

**Recommendations Report to Scope the Requirements for a
Proposal to Evaluate State Coastal Zone Management Programs and
National Estuarine Research Reserves**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Office for Coastal Management (OCM) contracted ECS Federal, LLC to conduct an analysis of their current state program evaluation process and provide recommendations for improvement, how to restructure the process through a regional focus, and assess the feasibility of outsourcing the evaluation process. The review process was based on (1) the review of relevant background documents, (2) semi-structured interviews with OCM staff, CZM directors and NERR managers, and (3) participation in 312 evaluation site visits.

Summary of major findings

1. OCM's evaluation process for CZM and NERR programs is comprised of a variety of program data collection activities, an on-site panel evaluation visit, and post-evaluation findings and actions.
2. Most data/metrics collected are not formally used in the 312 evaluation process. For example, no performance measurement data was discussed as part of the 312 site visit. Only a very brief discussion of the evaluation metrics is included in the evaluation findings.
3. The on-site evaluation is based on a subset of target areas negotiated months before the site visit, rather than on all aspects of the programs since the previous evaluation.
4. The evaluation process is not firmly anchored in a defined program theory.
5. The state program and reserve evaluation process is viewed differently by different stakeholders, programs, and evaluators. Collectively, it seeks to accomplish a broad array of often competing goals.
6. The implementation of the state program and reserve evaluation process is problematic, with delayed intervals between evaluations and often long delays between evaluations and reports.
7. The site visits and associated developmental evaluation aspects are valuable to accomplish a number of goals, including developing and strengthening the relationships between state programs and OCM managers.
8. The process and outcome aspects of the state program and reserve evaluation process have received comparatively little attention and may not benefit as much from an in person approach.
9. By their very nature and state/place focus, the CZM and NERR programs may not be best suited for joint regional activities, but may share concerns and issues that they have in common because of their shared regional geography.
10. Digital Coast is a resource for CMZ and NERR managers to use, and is a user driven resource to address coastal management issues broadly. It describes itself as issue agnostic and its priorities are entirely defined by the needs of its constituents, which extend well beyond the CZM and NERR program stakeholders.

Summary of recommendations

Recommendations regarding development of an effective performance measurement system

1. OCM should work with its state programs to define regional and/or national performance goals, metrics and associated targets.

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2. OCM should develop a clear program theory for itself for how it will advance each of these goals through its engagement with the CZM and NERR programs.
 3. Increase OCM internal evaluation capacity (e.g. staffing) to execute this programming
- Recommendations for site specific metrics and integration into a performance measurement system
4. Support programs in integrating site specific performance metrics into the NERR management plan renewal/CZM 309 planning process in order to ensure site specific performance metrics reflect high priority areas.
 5. Provide technical assistance to programs in identifying appropriate metrics and targets.
 6. Integrate review of site specific performance goals into the annual cooperative agreement renewal process.
 7. Integrate analysis of performance target achievement into the 312 evaluation process.
 8. OCM should clearly communicate how site specific performance metrics are used to show state programs the value of their contributions in this reporting requirement in storytelling and addressing national priorities, etc.

Recommendations regarding the type of evaluation

9. The 312 evaluation process should be divided into an off-site process and outcome evaluation to assess program compliance, accountability and performance, and an on-site developmental evaluation aimed at relationship building, problem solving, organizational learning and supporting program improvement.

Recommendations regarding outsourcing the 312 evaluations

10. The ECS team strongly recommends against a full outsourcing of the developmental aspects of the on-site 312 evaluation process.
11. The ECS team strongly recommends that OCM consider outsourcing of the process and outcome aspects of the 312 evaluation process that could be performed off-site.

Recommendations regarding a regional approach to 312 evaluations

12. Because the 312 mandates performance evaluations of individual programs and a regional focus is not uniformly appropriate or viable for all programs, we recommend against integrating the 312 process into a regional framework.
13. Regional exchange of ideas and best practices on topics of mutual interest to CZM and NERR programs are already in place in some regions, and should be encouraged where appropriate. Developmental evaluation activities during the site visit may serve as one vehicle for promoting regional exchange of ideas and best practices for programs in which that is a priority (see Table 4).
14. A regional integration of the state-based evaluations could include back-to-back evaluation of the CZM and NERR programs within a given state, and to the extent possible, considering potential burden on regional directors and stewardship staff, scheduling reviews of programs in neighboring states in a short period of time (1 or 2 years). These measures could help reduce costs and increase opportunities.

Recommendations regarding integration of Digital Coast into 312 evaluations

15. It would not be feasible or advisable to attempt to systematically use the 312 process to document the use and benefit of all Digital Coast products, tools, trainings and services.
16. We recommend integrating an evaluation of OCM's Digital Coast tools, services and trainings through stakeholder survey.

2. INTRODUCTION TO CZM, NERR, OCM AND DIGITAL COAST

Healthy coastal areas and communities are vital to the U.S. economy and responsible management is key to ensuring the sustainability of our Nation's coasts. NOAA's Office for Coastal Management (OCM) is tasked with implementing the Coastal Zone Management Act's (CZMA) goal to "preserve, protect, develop, and where possible, to restore or enhance the resources of the nation's coastal zone." The enactment of the CZMA provided guidance for the creation and implementation of the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) program and the National Estuarine Research Reserves (NERR) System (NERRS) which are managed by appropriate state agencies, with NOAA providing funding and national level guidance and the state providing required matching funds and associated support as required. Additionally, the CZMA outlines six focus areas which guide the direction of the state CZM and NERRS programming efforts: 1) coastal habitat, 2) coastal water quality, 3) public access, 4) coastal hazards, 5) coastal community development, and 6) government coordination.

The CZM program is a partnership of coastal states and territories and the federal government to manage our nation's coastal resources, with 34 states and territories represented. These state programs are tasked with managing the multiple uses of our coasts, ensuring economic productivity while preserving and restoring coastal resources. The NERRS is comprised of 28 coastal sites, which are a unique network of representative estuarine areas providing a connection between NOAA and the states to ensure the conservation and understanding of the Nation's estuaries by 1) acting as stewards of the land, 2) conducting innovative and long-term research and monitoring, 3) providing tools and trainings for decision makers and other stakeholders, and 4) educating the public about why it is important to conserve estuaries and how they help maintain productive coastal areas.

In 2014, NOAA's Office of Ocean and Coastal Resource Management and the Coastal Services Center merged to create the Office for Coastal Management, combining valuable resources and expertise to protect coastal habitats and provide the necessary services, tools, and trainings to coastal managers and other stakeholders. Under the Coastal Services Center, Digital Coast, an online platform targeted to coastal managers, was created to provide a one-stop shop for data and the services, tools, and trainings needed to utilize these data. Although now managed by OCM, Digital Coast is a compilation of data from local, state, federal, and non-government organizations. According to its strategic plan, Digital Coast's vision is to "be the most widely used and respected community resource for addressing coastal management issues through the use of data, tools, training, and partnerships." Merging the Ocean and Coastal Resource Management and Coastal Services Center offices under one organizational framework has allowed OCM the oversight to ensure coastal managers have the knowledge and access to new tools to solve coastal management issues through the Digital Coast.

3. EXISTING COMPONENTS OF THE OCM EVALUATION SYSTEM

Currently, OCM's evaluation process for CZM and NERR programs is comprised of a variety of program data collection activities, an on-site panel evaluation visit, and post-evaluation findings and actions. The overall process is both resource intensive and time consuming for OCM as well as state programs and reserves. OCM's evaluation process has been revised over the years, with the most recent revision in 2013. The 2013 revision led to a more focused scope of program evaluation including concentrating on up to 3 target areas during site visits, structured data collection processes, shorter site visits, and shorter findings documents. However, due to the nature of the evaluation and limited resources, the process is still lengthy and resource intensive.

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The goals that OCM has identified for their evaluation system are as follows:

1. Improve programs and policies in a systematic manner,
2. Enable monitoring of program performance for accountability,
3. Provide opportunities for NOAA, state CZM and NERR programs, and partners to discuss problems and solutions, and,
4. Identify program impacts.

The current OCM evaluation system is comprised of two core components:

- Federal and State defined evaluation metrics and
- 312 Site Evaluation Activities including information submittal by OCM Site Liaisons and Program Directors, document review of management plans and annual reports, stakeholder surveys, and public comment

Additional information collected regularly from CZM and NERR programs include:

- The CZM Program 309 Assessment and Strategy Grants (CZMA 309 Enhancement Program),
- The NERR management plans,
- Biennial reports to the Stewardship Liaison for the purposes of grant management, and
- Annual grant proposals submitted to OCM.

3.a. Performance Metrics

OCM collects two types of quantitative performance metrics through their federal performance metrics and site- specific performance metrics (collectively, evaluation metrics).

In 2008 and 2014, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) addressed the OCM program's evaluation metrics and identified areas for improvement to utilize performance metrics collected. OCM has taken steps to address the GAO recommendations to improve and report on progress toward metrics. For example, OCM has an updated progress report that tracks the status of addressing the 2014 recommendations; the most recent update was published March 2016. Tables 1 and 2 outline the breakdown of the federal performance measures based on both priority area as well as the nature of the indicator in terms of whether it is a measure of a program outcome versus an output or strategy measure. The Federal performance metrics provide national, and potentially, regional descriptive information on the execution and impacts of the CZMA programs. Several of these federal metrics are reported up the chain of command to NOAA and as part of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) performance metrics, and are reported in the annual budget for OCM.

Table 1: CZM annual site-specific performance metrics.

CZM Annual Performance Metrics	Measures
Coastal Dependent Uses & Community Development	6
outcome	4
strategy/outputs	2
Coastal Habitat	18
outcome	16
strategy/outputs	2
Coastal Hazards	6

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outcome	4
strategy/outputs	2
Decision making /Coordination	7
outcome	4
strategy/outputs	3
Public Access	6
outcome	4
strategy/outputs	2
Grand Total	43

Table 2: NERR annual site-specific performance metrics.

NERR Annual Performance Metrics	Measures by Type
Increased science informed decision making	2
outcome	2
Public Education and Awareness	16
outcome	9
strategy/outputs	5
Research and monitoring	2
Strategy/outputs	2
Grand Total	20

In response to recommendations by the GAO, OCM worked with CZM and NERR programs to identify a subset of state program specific performance metrics that are now also reported annually. The evaluation metrics do contain targets. The intent of these metrics was to allow state programs to develop performance metrics that reflected the most relevant priorities of their program.

3.b. CZMA Section 312 periodic evaluations

The CZMA (Sections 309 and 312) requires periodic evaluation of the CZM and NERR programs to assess that they are implementing funding appropriately and successfully fulfilling their missions. Evaluations are required to include public participation, with sufficient public notice of the review, providing opportunities for open public meetings and written comments. The evaluations also include stakeholder participation and interviews. These evaluations provide an opportunity for OCM to engage with the state programs, public, and state and local stakeholders, and provide constructive feedback for actions to be taken as well as highlight success stories. Failure to address recommended actions can result in suspension of funds and ultimately, withdrawal of approval for the state program or reserve. Site visits are conducted by an evaluation team that includes the OCM site liaison, OCM regional staff member, OCM evaluator, and an external expert participant (e.g. often other CZM or NERR program representatives or directors/managers).

OCM has developed a detailed protocol for pre- and post-site visit activities. Prior to the visit, a survey is sent to identified stakeholders requesting information on the site's strengths, weaknesses, accomplishments, challenges, and if the stakeholder has any recommendations. Data collected from the survey is analyzed prior to the site visit. Additionally, questions are sent to the program director or reserve manager as well as the site liaison to provide responses prior to the site visit. All information

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collected prior to the visit is reviewed by the entire evaluation team, along with the previous evaluation findings, management plan, site profile, Coastal and Estuarine Land Conservation Program plan, assessment and strategy report, and performance metric information. Through the previously mentioned 2014 revision to the evaluation process, several months before the site visit specific target areas are negotiated and identified between OCM and the CZM director or NERR manager. This allows for a more focused evaluation and provides the CZM or NERR guidance for inviting specific groups of stakeholders to participate.

During the site visit, the CZM or NERR staff provide presentations on target area activities, participate in discussions with stakeholders and the evaluation team, participate in one-on-one interviews with the evaluation team, and potentially provide a tour of program projects and/or managed lands. Additionally, the evaluation team conducts individual and group interviews with stakeholders. In one site visit, discussions included both sessions with staff and stakeholders, and follow up sessions with stakeholders only, without staff. In another site visit, evaluators either met with stakeholders without program or reserve staff present, or with program staff present and actively participating in all stakeholder meetings. Prior to the final day of the visit, the evaluation team meets to discuss initial findings and develop a preliminary list of recommendations to be shared with program or reserve staff and leadership during the final exit meetings. These preliminary findings are not final and may be modified after further reflection by the evaluation team; however, providing instant feedback to the programs or reserves is beneficial and allows staff the chance to plan for addressing the recommendations in the future when they receive the final report.

Final site visit evaluation reports are provided after the evaluation team has had sufficient time to review findings and develop a final report and include findings, accomplishments, and recommendations. Some recommendations may be mandatory while others are provided for program improvement activities. This report is sent to the director of the appropriate agency that oversees the state program or reserve. These reports are reviewed prior to the next site visit and programs and reserves will be evaluated on response to the recommendations.

