as Chair of the Science Policy Council should nominate an EPA GEO Chair for approval by the SPC, and the chair is expected to serve for the term of this charter, unless determined otherwise by the SPC. The EPA GEO Chair and staff are responsible for scheduling, planning, conducting and summarizing EPA GEO meetings.

Operating Principles

EPA GEO will operate by a consensus process, and the chair will be responsible for determining when a consensus has, or has not, been reached. The chair will be responsible for identifying when a resolution or compromise cannot be reached on an issue and elevating that issue to the Earth Observation Systems Executive, Chief Scientist or SPC for resolution (in that order). For the purposes of EPA GEO, consensus is generally accepted agreement without need for a formal vote. Consensus does not require unanimity. In other words, if there is a lack of active or voiced opposition on a decision and the principals are willing to let the decision move forward, consensus has been reached.

Action Teams

Action teams may be formed by EPA GEO to address specific issues. The group may establish an *ad hoc* Action Team after motion by any EPA GEO member and agreement by the group. Action Teams are intended to be temporary and will exist as long as needed to meet defined objectives regarding particular environmental problems. EPA GEO defines the charge for each Action Team, and teams will report progress to the group for discussion and further action. Participation in any Action Team is voluntary.

Accountability

EPA GEO will develop an annual action plan submitted to the SPC for approval. The annual plan will include performance measures with expected outcomes linked to the EPA and GEO Strategic Plans. All AMI/GEOSS principal investigators (PIs) will submit mid-year project progress reports and annual accomplishment reports to the OSA Program Manager and the EPA GEO Chair. The annual accomplishments reports are due on August 31. The reports will be the basis for GEOSS funding decisions.

Location and Support

EPA GEO will be organizationally supported in the Office of the Science Advisor (OSA). Funding for EPA GEO-related activities will be managed by OSA.

Approved by EPA GEO on 6/25/09

Approved by Chief Scientist on 9/15/09

Approved by SPC on 10/2/09