

Goal 1 Support the Agency's Mission

Goal Statement

ORD will support the Agency's Strategic Goals through collaborative relationships with its program and regional offices by providing high-quality, relevant, responsive, and timely scientific information and research results.

What This Goal Means

Science is the foundation of all of EPA's work. ORD's role is to deliver problem-driven and core research, scientific advice, and technical support that provide a solid scientific basis for EPA policy and program decisions. Our research and scientific support activities must clearly contribute to the Agency's Strategic Goals. Although ORD's research may benefit many customers, our success will be primarily measured by the extent to which our research helps EPA accomplish its mission, both now and in the future.

In achieving our mission ORD is committed to following a balanced program of *problem-driven* and *core research*—with the additional condition that research must always be necessary for, not just relevant to, environmental protection and restoration. *Problem-driven research* directly addresses a specific, identified need in order to support a regulatory action or program activity. This research may be needed to review a criterion, meet a legislative mandate, or provide technical support to a program or regional office, such as developing methods for detecting and removing microbial contaminants from drinking water.



We also recognize the need for a strong body of *core research* focusing on elucidating key physical, chemical, biological, geological, sociological, and economic processes that are important in understanding and predicting the effects of human activities on human health and the environment. This type of research provides the scientific basis for understanding a wide range of environmental issues and problems. It includes, for example, research on biological indicators of ecosystem health or development of improved methodologies for assessing cumulative exposure to contaminants.

Today's core research program will provide the foundation for our problem-driven research in future years, and today's problem-driven research helps to shape our future core research portfolio. We conduct both problem-driven and core research, focusing on the common element of facilitating the work of the rest of EPA.

An extensive discussion of problem-driven and core research can be found in *Building a Foundation for Sound Environmental Decisions, Committee on Research Opportunities and Priorities for EPA*, National Research Council, National Academy of Sciences, 1997.

As a result, ORD's research must be results-oriented and customer focused. Specifically, our research needs to be:

- Rigorous, objective, and thorough;
- Structured and conducted to provide complete and integrated information relevant to decision-making;
- Focused on the needs of our customers; and
- Provided in a timely and useful manner.

Why This Goal Is Important for ORD

EPA is a mission-oriented agency; its work is focused on the specific goals and objectives described in EPA's Strategic Plan. ORD provides the scientific support that enables the Agency to meet those goals and objectives. EPA depends on ORD; its scientific reputation is built on our work. As a result, our research must respond to and anticipate the Agency's needs. Science that is not supportive of EPA's mission may be important, but it need not, and should not, be done by ORD. We must keep ourselves focused on helping EPA program and regional offices to fulfill their mandates and achieve their goals to address the nation's most important environmental and human health risks through research and development, assessment methods, and management options.

Because EPA's responsibilities are broad, important, and heavily informed by science, ORD must maintain a robust and wide-ranging research agenda. The challenge for us is to ensure that this research is organized, conducted, and delivered to the Agency in such a way that it makes a positive difference in the lives of the American people.

Goal 1 Objectives and Actions

1.1 Maintain a balanced program of problem-driven and core research.

1.1.1 – Develop multi-year plans that address key outcomes needed by the Agency and a logical sequence of work to achieve them.

1.1.2 – Communicate the value of core research outcomes and products to the program and regional offices to develop a common understanding of the link between this research and the Agency's long-term policy and decision-making needs.

1.1.3 – As part of the planning process, link research outcomes to current and emerging Agency needs.



1.1.4 – Continuously improve the research planning and coordination process to engage ORD's EPA partners, enhance transparency and efficiency of the process, and ensure that we are doing the right research.

1.1.5 – Clearly link the research funded by extramural grants to the Agency's Goals and GPRA framework.

1.2 Proactively lead EPA's effort to ensure that sound science is synthesized, integrated, and communicated in a form that supports effective environmental decision-making by EPA and its stakeholders.

1.2.1 – Promote more frequent and direct communication between ORD scientists and engineers, and programs, regions, and states to ensure that the science is properly interpreted and communicated for use in the regulatory process.

1.2.2 – Expand efforts to communicate the results of ORD's research inside and outside ORD (e.g., using State-of-the-Science reports; assessments and criteria documents; and sponsorship of national meetings, workshops, and symposia on key human health and ecological issues).

1.2.3 – Develop, maintain, and promote a searchable database of ORD research projects and results.

1.2.4 – Develop mechanisms to ensure that problem-driven research delivers a complete product that integrates the relevant research across ORD.

1.3 Provide technical assistance and regulatory support that meet the immediate needs of the program and regional offices.

1.3.1 – Include technical assistance and regulatory support needs in our multi-year research plans.

1.3.2 – Build an accurate, up-to-date, electronic and searchable ORD Technical Assistance Directory and routinely assess its impact and usage.

1.3.3 – Modify performance and promotion criteria to recognize the value of technical assistance and regulatory support to EPA’s mission.

1.3.4 – Routinely interact with both the Regional and Tribal Science Councils to ensure the relevance and timeliness of ORD support.

1.4 Routinely obtain advice and feedback on our performance from our customers.

1.4.1 – Develop surveys and other tools to obtain and evaluate customer feedback.

1.4.2 – Incorporate customer feedback into our research planning process.

1.4.3 – Assess research productivity and performance and evaluate accomplishments through EPA’s Science Advisory Board (SAB), ORD’s Board of Scientific Counselors (BOSC), and other external peer review panels, and by benchmarking against other research institutions.

Measures of Success

Consistent with the recognition that our work is and should be focused on EPA’s mission, protecting human health and safeguarding the environment are the ultimate measures of our success. It should be noted that a full set of Annual Performance Goals and Measures for our research can be found in EPA’s Annual Performance Plan, as required by GPRA. To further evaluate this Goal, ORD will measure the feedback received from program and regional partners, the scientific community, Congress, and the public. Customer satisfaction surveys will determine how well the value and results of our research are communicated and how high our satisfaction is with the level of customer involvement in research planning. In addition, reports from the SAB, BOSC, and others will be used to assess ORD performance.

Other measures of success include the following:

- Citations or references in regulatory decision-making documents that reflect ORD’s advice and research in formulating final decisions;
- EPA regulatory, enforcement, and other actions that are not delayed or rejected because of a lack of scientific and engineering rigor to support them;
- Peer reviews verifying that major uncertainties across the risk paradigm impeding environmental protection have been addressed; and
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys indicate that our research results are valued and responsive to their needs.