3.c. CZM Program 309 Assessment and Strategy Grants

The goal of the CZMA Section 309 Enhancement Program is to provide incentive for state CZM programs to ensure they are not only meeting the requirements of the CZMA, but also working towards improvement of the program and coastal resources. To receive grant funding under the Enhancement Program, every five years the state CZM programs are required to conduct a self-assessment identifying high priority and improvement areas and provide a plan for addressing those priorities, working with OCM to develop strategies. These assessments are centered on nine enhancement areas: aquaculture, coastal hazards, cumulative and secondary impacts, energy and government facility siting, marine debris, ocean and Great Lakes resources, public access, special area management planning, and wetlands. OCM reviews these reports to prioritize funding and enable programs to meet their needs within the enhancement areas. The 309 Assessment and Strategy grants are an opportunity for additional funding above the base level the program already receives to fund program changes or highly beneficial projects within the enhancement areas.

3.d. NERR Management Plans

The NERR management plans are to be updated approximately every five years and are developed to help guide the reserve's programs, identify key objectives and strategies, and to serve as a description of

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coastal management issues facing the reserve during the specified time period. The plans include information on research and monitoring, stewardship, coastal training, and education, as well as identifying issue areas (e.g. climate change, water quality, habitat restoration) and strategic actions. These management plans are used as program guidance and outreach tools. While OCM does provide guidance on the development of NERR management plans, these plans are not necessarily developed consistently across the reserves and there is variability across reserve management plan implementation detail in scale, scope and strategies. OCM has not closely tied program evaluations to management plans.

3.e. Semi-annual Reports and Annual Grant Proposals.

Each CZMP and NERR is assigned a stewardship liaison that stays in regular contact with their respective programs. Site liaisons are generally organized by region and oversee 1) national and site specific performance reporting, 2) semi-annual progress reporting, and 3) annual grant renewal processes. In addition to the above processes, the evaluation team was informed that semi-annual reporting and annual grant renewal processes provide a regular mechanism through which programs communicate with OCM about needs, staffing, institutional support, as well as past and planned program activities. Documentation associated with both semi-annual reports and grant renewal may be reviewed by the evaluation team as part of the 312 process but these activities are not explicitly linked to the evaluation process.

4. SCOPE OF WORK AND METHODOLOGY

The Office for Coastal Management (OCM) contracted ECS Federal, LLC (ECS) to conduct an analysis of their current state program evaluation process and provide recommendations for improvement, how to restructure the process through a regional focus, and assess the feasibility of outsourcing the evaluation process. This was performed with guidance from a Steering Committee composed of OCM staff. The ECS Team understands the challenges of addressing legislated evaluations of state program performance while balancing resources (time and financial) for both NOAA and state coastal programs. Ideally, program evaluations provide an opportunity for reflection on strengths, weakness, opportunities, and challenges while providing an open conversation avenue with national program managers to raise awareness of challenges and outline potential solutions to challenges moving forward. Evaluations also provide opportunities to collect and compile state, regional and national stories for program promotion to numerous stakeholders, a critically important piece in building and maintaining program support at both national and state levels.

One of the main goals of the project was to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of OCM current evaluations of CZM and NERR programs in terms of staff time, experience, and cost, and consider the use of independent evaluators as an alternative. By having an outside party scope the requirements for a proposal, OCM hoped to get the perspective of what they would need to include if they went this route in the future. Additionally, OCM wanted to understand if an assessment of the services, tools, and trainings OCM provides through Digital Coast could be integrated into existing evaluation processes. Lastly, OCM was interested in considering how a regional context might be incorporated into existing evaluation processes.

This project is anchored in the theory of program evaluation. An effective program evaluation system has three key components:

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- **A clear program theory.** This must include: 1) a clearly articulated goal and a set of measureable indicators/outcomes that can serve as evidence of significant progress in accomplishing the stated goal, 2) a set of strategies for accomplishing the goal, and 3) a compelling theory for how execution of identified strategies will lead to goal accomplishment.
- **Good data.** Data on program activities, outcomes, and impacts must be systematically collected in accordance with sound principles of science in order to minimize potential for methodological bias.
- **Appropriate evaluation data use system.** In order for good data to be translated into useable information, systems for analyzing and interpreting evaluation data within the parameters of the program theory need to be created and validated.

These three components are the same regardless of the focus, scale, or scope of the evaluation effort.

Accordingly, this effort was guided by the following focal questions:

- ◆ *What is the program theory that is currently guiding OCM's work as it relates to the state CZM and NERR programs? How would this program theory change if it were to be re-envisioned to a regional scope?*
- ◆ *To what extent do the evaluation data currently collected clearly map to and help measure outcomes identified in the program theory? How would this need to change if OCM were to adapt a more regional focus?*
- ◆ *To what extent are there data management and analysis systems in place capable of and used to provide OCM timely information on the impact of its investments in state CZM and NERR programs?*
- ◆ *How should OCM evaluate their tools, services and trainings during the evaluation process to determine their utility to CZM and NERR programs, and stakeholders?*
- ◆ *How can a regional context for both OCM programs and OCM products (e.g., tools, services, trainings) evaluations be incorporated into future evaluation approaches?*
- ◆ *Would a revised evaluation approach provide significant cost savings that would lead OCM to consider its implementation?*

4.a. Background Document Analysis

In addition to the theory of program evaluation, this project is anchored in practical knowledge of the OCM programs. The ECS Team reviewed an extensive suite of background documents provided by the Steering Committee (list provided in Appendix A) including, but not limited to, the Coastal Zone Management Act, details on implementing regulations for both CZM and NERR programs, current guidance for the evaluation process, two reports on the evaluation process from the Government Accountability Office (GAO), performance metrics, and other pertinent documents related to the evaluation and background of the state programs and NERRS, as well as the tools, services, and trainings offered by OCM via Digital Coast.

The background document analysis was guided by a protocol to address three key questions:

1. What is the current program theory of CZM and NERR programs as suggested by current evaluation efforts?
2. What outcomes and indicators are currently being documented through existing evaluation practices?

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3. What policies and procedures are currently guiding/shaping evaluation practices to date?

This background document analysis allowed the ECS Team to develop a working program theory for the ECS Team to use for the external assessment of OCM's evaluation system (Appendix B and C). The working program theories were developed using existing documents provided by OCM. For the state programs, the outcomes and impacts were identified directly from the CZMA, while the inputs and strategies came from other background documentation. The NERRS program theory outcomes and strategies were leveraged from strategic planning documents and other materials provided. Because these working program theories are based on a wide range of available background documentation, they may not reflect all of the most current priorities and inputs if they were not included in available documentation.

The program theories developed are reflective of OCM, not the specific programs. The programs themselves could have different and varying perspectives, as their focus is local and site specific. Additionally, from the federal standpoint, the outcomes listed capture what OCM wants to accomplish at a national level, based on provided documentation.

4.b. Site Visits

The ECS Team participated, as observers, in two site visits with OCM evaluation teams to Jacques Cousteau and Grand Bay NERRs. The purpose of our participation was to gain further insight into current evaluation practices and how this is being translated into outcome data, how programs already participate in regional approaches and collaborations, and how programs and stakeholders are currently using the NOAA/OCM tools, services and trainings provided through Digital Coast. An observation protocol was developed in advance to maximize the quality and comparability of data collected during the site visits. Specific areas of interest are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Specific areas of interest for the site visit observations.

Framing questions for assessment (overall)
What are the goals/intent of the current evaluation system?
What are the components of the current evaluation system?
To what extent are the goals being met through the current system? Where are the gaps/opportunities?
To what extent is it feasible/economically viable to outsource evaluation activities?
How might this system be modified to consider evaluation outcomes within a regional context?
How might OCM build an evaluation system for understanding the impact of its tools, trainings, resources?
Framing questions for specific site visits
What do OCM evaluation team members see as the goal/purpose/value of the site visits?
What do you observe as the goal/purpose/value of the site visits?
What, if any linkages, do you observe between these different activities? [i.e., are site visits organized around management plan outcomes or 5 CZMA areas?]
What would evaluation from a regional perspective look like? How would OCM know it was being effective at a regional level?

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Was there any discussion of Digital Coast and its evaluation?

Based on what you observe, how do evaluation teams and local settings view OCMs role? Is it to implement a set of clear objectives through engagement and funding of local level partners? Is it to support local level partners in engaging in coastal zone management efforts consistent with the goals of CZMA? Is it to co-negotiate the implementation of CZMA goals with state level priorities?

4.c. Interviews

To better understand and assess the OCM evaluation system, the ECS Team conducted nineteen semi-structured key informant interviews which included four OCM staff experienced in the evaluation process, three OCM regional directors, five CZMP directors and seven NERR program directors. Efforts were made to obtain representative perspectives from across both relevant OCM divisions as well as across NOAA regions. These interviews covered a number of pieces of the current OCM evaluation system as well as questions regarding the use of Digital Coast and how to potentially move to a more regional-centric approach in future evaluation efforts, not limited to site visits. Interviews with the NOAA Steering Committee were semi-structured in nature and focused on clarifying and confirming the CZM and NERRS program theory(s) as well as identifying areas of improvement.

The interview protocol and questions can be found in Appendix D.

Interviews with CZM directors and NERR managers focused on understanding current performance metrics that they collect, their practices and challenges in documenting program outcomes, how they provide feedback to OCM concerning the tools, services and training that OCM develops via Digital Coast, and how a regional approach to evaluation may be useful and implemented. These semi-structured phone interviews provided more nuanced perspectives to inform our evaluation recommendations, identify potential challenges and opportunities in pursuing a regional evaluation approach, and refine a strategy for evaluating the utility of OCM tools, services and trainings provided via Digital Coast. The ECS Team acknowledges that this is a sample of perspectives from across OCM, CZM and NERR programs and thus information gathered in this process was used as representative information for the purposes of this project.

Financial information on staff salary or contractor costs were not available for a detailed cost analysis for implementing different options for evaluation in the future. However, tasks and associated efforts were estimated to provide a relative idea of cost implications of different scenarios. The cost analysis could be refined to be more quantitative with more input and guidance from OCM.

4.d. Digital Coast

The ECS Team also developed a separate internal evaluation framework to determine the utility of the OCM tools, services, and trainings that are provided to CZM and NERR programs via Digital Coast. Specifically, Digital Coast tools, services and trainings were reviewed to document and categorize them in accordance with their content and purpose (Appendix E). Digital Coast tools, services, and trainings with a common focus and purpose were referred to collectively as a strategy. Each strategy was collectively analyzed within the working CZM and NERR program theory(s) in order to document its role in supporting OCM's ultimate goal to restore or enhance the resources of the Nation's coastal zone for this and succeeding generations. The ECS Team notes that there are additional excellent CZM and NERR program tools, services, and trainings that deliver important information, data, and support to various

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stakeholders through education, stewardship, coastal training programs, and research/monitoring programs. These were not included in this analysis due to the limited focus on Digital Coast for this scope of work.

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following sections of this report are organized around each of the four task areas contracted for by this assessment: 1) Assessment of and recommendations for OCM's current evaluation system for enhancing the performance of its CZM and NERR programs, 2) Report on the feasibility and costs associated with contracting out the 312 process including a proposed statement of work and costs estimate associated with such contracts, 3) Recommendations for embedding a regional perspective into the evaluation process, and 4) Recommendations for integrating an evaluation of OCM's Digital Coast tools, services and trainings into future evaluation systems.

5.a. OCM's evaluation system for enhancing the performance of its CZM and NERR programs

5.a.i. Federal Performance Metrics

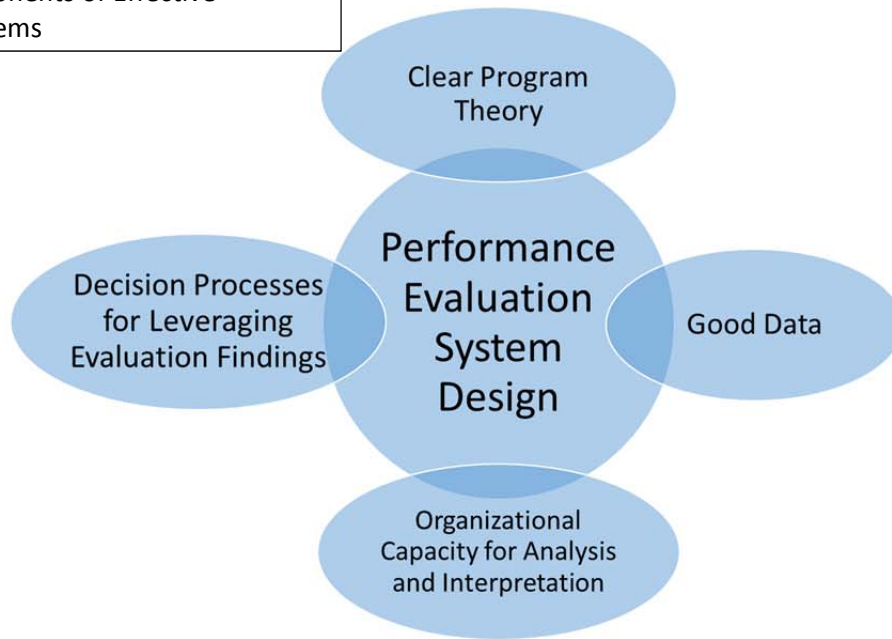
Federal performance metrics collected from programs are used in a number of ways including OCM annual performance reporting to OMB. It appears that no performance measure targets are set for either individual CZM or NERR programs, nor for regions, nor for OCM in relation to any of these metrics. Consistent with the findings of the GAO in 2014, we found limited evidence that federal performance metrics are used in any regular or significant way as part of the performance evaluation or to improve CZM and NERR programs. As described in more detail below, the reasons for this appear to be multi-faceted and include 1) a lack of an appropriately developed program theory that allows for sufficient program evaluation capacity and 2) a long-term history of a bottom-up, state needs-based approach to supporting state programming administered by OCM.

Performance metrics are one necessary but insufficient component of a performance evaluation system. In order to be effective, this system must also include three additional components (see Figure 1).

- First, there must be a clear outline of requisite inputs, intended strategies, goals, and associated outcome metrics and targets (i.e. a program theory).
- Second, there must be organizational capacity to analyze and interpret performance metrics in relation to identified program targets.
- Third, there must be decision processes that utilize this information to inform future actions of a program.

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Figure 1: Components of Effective Evaluation Systems



Based on our conversations with OCM staff and background document review, OCM does not have a performance evaluation system. To address step one, OCM will need to develop a documented program theory that guides its programming and set targets for itself in relation to the federal performance metrics that it collects. In order to situate OCM's existing performance measurement activities within some type of framework, the ECS Team reviewed OCM strategic planning documents as well as the CZMA to construct a working program theory. Upon review of this working program theory, OCM staff indicated that the activities and outcomes as documented do not adequately reflect the work of OCM. Further OCM has not set targets for itself in relation to any of the national level CZM and NERR performance metrics that it collects.

OCM will also need to ensure that there is organizational capacity to analyze and interpret performance metrics in relation to identified program targets. OCM has only one staff member focused on the 312 metrics and their connections with CZM and NERRS performance management systems. Finally, based on our observations and materials available there is a significant degree of uncertainty about how the federal performance metrics should be used and/or are currently being used. Collectively, this suggests that OCM will need to strengthen investments in its performance measurement system before it will be able to make better use of the federal reporting metrics to improve OCM programming and practices.

In order to fully develop a performance measurement system, OCM will also need to develop decision processes by which the organization reviews and uses the information to inform decisions. This potentially may be perceived as difficult as interviews with OCM staff revealed that OCM places a strong focus and value on being responsive to the needs of the state programs. In conversations with OCM about data needs and use, needs assessment information (i.e., more and better information on what states/programs need from OCM) was paramount. The CZM and NERR programs are joint investments, co-negotiated between NOAA and the States. Accordingly, priorities vary across states, programs, and regions. Interviews revealed a keen appreciation by OCM staff of the diverse socio-political and environmental contexts within which the CZM and NERR programs operate. Further, staff emphasized

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the importance of maintaining a positive relationship with the states and being viewed as a supportive partner in a joint federal-state initiative.

This emphasis is also reflected in OCM's approach to performance management. For example, in 2008, the GAO recommended OCM establish targets for its performance measures. OCM responded to this by working with the individual CZM and NERR programs to establish performance targets specific to their respective programs. Program specific targets have limited value for assessing the national or regional impact of the CZMA due to methodological challenges in aggregation across non-equivalent metrics. The establishment of national or regional performance targets for OCM as it relates to its programming with the CZM and NERR programs may be perceived as top down and somewhat counter to OCM's organizational culture. At the same time, OCM, CZM and NERR informants expressed a desire to build a program of national, or at least regional, impact and viewed the national performance metrics as a mechanism for understanding this impact. Collaborative development of national and regional goals with clear targets may provide new opportunities for advancing a shared vision of coastal zone management.

If OCM seeks only to monitor the collective contribution of the CZM and NERR programs at a national or regional level over time, its current federal performance measures appear adequate. While assessing the specific reliability and validity of each measure was outside the scope of the current project, collectively these measures cover both outputs and outcomes in each of the areas mandated by the CZMA (see Tables 1 and 2). However, if OCM wants to build capability performance management assessment aimed at assessing the contribution and effectiveness of OCM in advancing regional or national goals through the CZM and NERR programs, additional evaluation capacity will be needed. If the latter is a priority, we make the following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. OCM should work with its state programs to define regional and/or national performance goals, metrics and associated targets.**
- 2. OCM should develop a clear program theory for itself for how it will advance each of these goals through its engagement with the CZM and NERR programs.**
- 3. Increase OCM internal evaluation capacity (e.g. staffing) to execute this programming**

5.a.ii. State Program Specific Performance Metrics

In response to GAO's recommendation to establish performance targets, OCM worked with CZM and NERR programs to establish site specific performance metrics and associated targets. However, interviews suggest the effectiveness of these evaluation metrics for informing and guiding CZM and NERR programs is unclear and variable across sites. CZM and NERR programs overwhelmingly described viewing these metrics as something needed by NOAA rather than part of a performance evaluation system for informing their own programming. As described above, performance data requires that it be embedded within a larger performance management system in order to be strategic. There was limited evidence from interviews that this had occurred.

"Well, I don't know. I would be interested to hear if NOAA felt that [the metrics are effective]. We don't do it for us, we are doing it for them, so I couldn't tell you. So I am not sure about whether it gives them feedback or the info they need to know for Congress." – CZM

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“No idea. [There are] probably multiple ways that the data is being used...can’t speak to NOAA’s end—likely as a basis for external funding, leveraging partnerships, other things to inform policy. Is it useful for state agency partner? Not sure that the state agency cares about those numbers, but they are available if someone wanted to look at performance.” - CZM

OCM staff reported that they have had a difficult time determining what to do with the information provided by the site specific evaluation metrics. As discussed above, site specific performance data have limitations in assessing regional or national impact due to the methodological challenges of aggregating across non-equivalent measures. Reports varied as to whether these metrics were systematically used in negotiating annual grants or the extent to which they were central to the NERR management plan renewal, the 309 process or the 312 evaluations.

“The GAO report said we needed numerical outcomes and to document success better. In 2012 – we had the programs choose the metrics. Programs had to come up with a strategy for measuring metrics. We have really struggled to incorporate those into the findings. The three metrics they identified to their program have been difficult to integrate. Some programs chose metrics in areas that aren’t really a priority, they were just easy to measure so they don’t make progress on them.” – OCM

“[It’s] not consistent. Each program has a liaison. Depending on who that person is and who they are working with in their region, the translation of that information across the office is very different – it isn’t consistent. Again, with the integration, not clear who is interested in the information. Where that information gets plugged in. It does help us understand what the state issues and trends are and needs.” – OCM

In conclusion, there is limited evidence that the majority of data from the site specific evaluation metrics are being leveraged in any significant or systematic manner to inform and improve programming either for the individual programs or for OCM. Accordingly, to date, the return on investment into these data is limited. Enhancing the value gained from these data for performance evaluation will require investment into the evaluation capacity of individual CZM and NERR programs as well as integration of these metrics into existing planning and evaluation processes facilitated by OCM.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4. Support programs in integrating site specific performance metrics into the NERR management plan renewal/CZM 309 planning process in order to ensure site specific performance metrics reflect high priority areas.**
- 5. Provide technical assistance to programs in identifying appropriate metrics and targets.**
- 6. Integrate review of site specific performance goals into the annual cooperative agreement renewal process.**
- 7. Integrate analysis of performance target achievement into the 312 evaluation process.**
- 8. OCM should clearly communicate how site specific performance metrics are used to show state programs the value of their contributions in this reporting requirement in storytelling and addressing national priorities, as well as communicating better the purpose of evaluations.**

Note: OCM should clearly communicate how site specific performance metrics are used to show state programs the value of their contributions in this reporting requirement in storytelling and addressing national priorities, etc.

5.a.iii. 312 Evaluation Process

Review of 312 evaluation documents, observation of two site visits, and interviews all confirmed that the 312 evaluation process is viewed differently by different stakeholders, programs, and evaluators. Collectively, these data sources all further confirmed that the 312 process seeks to accomplish a broad array of often competing goals, as identified via observations and interviews [see Figure 2].

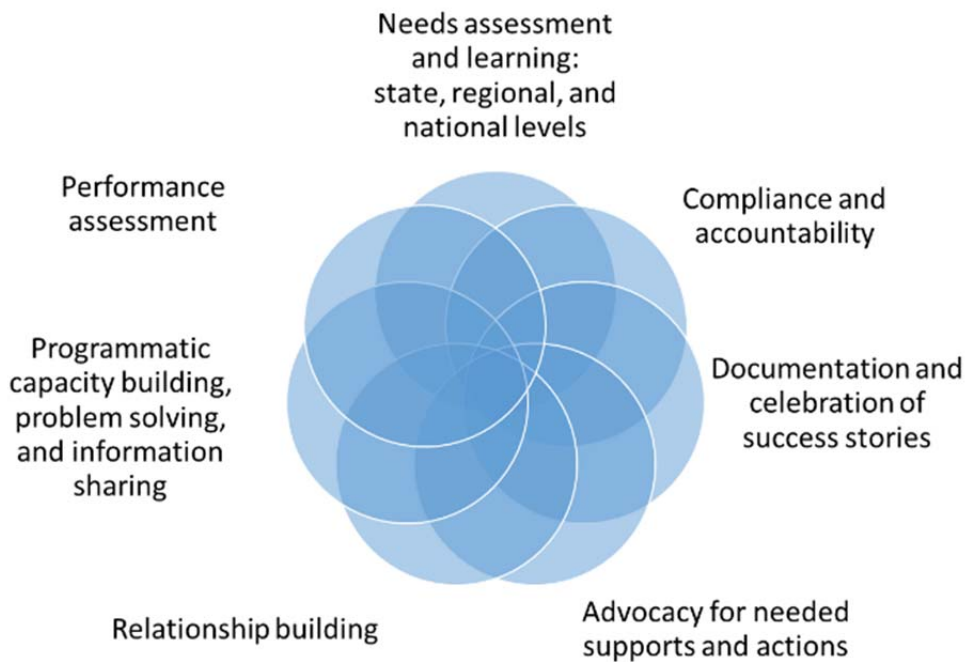


Figure 2: The figure illustrates identified areas of importance to the site evaluation process, with related and often competing goals.

The different goals of the 312 process can be summarized into the following categories:

1) Ensuring compliance with and accountability to cooperative agreements per the CZMA

My understanding [of the goal of the 312] is to demonstrate to the reviewers that we are in compliance with CZMA requirements... —NERR

Well, probably like any evaluation or audit, to ensure that stakeholders are being reached, folks being educated, partnerships being made —NERR

2) Performance evaluation

[The 312 process is] the periodic detailed assessment of the program, how the program is meeting its goals as the program lays it out. —CZM

[The goal of the 312 is] to measure how we are progressing and meeting our stated objectives in

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the management plan and other performance elements as well as the operating agreement between our state and NOAA. —NERR

The goal is to look back over review period (312) to understand how program has addressed topics in management plan and expressed through their cooperative agreements and 309 strategies where they described they wanted to go. Assess how program is meeting their goals, engaging colleges outside program. —OCM

3) Programmatic capacity building, problem solving, and information sharing

[the evaluators are] now listening for politics, road blocks, challenge in partnerships within jurisdictions and regionally. Are they contributing to program role on larger scale—are they leading as they should be? — OCM

Staff can be in their own little world sometimes in the Reserve, so being able to get feedback from folks who see how all these other Reserves are run could give them a good opportunity to come up with some good ideas of what they could implement. —NERR

[312] provides a disciplined way to facilitate the achievement of some harder issues using the 312 process (e.g. getting a Reserve to deal with completion of a delinquent management plan, or 319 point source pollution requirements jointly with EPA state challenges, etc.) —OCM

4) Needs assessment and learning for OCM

I hope the program liaison and OCM staff would see all these reviews and better understand where strengths/successes are across the nation, as well as the challenges. In turn, would inform the NERRS strategic planning process. Secondly, if the review team is not familiar with the NERR, a site visit provides context for the review team to understand what is/is not possible at each Reserve given how unique each reserve is. It's all very qualitative. —NERR

5) Document and celebrate success

It helps me create conversations in my state about what the program has done. —CZM

312 gives local municipalities a chance to shine—chance for a mayor and planner to show off work to federal level is a big deal to them. Good from a partnership perspective. —NERR

6) Advocate for needed support and/or actions

There are direct questions to the reserves about what they have issues with, because the evaluation process is supposed to be helpful. Do you need something from the state partner that we could put in the report to help you out? So I hope the reserves see it is as helpful, not just like an audit. —NERR

And I think sometimes a real goal of providing an assessment or review of a state program that allows the program to go to state leadership to address some things they know are of concern for them to achieve their job. [how does this work?], part of it is which pieces they choose to

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have evaluated. And so that is where the strategy comes in. When there is an issue around either policy or funding they are trying to pass, you can actually get the outside review to focus on it and then that gives them the framework to go the legislature, or the governor's office or their home agency to do this. —OCM

7) Build/strengthen relationships

For NOAA staff that aren't in the field – it is another good opportunity to get some face time with the partners you work with and meet in person. Other persons from agencies that you know about and talk to on the phone – get to see face to face and just get out and see the [natural] resources that you are working on. —OCM

[The 312 is a] re-affirmation of our coastal program within state agencies—where they can realize they're part of something bigger. Executive team profile increases through this opportunity because they are participating in the visit. Having that outside affirmation is a good thing. —CZM

There are a number of evaluation designs that are intended to address different, or multiple, goals. However, not all goals may be compatible within a single evaluation design or approach. Figure 3 outlines the multitude of goals of the 312 process and their complementary, appropriate, evaluation designs.

As shown in Figure 3, the combination of goals of the 312 process have incompatible designs. Further, the current 312 process contains a mixture of developmental, process, and outcome evaluation design elements.

Compatible evaluation designs by purpose



Figure 3: Goals of the 312 process and their complementary, appropriate, evaluation designs.

As symbolized by its name which refers to section 312 of the CZMA, the 312 evaluation is a legislative requirement for the purposes of program compliance, accountability, and performance assessment. Evaluation designs for the purposes of compliance and accountability generally fall into the category of process evaluations. Process evaluations focus on assessing the adequacy of program inputs (i.e., staffing, institutional supports, physical infrastructure, etc.) and outputs (# of trainings held, # of visitors, # research publications, etc.). In the context of grant management, these assessments generally reference the grant or cooperative agreements as the basis for determining compliance and accountability.

Performance evaluation is generally supported by outcome evaluation designs which assess program success, ideally against a set of a priori targets or standards. For example, a program may want to increase permanent protection and restoration of key areas in reserve watersheds to improve coastal habitat quantity, quality and resiliency to climate change impacts. However, the program would have to provide a concrete target, for example increase permanent protection by 5% in acreage over the next 5 years, by which its success could then be evaluated.

The remaining goals of the 312 process (e.g., problem solving, organizational learning, relationship

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building) are most commonly achieved through developmental evaluation designs. Developmental evaluation designs differ from process and outcome evaluation designs in several key ways. They are exclusively internally focused and come out of an organizational development tradition. Most importantly, the intent of a developmental evaluation is not to hold a program accountable for doing what it was supposed to do (process evaluation) or achieving what it was supposed to have achieved (outcome evaluation). Rather, developmental evaluation designs are entirely focused on enhancing organizational capacity for accomplishing its goals. The focus in a developmental evaluation is in critically examining what has been done, what has worked and what has not, understanding the mechanism underlying the outcomes observed, and prospectively leveraging this information toward informing future needs, priorities, and appropriate actions. Social learning, collective sense making, and relationship building are often important elements of a developmental evaluation, particularly for programs seeking to intervene into complex systems involving multiple stakeholders.

Retrospective accountability to pre-defined standards/targets/agreements versus prospective learning and problem solving are generally incompatible goals within a single evaluation design element such as a site visit. The reason for this lies in the inherent conflicting motivations for the program under evaluation. For the former, programs are motivated to and rewarded for engaging in self-protective behavior in which their focus is on putting their best foot forward, highlighting success, and minimizing challenges, failures, and problems. In the latter, programs are motivated to and rewarded for critical self-reflection of challenges, failures, and problems as these can lend rich insight to inform future action. The 312 process attempts to do both within the same evaluation design which is undermining its effectiveness in accomplishing either.

Interviews with CZM directors and NERR managers revealed frustration with the 312, feeling that it held different programs to different standards. Others felt that it was useful because the whole process was intentionally staged to only reveal positive information.

Each reserve meets with partners that can speak most positively to our programs—stacking the deck, in the limited amount of time available. If a reserve was actually having a challenge with a partner/stakeholder it's unlikely that that group would be given time [on the agenda] in the visit. It's a dog and pony show. We don't get much out of it—reserve staff and myself—we meet with them all the time, it's just another meeting. —NERR

NOAA hasn't defined the minimum set [of standards] for 312 evaluators—what's expected? What do the evaluators evaluate against? ...We need a clearer definition of 312. What are the minimum standards now? It needs a state-federal discussion. —NERR

The implementation of the 312 process as part of an evaluation system is also problematic. Conversations revealed that 312 site visits were originally performed every 4 years, but now they are taking place every 7-10 years for any given program. The same conversations revealed that the consequence of poor performance (for which there is no recognized metrics or threshold) is decertification of a program following two consecutive failing grades. Therefore, with the current practice of a 312 every 7-10 years, it would take 14-20 years before a failing program suffers consequences.

Observations of the site visit process confirmed several of the observations above. Site visits appeared intentionally organized to highlight and emphasize program successes and minimize the likelihood that problems or challenges will be revealed. The various topical sessions mostly focused on program

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activities, and follow up discussions with stakeholders were mostly based on confirmatory anecdotes rather than the big picture. In one site visit, the program liaison at times asked stakeholders positively leading questions, and occasionally used “we” statements when referring to the program, suggesting some level of confusion as to the role of the evaluation process and evaluators. Program staff were present and actively directed the conversation during stakeholder interviews on one site visit, while the other site visit included sessions with staff and stakeholders, and follow up sessions with stakeholders without staff. This was described as being done strategically in order to promote the success of the program to its partners and build relationships. OCM staff noted that any problem areas discussed during the site visit were generally identified in advance by the stewardship liaison through the annual cooperative agreement process.

In one site visit, the debriefing exit session largely ignored obvious issues such as staff turnover. The “objectives” stated in one of the site visit agendas were as follows: “keep the process positive and seek constructive feedback,” “facilitate learning, understanding and idea generation,” and “use evaluation process to enhance future activities at Reserve by identifying areas of improvement,” and the desired “outcomes” stated as “Generate advice and suggestions for moving Reserve program to the next level” and “Form and strengthen relationships with evaluation partners.” Clearly, this suggests a strong focus on a developmental evaluation process, with little room if any for process or outcome evaluation approaches. The lack of formal and thorough outcome evaluation is further highlighted by the fact that metrics provided to the evaluation team were not discussed at all during the 312 evaluation, the results of the pre-visit stakeholder survey received little attention, and that programs select the three topics on which they choose the evaluation to focus on through negotiations with OCM that happen only months prior to the site visit. Further, in one site visit, the agenda and opening remarks clearly highlighted that the discussions would focus on the last few years, when the last 312 evaluation had been performed 9 years before. Given the high degree of positive bias of the site visit process, the site visit as currently executed is not a methodologically sound tool for performance evaluation.

Developmental Benefits of the 312 Process

While the value of the 312 site visit is limited for performance evaluation, the site visits and subsequent reports were described by some CZM directors and NERR managers as having significant value. For example, some directors/managers spoke about the value of participating on other 312 evaluation teams as a vehicle to gain new ideas and insights for their home programs. Other directors/managers spoke about the importance of the exit interview and site visit report in helping them to advocate for needed policies, resources, or changes with their state partners. Some directors/managers appreciated the opportunity to get feedback from the public and other stakeholders. Both directors and OCM staff were complementary about the recent decision to focus the evaluation site visit and report on three specific areas pre-identified jointly by the site and OCM, which reduces over accountability towards performance assessment.

It’s good to get to know the NOAA folks. —NERR

The decision to narrow the focus to a specific group of issues is really helpful. The survey work prior to the review gives a broad picture of the program—and then discussions narrow. —CZM

It’s very effective to have other state program’s involved in the review panels. —CZM

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Public meetings are not typically done at university NERR hosted efforts—the site visit does allow the Reserve to get out of its comfort level and interact with public (even with small engagement). —NERR

... I was not here for the prior 312, but at that time we were behind on routine program changes, and we knew that, but that (312 feedback) really pushed us. And we are almost all up to date now, it lit the fire under us if you will. We really need to deal with it, and they told us that. That was good. —CZM

I think the biggest thing to get out of the 312 is how they can not only improve their program, but for their state partner, which is a state agency... Our review team had put in a couple of items for improving the program that would help the Reserve... this allowed the Reserve to go and discuss, in a safe way, with the state what would be needed to fix [the problem]. Or in a positive thing, of saying we have a really strong program in this, but we need more resources, so can NOAA evaluation help make that argument. —NERR

There were several important elements of the site visits that were described to support the developmental outcomes or goals.

Importance of being face to face

Several informants reflected on past efforts to conduct the 312 site visit process remotely. The reviews of this effort were uniformly negative. OCM, NERR, and CZM informants all agreed that face to face meetings and interaction were crucial to an effective site visit.

The opportunity to meet with leadership is important – it wouldn't work to do those things over the phone or computer. —OCM

There was an effort recently to reduce the number of site visits and we had a lot of feedback in our state that people thought it reduced the value of the evaluation because without coming on site it made it hard to communicate key points. —CZM

Importance of knowledgeable evaluators

Both CZM directors and NERR managers emphasized the criticality of having knowledgeable, informed, and experienced evaluation team members in order for the process to be useful to them. A few were critical of the evaluators they worked with on their 312 process for their lack of preparation and familiarity with the state specific aspects of their programs.

I think that there are a lot of very experienced individuals across the nation and I think that if we could tap into those more experienced individuals as part of the process it could be helpful to those less experienced states or programs, so that is a huge potential. —CZM

When NOAA reaches into 312 a lot of upfront work could be done—seems like the review team isn't well prepped at the site. The management plan is available for their review, why go through it again? —NERR

There were several elements of the site visits that were described to limit the developmental value of the 312 process.

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Lengthy delays between site visits and receiving the 312 report

In order to be developmentally useful, feedback must be received back as quickly as possible and ideally timed such that it can inform strategic planning processes such as the management plan renewal or 309 assessment strategy, as well as associated grant development opportunities for the programs. Several CZM and NERR program directors noted the long time delay between the site visit and the receipt of the report. A year or longer delay appears to be not uncommon and this level of delay significantly reduces or possibly extinguishes any developmental value of the 312 process.

Still haven't received report from a review from 2 years ago. Timeliness has always been a problem. —CZM

Need more timely reports—in a year you probably already have turnover ... You could have an election in a year's time. To be able to get it out in three or six months might be helpful because people would still remember the process and what some of the stakeholders said. A year later they would not remember. —NERR

Lack of future orientation

Developmental evaluations are forward-thinking in nature. Informants noted that the purely retrospective nature of the 312 process placed limits on how valuable the process could be in informing future action.

We thought there would be a benefit to having a second part of the evaluation focusing on successes and next steps, instead of just a focus on the past. —CZM

It is retrospective. The line of questioning does allow for future looking but evaluator doesn't have a high tolerance for future discussions when this is retrospective. —OCM

Current format of site visits is most valuable to newer and struggling programs

Several informants noted that the current site visit format may not be all that valuable to older, established programs that already have strong relationships with their partners. For these programs, there may be missed opportunities to do more advanced program building such as focusing on more regional issues or forward looking planning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9. *The 312 evaluation process should be divided into an off-site process and outcome evaluation to assess program compliance, accountability and performance, and an on-site developmental evaluation aimed at relationship building, problem solving, organizational learning and supporting program improvement.***

In light of the preceding analysis, we recommend a re-organization of the 312 process into two distinct components. The goals of the re-organization are to

- 1) improve the methodological rigor of the accountability/compliance/performance evaluation functions of the 312 process and
- 2) improve the effectiveness of the developmental/program enhancement functions of the 312 process.

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Stage 1: CZM and NERR Process and Outcome Evaluation

The mandated compliance, accountability, and performance evaluation functions of the 312 process are best supported by an evaluation design characterized by clear standards/targets and an unbiased, independent, standardized evaluation process. In order to build toward this, we recommend the following actions:

- Revise the requirements of the management plan/309 Assessments to include a program specific program theory. This program theory should define: 1) requisite program inputs, 2) strategies and associated output targets (e.g., # of students taught, # of new research initiatives) and 3) program outcomes with associated metrics and targets (e.g., 5% increase in the number of wetland acres restored over the next 5 years). Numerical targets for program inputs, outputs, and outcomes should be co-negotiated and approved by OCM as they will represent the numerical basis for NOAA assessing satisfactory program performance. This may require technical assistance aimed at assisting programs to identify performance indicators that are both feasible and in alignment with their areas of priority.
- Require a program stakeholder assessment associated with each of the goals defined in the plan. This list of stakeholders will become the sampling frame for the 312 stakeholder survey.
- Revise requirements of the annual cooperative agreement renewal documentation to include a detailed description of requisite program inputs [staffing, institutional supports, physical infrastructure, etc.]; planned activities [programs]; outputs [e.g., # of trainings, # of research reports, etc.], and outcomes [e.g., # of acres restored]. Inputs, outputs, and outcome performance measures should include numerical data based on pre-negotiated indicators as defined in the NERR management plan/CZMP 309 Assessment.
- Perform an independent process and outcome evaluation of each site prior to the site visit. Where possible, this evaluation should provide quantitative as well as qualitative descriptions focused around the following evaluation questions: 1) Has the program received, retained, and/or acquired the requisite staffing, institutional supports, and physical infrastructure necessary for the fulfillment of its obligations under the CZMA? What if any problems or shortages of resources, staffing or support have occurred which may adversely impact program performance? Is a corrective action plan in place? 2) Has the program met or exceeded its performance targets in regards to program outputs per its annual cooperative agreements? and 3) Has the program met or exceeded its performance targets with regards to its program outcome performance metrics? 4) What, if any, problem or challenges were encountered that adversely impacted programs outputs or outcomes? Were actions for addressing these challenges evident in subsequent cooperative agreements? 5) How effective do stakeholders perceive the focal program is in each of the five CZMA mandated areas?
- These reports should proceed and directly inform the evaluation targets areas for the program under review. They should also be shared with program directors in advance of the site visits and allow opportunity for formal comment and response. However, these reports are intended to inform and complement but not replace the 312 report.
- An effective and transparent process and outcome evaluation process would require clearly developed and understood thresholds for a “passing grade,” as well as clearly developed and

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understood consequences for a “failing grade,” as it relates to CZMA requirements and other outlined metrics.

Stage 2: Confirmation and Developmental Evaluation of the CZM/NERR programs

The ECS Team recommends that the second phase of the 312 evaluation process be defined as having several important goals that are largely developmental in purpose. These goals include: 1) documentation and celebration of success, 2) cross-boundary assessment and learning (may include focus on regional issues, linkages between CZM and NERR programs, etc.), 3) programmatic level problem solving, capacity building, and information sharing, 4) relationship building, 5) advocacy for needed supports and actions, and 6) confirmation and explication of program process and outcome performance. All functions should be addressed in some capacity, however, it should be directly acknowledged that different functions may be given different priority based on the needs and priorities of the program(s). We further recommend that the specific goals as well as specific focal evaluation areas of the site visit be discussed and agreed upon between/among OCM and program directors/managers in advance of the site visit. Design elements of the site visit should be tailored to meet the specific developmental priorities agreed upon for that program (See Table 4).

Table 4. Designing for Impact: 312 Site Visit Goals and Supportive Designs	
Goal	Key Processes
Documentation and celebration of success	Stewardship liaison survey, stakeholder survey, public meetings, observation of program operations, stakeholder meetings, presentations by program staff; clear, concise, and timely reports back to programs
Relationship building – focus may include a combination of any of the following: OCM staff, CZM/NERR staff, program partners, the public, other CZM/NERR programs	Informal networking opportunities, observation of program operations, stakeholder meetings, presentations by program staff, strategic composition of the evaluation team [i.e., regional directors, liaison officers, members of other OCM divisions, representatives from other CZM/NERR programs], use of regional meetings
Needs assessment and learning – focus here may include focus on regional issues across states, linkages between NERR and CZM within state, and obtaining feedback and needs related to OCM priorities, resources, tools, trainings, and support.	Regional stakeholder and program meetings, joint CZM/NERR meetings, using regional priorities to inform three evaluation areas, strategic composition of evaluation team (e.g., inclusion of representative from Coastal Services, including CZM director or NERR manager from within the region), clear, concise and timely reports back to programs
Advocacy for needed support and actions	Strategic focus of the evaluation areas, stakeholder meetings/presentations, interviews with key members of the state, exit interview, report recommendations and required actions, clear,

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	concise and timely reports back to programs
Programmatic level problem solving, capacity building and information sharing	Strategic focus of the evaluation areas, strategic composition of the evaluation team to reflect expertise and insight into problem areas, stakeholder meetings and individual interviews aimed specifically on diagnostic assessment; exit interviews; report recommendations and required actions; clear, concise, and timely reports back to programs

Note: The separation of the process/outcome and developmental aspects of the evaluation would clarify the role of the site visit team and reduce the potential for conflicting aspects and roles of evaluators (assess vs. advise). This is of particular relevance to the ongoing practice of including a CZM director/NERR manager from a neighboring program as part of the 312 evaluation program, which is much more relevant to the developmental aspect of the evaluation than for the process/outcome components.

5.b. Opportunities for outsourcing 312 evaluations

OCM requested assistance in assessing the feasibility and cost effectiveness of outsourcing the 312 evaluation process. There are several drivers behind this. OCM's evaluation staff has been reduced and thus there is limited capacity resulting in lengthy periods between 312 site evaluations (in the 7-10 year range at this point). The 312 process was described as being a significant staffing burden for OCM and the lack of dedicated evaluation staff was also noted as a key factor causing lengthy delays in finalizing the 312 reports.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10. The ECS team strongly recommends against a full outsourcing of the developmental aspects of the on-site 312 evaluation process.**
- 11. The ECS team strongly recommends that OCM consider outsourcing of the process and outcome aspects of the 312 evaluation process that could be performed off-site.**

Developmental evaluation

Based on our assessment of the goals of the 312 process, the ECS team strongly recommends against a full outsourcing of the 312 process. Specifically, based on our observations of the site visit process as well as insights from key informant interviews, it is our conclusion that: a) the primary value/function of the 312 site visit is developmental in nature for both OCM and the programs, and b) the creation of that value requires evaluation teams are staffed by OCM staff and other stakeholders knowledgeable about coastal management programs and coastal issues. Were OCM to outsource the site visit component of the 312 to external contractors, it would lose a valuable mechanism through which OCM currently builds institutional knowledge about its component programs. It would also lose the opportunity provided by the site visit to build and maintain a positive working relationship with those programs. Further, much of the developmental benefit of the site visits for the programs lies in leveraging the experience and expertise of the evaluation team to provide programs with new insights and perspectives on their work. In a couple instances, CZM and NERR informants were highly critical of what they perceived to be an inexperienced and unknowledgeable evaluation team, indicating that team expertise is vital. It is questionable that OCM would be able to identify a contractor with anywhere near the level of insight

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into coastal zone management programs as to be regarded as a source of expertise by the target program. Further, programs value the site visits, in part, because it demonstrates a degree of federal commitment and interest in what they are doing. Even if a contractor team had strong expertise, they would not have the authority and clout afforded by the NOAA OCM staff. Outsourcing this function is likely to be perceived by programs as a lack of commitment and interest and reflect poorly on NOAA/OCM programming.

Process/outcome evaluation

The ECS evaluation team recommends that OCM consider a partial outsourcing of the 312 process. Specifically, we recommend that Stage 1: CZM and NERR Process and Outcome Evaluation as described in the preceding section be considered for contracting. Outsourcing this component of the 312 process would likely have several important benefits. First, outsourcing would ensure an independent evaluation as the contracted evaluators are not under pressure to maintain an on-going positive working relationship with the program sites. As a result, a contractor would be in a better position to provide an unbiased, data-based process and outcome assessment. Further, this would clarify and enhance the ability of OCM staff to position themselves as resources to the programs. Second, contracting out the process and outcome evaluation components of the 312 process would significantly reduce the document review and analysis tasks associated with the 312 developmental evaluations. This would facilitate OCM in being able to conduct the 312 developmental evaluations at a more regular interval, lessen the burden on OCM staff, and facilitate timelier reporting back to programs in order to maximize the developmental benefits of the process. Finally, the process and outcome evaluation could be performed as a “paper exercise” that would not require travel for on-site visits, and not incur additional travel costs. In fact, the separation of an off-site process and outcome evaluation from the on-site developmental evaluation may allow some reduction in the time spent at each site.

Outsourcing the process and outcome evaluation may have some disadvantages, including the need for OCM to remain involved in the process through the development of an appropriate program theory, and clear guidance for contractors or the specificity of their tasks. Further, program liaisons may feel somewhat detached from their programs, and lose some of their direct connections and conduits for gathering formal and informal information. However, these can be overcome by attention to detail when designing the process, and the advantages of outsourcing the process and outcome evaluation appear to clearly outweigh the disadvantages.

5.c. Regional context into future evaluation approaches

OCM also requested assistance in considering options for how to incorporate a regional context into future evaluation efforts. However, interviews with OCM staff revealed a wide array of ideas about what it means to incorporate a regional context into future evaluation approaches.

5.c.i. Potential drivers for a regional approach

Common Issues within a Region

Throughout a region, similar ecological stressors are present, which would allow for developing and implementing a regionally agreed upon set of priorities or metrics that can be evaluated over time and help shape program direction and approaches to key issues. For example, in the Gulf, the main NERR issues are very similar and the CTP programs already focus on similar issues and themes (e.g. community resilience), which are demonstrated in site specific performance metrics. OCM may be able to scale up metrics at the regional level to better capture programmatic investments and impacts.

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One major benefit to conducting evaluations under a regional approach is that it could pull the CZM and NERR programs more closely together to work on regional issues and approaches to address those issues, leveraging each other's resources. One informant commented on the relationship between the CZM and NERR programs within states:

[CZM] programs are described in the CZMA and how it works on the ground is very site and state specific.

This suggests that incorporating regional aspects to program coordination and evaluation may help draw CZM and NERR programs together rather than leaving it to the states and sites to work towards this coordination.

Fostering learning between programs and states

Based on the interviews, there is willingness to use a regional approach and framework to ensure that cross-program communications improve. While communications exist for specific issues, implementing a regional perspective could increase the likelihood that programs work together and learn from each other. For example, some programs hold annual or bi-annual meetings for state CZM and NERR programs, which may be a good way to foster communication, share ideas, and ensure a closer connection among staff.

Need for efficiency in OCM programming

One perspective noted from OCM regional directors was that there is a real need to find the most effective and efficient manner to serve partners and stakeholders with limited staff and budgetary resources. Regional approaches to an OCM programs and evaluation system may help increase efficiencies and effectiveness. Conducting a needs assessment at the regional scale could allow OCM to better provide tools, trainings, and initiatives and direct resources to priority areas established, also allowing the CZM and NERR programs to be more responsive to more partners.

Regional impact

Some staff expressed a desire to create/advance a program that has a national impact and saw a regional focus as the right level of granularity for strategic planning and prioritization of resources. Relatedly, others described on-going efforts within OCM to organize at a regional level and saw opportunity for the evaluation activities to support these larger efforts. Addressing priorities and performance at a regional scale may allow OCM to report accomplishments and describe opportunities at a greater impact scale than reporting state or site specific metrics. While reporting at the national level is impactful for budget justification, being able to point to specific regional reports or achievements could provide specific examples of how resources are being utilized in an efficient manner and addressing larger scale coastal management issues. Additionally, sharing aggregated information at regional forums with other federal and NOAA offices could increase opportunities to share coastal management lessons learned and potentially lead to leveraging additional resources.

The data the NERRS produce (e.g. System Wide Monitoring Programs) and other data sets and projects from the CZM and NERR programs, while state or site specific, can have regional implications and be scaled up to develop a national product and storyline that supports OCM's mission. Reporting CZM and NERR program accomplishments at the regional level would also promote OCM programming impacts strongly to lawmakers, decision makers, and the public to increasingly understand the importance and

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significance of for protecting, restoring, and responsibly developing our nation's diverse coastal communities and resources.

5.c.ii. Existing regional capacity

Regional OCM infrastructure and staff

OCM has some level of regional organization, including regional directors in every region. Should regional approaches to the CZM and NERR programs be implemented, the regional directors could contribute significantly to the development of regional priorities and/or metrics within their region, and contribute to the development of a program theory with clear goals for evaluation purposes.

Existing regional collaboration entities

Collaborative projects within OCM already occur at a regional scale. For example, in the Gulf of Mexico, the NERR programs regularly submit grants together for research, education, and stewardship workshops. In this instance, the Restore Act and the Deepwater Horizon spill funding opportunities have provided resources for this collaborative work. However, regional collaborations within OCM appear to be bottom up efforts driven by opportunities rather than a top down directive. Also, there appears to be no formal process in place for CZM and NERR programs to engage with other NOAA programs with activities at the regional scale such as IOOS, Sea Grant, and the NOAA Climate Program.

5.c.iii. Logistical considerations

Increase efficiency of the site evaluation process

For some staff, the intent behind thinking more regionally in OCM's evaluation work was largely about logistics. OCM staff explained that there is a degree of overlap in key stakeholders within regions and many of the issues are the same. Consequently, there may be efficiencies gained by the evaluation team if 312 evaluations could be scheduled by region.

At the state program level, CZM directors and NERR managers (and some OCM staff) saw value in thinking and sharing information and insights regionally but also had concerns about the extent to which a regional approach to evaluation would be feasible. These concerns included the need to integrate and not compete with other on-going regional initiatives, differing state priorities within regions, travel costs and logistics associated with meeting regionally, and the idea that different issues are associated with different regional boundaries that don't necessarily match with NOAA's region designations. There was also agreement that regional approaches make more sense in some areas than they do in others.

Last, the general consensus among OCM staff was that OCM has yet to develop a regional vision and associated program theory for its work with the CZM and NERR programs. As such, there are currently no agreed upon targets or performance metrics upon which OCM could assess its impact at a regional level.

5.c.iv. Barriers to a regional approach to activities and evaluation

Current OCM program documents and information do not explicitly incorporate regional aspects for evaluation purposes

Overall, the current 312 evaluation and performance metrics collected are state/site specific rather than organized for a regional analysis. National and state specific performance metrics, the site 312 evaluations, NERR management plans and the CZM and NERR grants are not currently designed with regional programming as an evaluable component.

Clear definition and communication of OCM's regional approach

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A regional vision for OCM has not yet been well articulated such that CZM and NERR programs are invested and motivated to pursue regional aspects of programs that could be incorporated within an OCM evaluation approach. Additionally, there is seemingly no outside pressure to do this (e.g. CZMA, OMB performance metrics, regional politics, etc.). It is therefore not surprising that there is not a clear program strategy for regional evaluation, as there is not a clear vision for the potential scope and scale of potential regional activities. However, OCM articulated that some of the drivers behind shifting to a regional approach are organizational efficiency, cost efficiency, staff efficiency, and PR purposes.

The nature of the CZM and NERR programs

Consideration should remain for the fact that CZM programs are state based, and even small states close to each other may differ in their approaches for social, economic or political reasons, making it hard to coordinate regionally. Similarly, NERRs are site-based, and should only have been established because they represent differences from neighboring NERRs (the reserve system aims to represent “estuarine hydrologic and biological types characteristic of each biogeographic region”), representing some barriers to regional approaches. Further challenges may arise from the differences between regions. For example, there are only 3 states on the entire Pacific coast, and 14 states on the Atlantic coast.

Limited funding

In addition to the fact that a regional vision for OCM has not been well articulated and communicated to CZM and NERR programs, concern from the states was expressed that a regional mandate without additional funding may be hard to implement. Limited funds are available for the CZM and NERR programs, and an additional regional mandate would require additional funding, which may not be available without affecting existing aspects of the program. Throughout nearly all of the interviews, funding was listed as a key challenge to implementing a regional effort that requires added staff resources or time, as well as for conducting research across states.

Strain on OCM regional staff, programs and stakeholders to evaluate all programs in a region within the same timeframe

One major challenge for OCM to conduct 312 evaluations for an entire region within one to two years is that this will put a heavy burden on the regional directors and stewardship staff.

5.c.v. Overall interpretation

Overall, two interpretations emerge from these conversations, which will form the basis for the recommendations:

1. *Evaluation of regional activities:* The evaluation of regional activities would require that regional needs are understood and addressed via regionally-based plans and activities, which would then be evaluated at the regional scale. It appears clear that the required clear vision for OCM regional activities is not in place at this time. Further, a regional approach may not be relevant to all CZM and NERR programs in all regions, and may not be fully relevant to the state-based CZM programs and the place-based NERR programs given their very nature, and considering social, economic and political constraints that may differ across states. There may, however, be thematic interests (e.g. resilience to a changing climate) that are shared within regions, and this could be explored further. It appears that forums (such as regional conferences) for the regional exchange of ideas and best practices are already in place in some regions, and these should be encouraged, whether or not they are part of a regional *evaluation* process (they may not need to be). Also, considering that opportunities may arise from awareness, we recommend to

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continue and formalize the apparent current practice of including a CZM director/NERR manager from a neighboring program into the 312 developmental evaluation process.

If an evaluation of regional activities must take place, it should not be done without a clear communication of OCM's vision for CZM and NERR regional activities, and a clear program theory with regional strategies and outcomes, each with associated regional metrics and targets.

2. *Regional integration of the state-based evaluations:* Several CZM and NERR programs are evaluated every year. There might be practical, economic and programmatic/thematic reasons to perform the evaluations of programs in the same region in any given year. For example, back-to-back evaluation of the CZM and NERR program in the same state would reduce costs and allow for an assessment of how their activities are integrated and complementary in serving stakeholder needs. It is likely that there would be significant overlap in stakeholders for CZM and NERR programs, and convening them once rather than twice would likely reduce stakeholder fatigue, while demonstrating OCM's efforts at integrating services. Similar principles apply to the state authorities to which the CZM and NERR programs report. Further, assessing programs in neighboring states during the same year may provide opportunities for the reviewer team to more easily identify topical areas of common interest and potentially help build synergy among programs, while assessing complementarity and overlap. Regionally integrating state-based evaluations would not add costs or burden (which may in fact be reduced), but increase opportunities. However, the potential benefits of scheduling the review of programs within a region in a short period of time (1 or 2 years) must be weighed against the potential burden on the regional directors and stewardship staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

12. ***Because the 312 mandates performance evaluations of individual programs and a regional focus is not uniformly appropriate or viable for all programs, we recommend against integrating the 312 process into a regional framework.***
13. ***Regional exchange of ideas and best practices on topics of mutual interest to CZM and NERR programs are already in place in some regions, and should be encouraged where appropriate. Developmental evaluation activities during the site visit may serve as one vehicle for promoting regional exchange of ideas and best practices for programs in which that is a priority (see Table 4).***
14. ***A regional integration of the state-based evaluations could include back-to-back evaluation of the CZM and NERR programs within a given state, and to the extent possible, considering potential burden on regional directors and stewardship staff, scheduling reviews of programs in neighboring states in a short period of time (1 or 2 years). These measures could help reduce costs and increase opportunities.***

5.d. Evaluation of OCM's Digital Coast tools, services and trainings

Finally, OCM requested recommendations for how they could evaluate the Digital Coasts services, tools, and trainings during the 312 process to determine their utility to CZM, NERR, and other stakeholders. Through our research, we learned that Digital Coast is a user driven resource to address coastal management issues broadly. It describes itself as issue agnostic and its priorities are entirely defined by the needs of its constituents. The partnership that guides the work of Digital Coast consists of eight programs – of which NERR and CZM represent two of the seven. The mission and end users of Digital Coast is much broader than the CZM and NERR related stakeholders.

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Current evaluation activities of the Digital Coast include user information on dataset and post training evaluations as well as download analytics of online tools, trainings and resources; however, the latter is not used for evaluation purposes. Digital Coast is unable to collect more systematic evaluation data on its web based resources due to restrictions imposed by OMB. Digital Coast's primary interest is in: 1) needs assessment information that can assist them in identifying priorities for new tools/training/resources that can meet the needs of the coastal management community, as well as, 2) feedback on the usefulness of specific tools, resources, and trainings that have already been created.

Historically, the Triannual Coastal Manager survey was a vehicle for obtaining information on emerging needs and feedback on existing tools, resources, trainings, and support. This survey was terminated after the integration of the CSC and OCRM offices because it was believed the greater integration and more frequent communication with regional directors and site liaisons would provide the needed feedback mechanism through which Digital Coast could learn of emerging needs. There was also general concern about survey fatigue and staff resources needed to carry out the survey – particularly given the challenges with the survey approval process through OMB.

There are several avenues that Digital Coast currently uses to get feedback on their work. The regional directors are asked to annually prepare feedback on emerging needs. OCM maintains a spreadsheet that OCM staff are asked to input emerging needs and requests for tools, trainings and resources that come to their attention. Digital Coast uses this information to determine feedback and needs. There are also regional coordinators such as the regional coastal training program coordinator who stays in close communication with Digital Coast regarding training needs. No CZM or NERR informant noted any concerns about the responsiveness of Digital Coast in terms of program's ability to communicate emerging needs. There were also multiple comments made during our interviews that it was a challenge to find time to actually use Digital Coast information and products, but that out of NERR staff, the CTP programs make up the majority of users and there are other tools available for specific state needs.

It was noted by several informants that there were significant limitations to the value of integrating Digital Coast into the 312 evaluation process for two key reasons 1) the stakeholders selected for participation in the 312 process are not necessarily the focal users of the Digital Coast products, tools and services so feedback from this group may provide a skewed and unrepresentative picture of end user use and appreciation for Digital Coast resources, 2) because of the sheer number of different tools, resources, and trainings that are provided by Digital Coast – feedback provided through the 312 process would be quite general in nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 15. It would not be feasible or advisable to attempt to systematically use the 312 process to document the use and benefit of all Digital Coast products, tools, trainings and services.**
- 16. We recommend integrating an evaluation of OCM's Digital Coast tools, services and trainings through stakeholder survey.**

The ECS Team understands that there are considerably more tools, services, and trainings that are developed and delivered through CZM and NERR programs that are of significant impact and should also be considered when incorporating evaluation efforts if they are not already captured sufficiently in national performance metrics.

6. COST ANALYSIS ASSOCIATED WITH POTENTIAL CHANGES IN THE EVALUATION PRACTICES

Two main recommendations would impact the costs associated with potential changes in the evaluation process:

9. *The 312 evaluation process should be divided into an off-site process and outcome evaluation to assess program compliance, accountability and performance, and an on-site developmental evaluation aimed at relationship building, problem solving, organizational learning and supporting program improvement.*

14. *A regional integration of the state-based evaluations could include back-to-back evaluation of the CZM and NERR programs within a given state, and to the extent possible, considering potential burden on regional directors and stewardship staff, scheduling reviews of programs in neighboring states in a short period of time (1 or 2 years). These measures could help reduce costs and increase opportunities.*

While it is difficult to quantify the financial implications of those measures given that the costs associated with the current evaluation process are unknown to the ECS Team, we present a qualitative assessment of such financial implications.

While separating the 312 evaluation into an off-site process and outcome evaluation to assess program compliance, accountability and performance, and an on-site developmental evaluation aimed at relationship building, problem solving, organizational learning and support program improvement (Recommendation 9) would have significant programmatic benefits, it would definitely add to the costs of the evaluation process. This is not surprising, since the current 312 evaluation process provides minimal considerations to the process and outcome aspects of the evaluation. Table 5 provides an overview of the additional tasks, and Table 6 summarizes the costs, that would be associated with the implementation of Recommendation 9, given that the process and outcome aspects of the evaluation would be contracted (per Recommendation 11). Table 6 also considers the costs associated with the implementation of a regional integration of the state-based developmental evaluation site visit to include back to back evaluation of the CZM and NERR evaluations within a given state.

The costs associated with an off-site process and outcome evaluation to assess program compliance, accountability and performance would include the design of a template for use by CZM and NERR programs to document progress against the performance measures included in their respective plans, following the review of a representative sample of background documents. This would be a one-time cost. The CZM and NERR programs would then use such a template to self-report, on a regular basis (for example, every year or every four years), progress against targets. This would not represent additional burden beyond the required program performance report associated with the federal grant funding the programs, and in fact represent an abbreviated tabular format, which may require a lower level of effort. The evaluating team (contractor) would then review progress against targets, and summarize the findings (on target, or some concerns) in a short report to the program manager. This simple exercise would allow the rapid identification of concerns for CZM and NERR programs, and initiate conversations between the program and program manager for corrective actions if necessary. It is estimated that approximately 30 hours of contractor time per program would be necessary to review performance measures and draft a report.

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Table 5: Comparison of tasks associated with separating the 312 evaluation into an off-site process and outcome evaluation performed by contractors, and an on-site developmental evaluation performed by OCM staff.

Tasks	Current practices	Outsourced process and outcome evaluation	Developmental evaluation site visit
Review of background documents	X		X (reduced)
Draft template with performance measures from plan		X	
Review of state and national performance measures in view of state plan	X?	X	
Site visit	X		X
Interviews with staff and stakeholders	X		X
Developmental evaluation	X		X
Staff			
Program liaison	X		X
Regional coordinator	X		X
OCM evaluation staff	X		X
Peer director/manager	X		X
Contractors		X	

The costs associated with an on-site developmental evaluation to develop relationship building, problem solving, organizational learning and support program improvement would not differ much from the existing 312 evaluation process, which is mostly dedicated to those tasks. However, the review of background documents related to process and outcome evaluation could be eliminated, reducing preparation time prior to the site visit, and therefore reducing staff time and associated costs. It is also possible that the site visits could be slightly reduced in duration given the theoretical reduction in efforts associated with process and outcome evaluation, although such efforts and associated time commitments were minimal in the ECS Team's experience.

However, the implementation of a regional integration of the state-based developmental evaluation site visit to include back to back evaluation of the CZM and NERR evaluations within a given state could result in significant cost savings. Given the likely significant overlap in stakeholders, interested public, and agency reports, it is likely that a CZM and a NERR in the same state could be evaluated within a week (5 days), rather than two separate 2.5+ day efforts. This would represent significant savings in travel costs (cut in half for states with a CZM program and one NERR), as well as significant savings in staff time (5 days instead of two four-day periods, if including travel), and savings in time spent writing the findings since background materials on the local/state landscape likely overlap significantly. The cost savings would be in addition to the significant programmatic benefits of the simultaneous evaluation of a CZM and NERR program in the same state. The assessment of CZM and NERR programs within a region in the same year would similarly result in significant programmatic advantages, but would likely be cost neutral.

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Table 6: Comparison of costs associated with separating the 312 evaluation into an off-site process and outcome evaluation performed by contractors, and an on-site developmental evaluation performed by OCM staff, with or without the implementation of a regional integration of the state-based developmental evaluation site visit to include back to back evaluation of the CZM and NERR evaluations within a given state. Additional costs are presented in red, while cost savings are in green.

Tasks	Current practices	Outsourced process and outcome evaluation	Developmental evaluation site visit	Regional integration of the state-based developmental evaluation site visit to include back to back evaluation of the CZM and NERR evaluations within a given state
Review of background documents	10-15 hours of staff time for each of 3 staff members and 1 peer director/manager	10-15 hours of contractor time per program	5-10 hours of staff time for each of 3 staff members and 1 peer director/manager	5-10 hours of staff time for each of 3 staff members and 1 peer director/manager
Draft template with performance metrics from plan		*One-time expense for OCM staff or contractor (15 hours for each program review) to develop template, program staff time to fill self-study		
Stakeholder survey	20 hours (presumably) to develop and administer the stakeholder survey	20 hours to develop and administer the stakeholder survey		
Review of state and national performance metrics in view of state plan		20 hours of contractor time per program, and 10 additional hours for reporting		
Site Visit	Travel expenses		Travel expenses	Travel expenses for 4

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	for 4 staff members, 2.5+ days per program, every 4 (7-10) years		for 4 staff members, 3-4 days per program, every 4 (7-10) years	staff members, 5 days per state with a CZM and NERR program, every 4 (7-10) years
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6.a. Detailed Cost Analysis

This section provides more detailed information about the cost analysis activities involved.

Pricing will vary depending on what GSA schedule/labor category a company falls under as well as the level of experience desired. This can likely range from \$75-160. More information can be found on the GSA website [here](#).

The products of this contract include:

1. Review of relevant program documents
2. Conduct a stakeholder survey
3. Conduct process and outcome evaluations of program inputs/outputs to determine if they are in line with projected targets as identified by the grant agreements as well as how well programs meet required metrics
4. A preliminary assessment report summarizing the above outlined evaluation questions for each site evaluation

1. Review of relevant program documents and draft template with performance measures from plan – 30 hours

The template would be a one-time cost (15 hours for each program review). Quantitative data cleaning and prepping for analysis; quantitative assessment of performance outcomes and development of standard template to be used by each CZM/NERR program for self-reporting.

Review and analyze background materials for each specific site (15 hours) including 1) Coastal Zone Management Act as it relates to CZMP and NERRS, 2) OCM program theory/evaluation framework, 3) Management plan/program document of selected sites, 4) Annual grant agreements of selected sites, 5) Semi-annual reports of selected sites, 6) Performance measures – national and site-specific measures, and 7) Previous evaluation findings of selected sites.

2. Conduct stakeholder survey – 20 hours

Implementation and qualitative analysis of stakeholder survey and cross walk against annual grants. It is assumed that this survey has been developed by OCM and that the contractor will administer and analyze results. Stakeholders would be identified by OCM, NERR, and CZM staff.

Prior to each site visit, a stakeholder survey (provided by OCM) will be administered for each specific site and the results analyzed in a qualitative manner by the contractor, providing a summary report of findings to OCM. The contractor shall draft and send emails to program or reserve directors, site liaisons, and stakeholders (identified by OCM) 1-2 weeks prior to conducting the surveys. A second,

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reminder email will be sent to stakeholders who have not yet responded, two weeks after the initial email. The contractor shall be responsible for providing summary analysis of survey data at least three weeks prior to the site visit. All OMB Paperwork Reduction Act requirements for information collection will be followed as required.

3. Conduct process and outcome evaluations – 20 hours

Perform an independent process and outcome evaluation of each site prior to the site visit. Where possible, this evaluation should provide quantitative as well as qualitative descriptions focused around the following evaluation questions: 1) Has the program received, retained, and/or acquired the requisite staffing, institutional supports, and physical infrastructure necessary for the fulfillment of its obligations under the CZMA? What if any problems or shortages of resources, staffing or support have occurred which may adversely impact program performance? Is a corrective action plan in place? 2) Has the program met or exceeded its performance targets in regards to program outputs per its annual cooperative agreements? and 3) Has the program met or exceeded its performance targets with regards to its program outcome performance metrics? 4) What, if any, problem or challenges were encountered that adversely impacted programs outputs or outcomes? Were actions for addressing these challenges evident in subsequent cooperative agreements? 5) How effective do stakeholders perceive the focal program is in each of the five CZMA mandated areas? The evaluation should include quantitative and qualitative analysis cross-walking stakeholder survey results and process evaluation against annual grants and stated metrics.

These reports should proceed and directly inform the evaluation targets areas for the program under review. They should also be shared with program directors in advance of the site visits and allow opportunity for formal comment and response. However, these reports are intended to inform and complement but not replace the 312 report.

An effective and transparent process and outcome evaluation process would require clearly developed and understood thresholds for a “passing grade,” as well as clearly developed and understood consequences for a “failing grade,” as it relates to CZMA requirements and other outlined metrics.

4. Develop draft and final reports – 10 hours

Develop and provide final report to OCM evaluation team prior to site visit and with enough time to aid in identifying specific areas of evaluation during the site visit.

Total estimated hours per site: 80 hours

Total estimated cost range: \$6,000-12,800 per site

7. APPENDICES

APPENDIX A. Background documents reviewed.

Instruction Manuals

1. [Instruction Manual for Evaluators](#): A very detailed, regularly revised, Google Docs folder for evaluators that guides through process.
2. [Final New Evaluation Process March 2013](#) - General overview for program managers and staff Note: Out-of-Date. Does contain information submittal request to programs and example stakeholder surveys (which have gotten progressively shorter).
3. [Reporting Guidance for Recommendations and Evaluation Metrics](#) - Note: For recommendations programs did not consistently report in the past and we did not track, programs did provide an update at the time of the evaluation. OCM is now tracking annually for all evaluations conducted 2014 and our first annual [2015 Evaluation Tracking Report](#). Although programs are supposed to report on evaluation metrics and background information there are a lot of inconsistencies which are not addressed till the evaluation.
4. 2017-2020 Evaluation Forms
 - [2016 OMB Paperwork Reduction Act submittal](#) - contains other background information regarding level of effort etc.. that may be of interest.
 - “New” Stakeholder Survey Forms pp. 26-32 (some revision of questions and shorter)
 - Information Submittals for CMPs and NERRS - pp. 17-25 (very minor tweaks from original)
5. 2008 Evaluation Considerations - Developed to cover full range of potential questions for the evaluator to explore during an evaluation
 - [CMP Evaluation Considerations](#)
 - [NERR Evaluation Considerations](#)
6. Other Process Documents
 - [Overview of Process 2-pager](#) - updated evaluation review
 - [List of Internal Information Collected](#)
 - [Prioritized CZMA Evaluation Outcomes](#) for Reserves and Coastal Programs
 -

Examples - Final Evaluation Findings with Survey Reports and Information Submittals

1. [Waquoit Bay NERR Findings](#) | [Stakeholder Survey Results](#) | [Information Submittal](#)
Program with some challenges, Evaluator Sacheen Tavares Leighton, 2014, Stakeholder meetings conducted remotely
2. [Chesapeake Bay NERR VA](#) | [Stakeholder Survey Results](#) | [Information Submittal](#)
High performing program, Evaluator Carrie Hall, 2014, stakeholder meetings onsite,
3. [Massachusetts CMP Findings](#) | [Stakeholder Survey Results](#) | [Information Submittal](#)
High performing program, Evaluator Sacheen Tavares Leighton, 2014, stakeholder meetings conducted remotely,
4. [Puerto Rico CMP Findings](#) | [Stakeholder Survey Results](#) | [Information Submittal](#)

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Program operates in system with challenges, good example of what we consider a high level of public comment (see appendix for comments and responses), Evaluator Carrie Hall, 2015, stakeholder meetings onsite,

Other recent findings are Apalachicola NERR (Florida), Connecticut CMP, Michigan CMP, Indiana CMP, Texas CMP, Maryland CMP, Virginia CMP, and Florida CMP which are available along with older findings at: <https://coast.noaa.gov/czm/evaluations/>

Selection of Evaluations related to CZMA

1. [2008 GAO Report - CZM Measuring Program's Effectiveness Continues to Be a Challenge](#)
2. [2014 GAO Report - Opportunities Exist for NOAA to Enhance Its Use of Performance Information](#)
3. [OCM's Plan to address recommendations in 2014 GAO Report](#)
4. [2010 SRA Evaluation of CZMA Programs](#) - Includes survey of 57 state program managers and external partners and analysis. Asked a number of questions regarding influence of state programs, role of state programs, state program effectiveness that are similar/related to what is being considered.

Performance Metrics

1. [Evaluation Metrics for all CZM Programs](#) - In response to the 2008 GAO Report, CMP and NERRS developed 3 performance metrics with 5-year targets specific to their program and are reporting on these annually in their progress reports. At this time we are thinking that for the next 5 years we will ask programs to pick from existing national metrics and set 5 year targets.
 2. Coastal Programs Performance Metrics
 - [CMP Performance Metrics webpage](#) - Note Contextual indicators are no longer collected, instead the office is relying on the 5-year 309 Assessment.
 - The Quick Summaries – 2008 to 2011 on this page may help provide more detail and context for goals/strategic objectives.
 - Note: The CZMA Performance measurement system is designed to cover Section 303(2)(A-K) of the CZMA
 - 309 5-year (2016-2020) Assessment and Strategies - Example: [Alabama CMP 309 Assessment and Strategies](#).
 - Data can be access on [CMP Performance Metrics internal website](#): Database is extremely limited in analysis capabilities, no reporting by program. We do sometimes pull together data for our evaluations by hand. Example: [New Jersey CMP Performance Metrics table](#).
 3. NERR Performance Metrics
 - [NERR Performance Metrics Database](#) Database is extremely limited in analysis capabilities, no reporting by program.
 - [NERRS Performance Metrics Guidance \(2011\)](#)
- NERRS programs
- [Coastal Training Program Performance Monitoring Manual \(2012\)](#) *see page 28 for logic model*
 - [Education Sector Performance Monitoring Guidance Manual \(2015\)](#)

Office-wide Strategic Planning

- [NOAA Coastal Office \(OCM\) Strategic Plan 2013](#)
- ["Logic Model"](#) - for existing metrics leading to office/CZMA priorities (note: although slide is labeled proposed we and our partners collect this data)

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Coastal Program Strategic Planning

- [Coastal Zone Management Act](#) - Section 303(2)(A-K) lists the priorities of coastal management programs
- [Coastal Programs 2007-2012 Strategic Plan](#) - This is the most recent plan.

National Estuarine Research Program Strategic Planning

- [NERRS Strategic Plan 2011-2016](#)
- The [individual Management Plans for each reserve](#) - Reserves develop 5-year management plans. In 2013 guidance was released requiring reserves to identify key issue areas and develop goals/objectives/strategies/metrics for these issues. This should make the choice of target areas and focus/structure of evaluations more straightforward in future.
- [Guidance for Developing state program management plans](#)

CZMA Act and Regulations

- [Coastal Zone Management Act](#) - In particular Section 303(2)(A-K) lists the priorities of coastal management programs
- [CZMA Regulations](#)
- Section 309 Guidance
 - Louisiana Assessment and Strategy
 - California Coastal Commission Assessment and Strategy

Program Documents

- Louisiana Program Document
- California Program Document

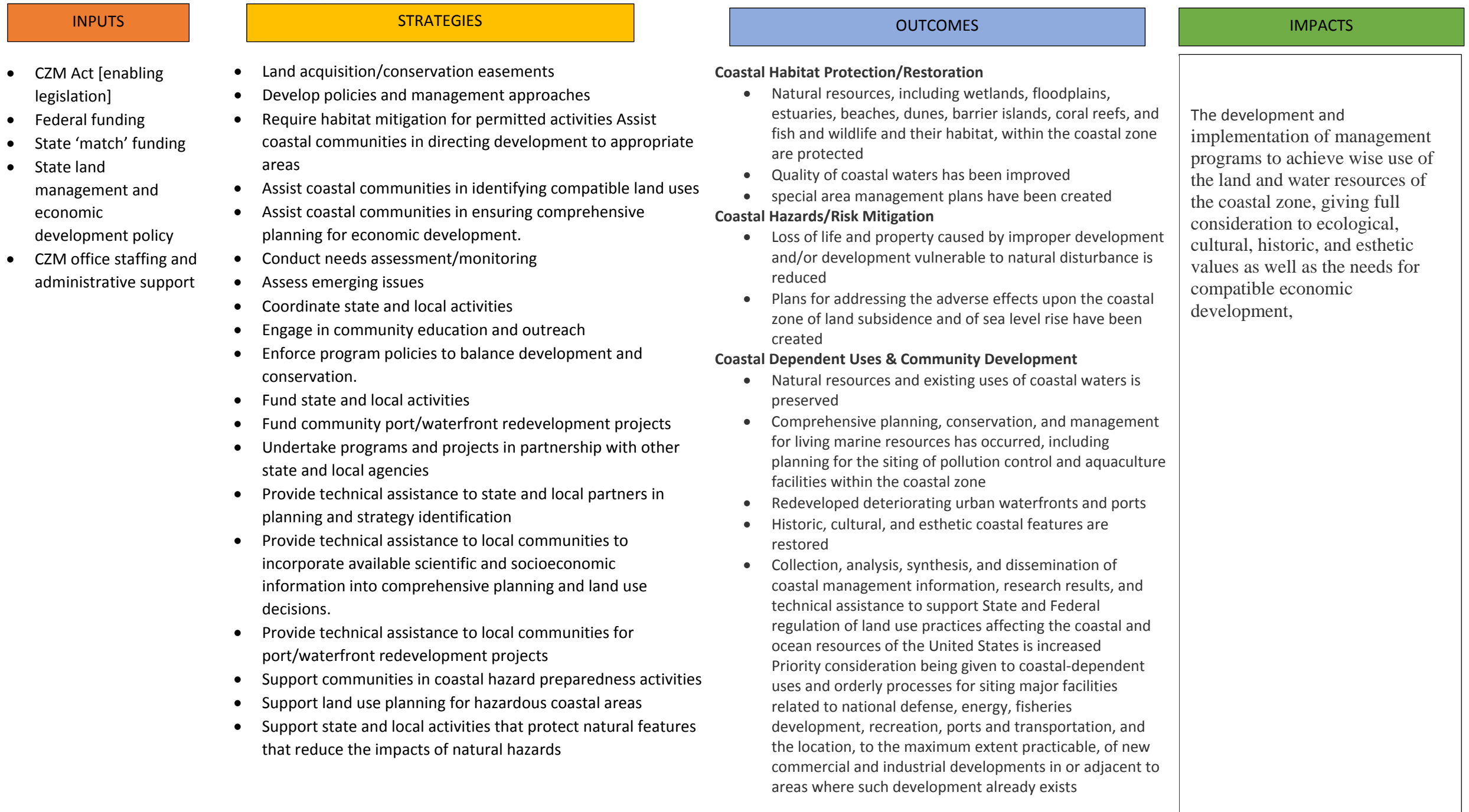
Digital Coast

- Strategic Plan
- OCM provided tools, trainings and services listed on website

Documents relevant to the 312 site visits

- Jacques Cousteau NERR (NJ)
- Great Bay NERR (MS)

APPENDIX B. CZM working Program Theory



INPUTS

STRATEGIES

OUTCOMES

IMPACTS

Decision making /Coordination

- Governmental decision making for the management of coastal resources is expedited
- Improved consultation and coordination with, and consideration of, affected Federal agencies
- Public and local governments are participants in coastal management decision making.
- improved coordination between State and Federal coastal zone management agencies and State and wildlife agencies, and Cooperation between the public, state and local governments, and interstate and other regional agencies, as well as of the Federal agencies has increased
- Increasing consideration by States around such issues as ocean uses potentially affecting the coastal zone

Public Access

- Increased public access to the coasts for recreation purposes

Decision making /Coordination

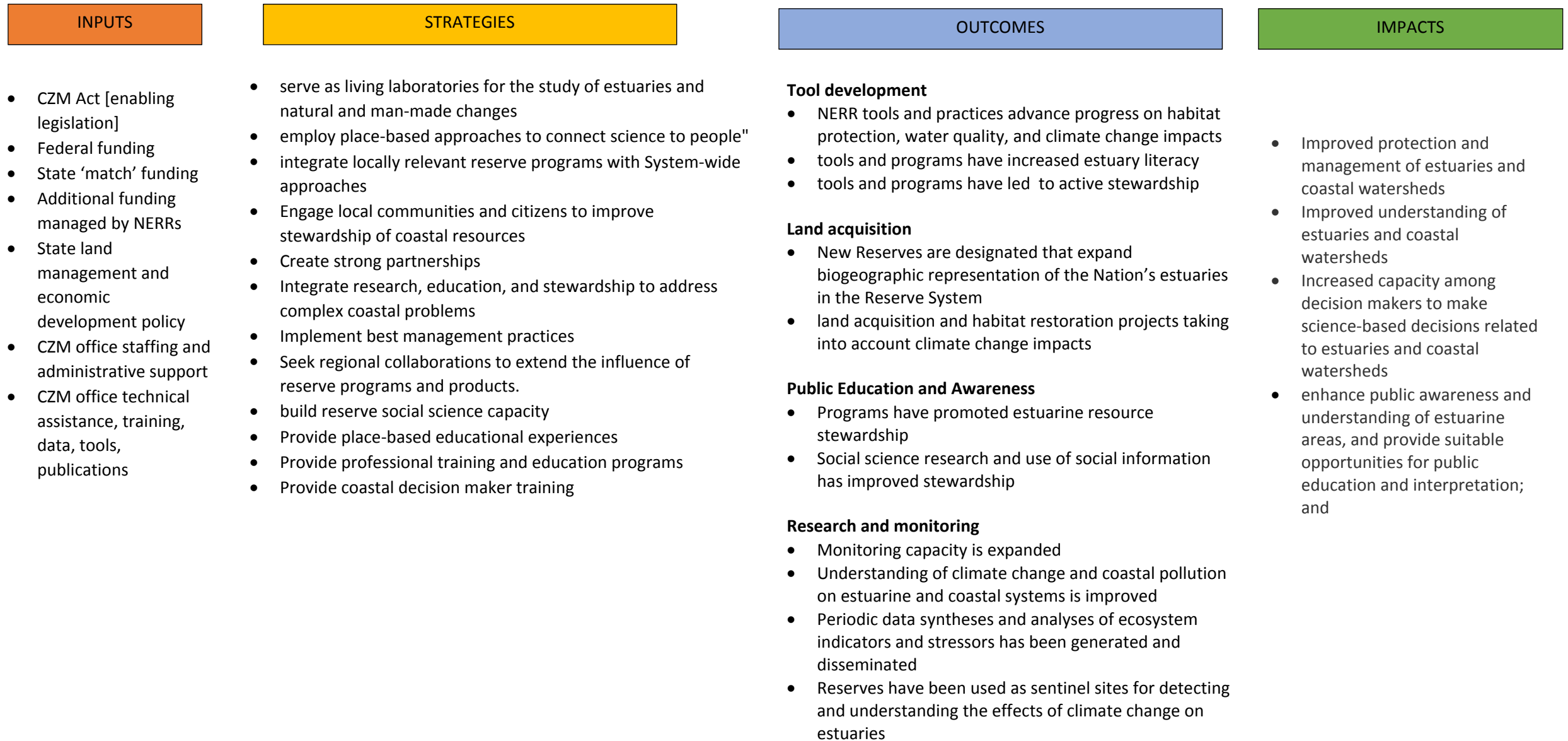
- Governmental decision making for the management of coastal resources is expedited
- Improved consultation and coordination with, and consideration of, affected Federal agencies
- Public and local government are participants in coastal management decision making.
- improved coordination between State and Federal coastal zone management agencies and State and wildlife agencies,
- cooperation between the public, state and local governments, and interstate and other regional agencies, as well as of the Federal agencies has increased
- Increasing consideration by States around such issues as ocean uses potentially affecting the coastal zone

Public Access

- Increased public access to the coasts for recreation purposes

The development and implementation of management programs to achieve wise use of the land and water resources of the coastal zone, giving full consideration to ecological, cultural, historic, and esthetic values as well as the needs for compatible economic development,

APPENDIX C. NERR working Program Theory



INPUTS

STRATEGIES

OUTCOMES

IMPACTS

Increased science informed decision making

- quantification of ecosystem services has supported ecosystem-based management of natural and built communities
- characterization of coastal and estuarine ecosystems has supported ecosystem-based management of natural and built communities
- decision-makers capacity to use science-based information in decisions that affect estuaries and coastal watersheds has improved
- collaborative projects to connect scientists with intended users have occurred
- researcher and student capacity to understand and use NERRS data and information for inquiry-based learning has increased

- Improved protection and management of estuaries and coastal watersheds
- Improved understanding of estuaries and coastal watersheds
- Increased capacity among decision makers to make science-based decisions related to estuaries and coastal watersheds
- enhance public awareness and understanding of estuarine areas, and provide suitable opportunities for public education and interpretation; and

APPENDIX D. Interview protocols.

OCM INTERVIEW GUIDE
<p>Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. As you know, I'm part of a team contracted by OCM to assess OCM's evaluation system as it relates to the CZM and NERR programs. We were asked to do this with particular consideration of three things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To what extent is it feasible and econ viable to outsource evaluation activities under contract? 2) How might this system be modified to consider evaluation outcomes within a regional context? 3) How might OCM expand its evaluation system to include assessment of its tools, trainings, resources? <p>The purpose of this interview is to gain some additional insight into the current evaluation system, its current capabilities and limitations in general as well as in relation to the aforementioned questions. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded. These audio recordings will be used only so that I don't have to rely exclusively on how fast I can type while we talk. Once I have fleshed out my notes, the audio recordings will be deleted and will not be shared with anyone outside of the evaluation team. However, if at any point you become uncomfortable, I'm happy to turn the recorder the off.</p> <p>Any questions before we get started?</p>
<p>First, just some background on you:</p>
<p>What is the title of your position?</p> <p>How long have you been in this position?</p> <p>How long have you been with [NERR or CZM name]</p> <p>How many NOAA site review cycles have you been through as Director?</p>
<p>Great. First, I want to clarify what we mean by OCMs evaluation system for the NERR and CZMs programs. We've come to understand this system as consisting of several components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annual reporting on federal outcomes metrics - Annual reporting on 3-5 site defined outcomes - Periodic site reviews [every 7 years] as mandated by the CZMA which includes pre-surveys of the stewardship liaison, program director, and other program stakeholders - Historically, this also included the CZM manager survey although the intent is to phase this out. <p>In addition to these processes, both CZM and NERRs have program agreements/management plans that are reviewed and renewed every 5 years and annual funding renewal proposals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did we get that right? • Did we miss anything? Any other data that is routinely collected from your program by NOAA on your efforts/performance?

CZM/NERRS Evaluation Report

Great, I'd like to ask you about each of these.
Starting with the annual reporting on the federal outcomes and the 3 -5 site defined outcomes, how familiar are you with the information that is collected in that process?
What, in your understanding, is the intended use or function of that data? Who are the intended audiences?
How is that data currently used?
How effective is the annual federal outcomes data at meeting its intended goals?
What could be done to make it more useful?

APPENDIX E. Digital Coast tool analysis

Tool Types (Categorizations from Digital Coast)

- Analysis
- Classroom Led
- Learning
- Mixed Delivery
- Online – Instructor Led
- Quick Reference
- Reporting
- Self-Guided
- Video
- Visualization
- Webinar

Focus Area

- Benthic Terrain
- Climate Adaptation Strategy
- Coastal Flooding
- Coastal Shoreline Counties
- Community Development
- Data Applications
- Demographic
- Economic Development
- Evaluation Methods
- Group Discussion/Planning Framework
- Hurricane Tracking
- Land Cover
- Land Cover Change
- Land Cover Change and Associated Community Impact
- Needs Assessment
- Ocean Planning
- Ocean/Coastal Legal Information
- Outer Continental Shelf Studies
- Ports
- Risk Assessment
- Risk Communication
- Riverine Flooding
- Shoreline Development
- Social And Economic Data Of Coastal Communities
- Social Marketing
- Socioeconomic Information
- Stakeholder Identification
- Strategic Planning
- Tsunami Information
- Understanding Models

CZM/NERRS Evaluation Report

Outcome

- Accessible Environmental Data
- Awareness
- Community Behavior Change
- Education
- Influence Development Decision Processes
- Skill Development
- Tool Applications

Impact

- Ability To Collect And Use Data To Improve Programming
- Data Informed Hazard Risk Assessment
- Data Informed Policy
- Data Informed Research
- Efficient And Effective Meetings
- Hazard Risk Assessment
- Hazard Risk Management
- Hazard Risk Reduction
- Inclusive Planning Discussion
- Incorporating Economic Considerations Into Ecosystem Evaluations
- Land/Community Planning
- Organizational Framework
- Priority Needs Identified
- Reduced Environmental Problems
- Smart Community Development

APPENDIX F. Different Approaches to Evaluations and Associated Requisite Conditions

	Description/Purpose	Requisite conditions
Summative/ outcome evaluation	Assess the achievement of a pre-defined set of objectives based on scientifically reliable and valid indicators compared against pre-defined targets of progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A well-defined and widely agreed upon program theory - Availability of objective, reliable, and valid indicators that can be measured within the scope of the resources available to the evaluation
Process Evaluation	<p>Assess program capacity in terms of staffing, institutional support, leadership, physical infrastructure</p> <p>Assess the scale, scope, and quality of implementation of planned strategies and their immediate outputs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Availability of implementation data summarizing the program’s activities and the quality of that implementation [e.g., participant satisfaction, # completed, average performance] - Clear widely agreed upon strategic plan outlining the requisite inputs as well as the scale, scope, and indicators of quality for actions and activities that should have been implemented
Developmental Evaluation	Generate new knowledge and insight that can assist a program in clarifying its goals, identifying best practices, generate more nuanced understanding of the nature of challenges, identify gaps or problems, and help inform future actions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Some documentation of process and outcome data – may be perceptual - Some documentation of program goals, objectives and activities - Openness of program staff/stakeholders to participate in a facilitated process of self reflection
	<p>Ancillary Goals of Developmental Evaluations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relationship building - Knowledge transfer across programs - Celebration of success - Storytelling/sensemaking - Facilitating integration and building a more coherent program identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Openness of program staff/stakeholders to participate

For more information, see:

Rossi, P. H., Lipsey, M. W., & Freeman, H. E. (2003). *Evaluation: A systematic approach*. Sage publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2008). *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage publications.

Patton, M. Q. (2011). *Developmental evaluation: Applying complexity concepts to enhance innovation and use*. Guilford Press.