Water Information Strategies Workgroup: Objectives & Tasks

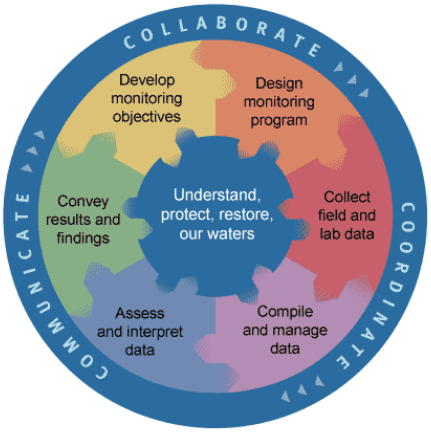
Background

The National Water Quality Monitoring Council was created in 1997 to provide a national forum for coordination of consistent and scientifically defensible methods and strategies to improve water quality monitoring, assessment, and reporting. The Council promotes partnerships to foster collaboration, advance the science, and improve management within all elements of the water quality monitoring and assessment community. A vital aspect of this role is to encourage increased understanding and stewardship of the nation's water resources. The Council has 35 members – a balanced representation of federal, tribal, interstate, state, local and municipal governments, watershed and environmental groups, the volunteer monitoring community, universities and the private sector, including the regulated community. The Council is co-chaired by the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. The Council is chartered as a subgroup of the Advisory Committee on Water Information under the Federal Advisory Committee Act

The Council takes a national perspective in developing its goals which are formulated and carried out through Council meetings and workgroups. Biennial conferences provide feedback from constituents and also shape the Council's goals and objectives. The Council is organized into three workgroups (Collaboration and Outreach, Methods and Data Comparability Board, and Water Information Strategies) whose activities and products advance these goals.

The Water Information Strategies Workgroup

The Council defines and promotes goal-oriented monitoring through the Water Information Strategies Workgroup (WIS). The basic concept of goal-oriented monitoring is to ensure that monitoring and assessment programs at a variety of spatial and temporal scales are connected via study design to management questions and/or actions. Connectivity is achieved by viewing monitoring and assessment along a continuum. WIS is concerned with carefully connecting the information goals of a monitoring program to its information products via strategic planning and design of water quality monitoring systems.



The Council used a collaborative approach to develop a graphic to illustrate a Framework for Monitoring, which provides a perspective that moves the entire monitoring and assessment community toward more consistency and comparability. This work group focuses on the cogs that involve:

- Identifying information objectives,
- Designing an appropriate monitoring program,
- Compiling and managing data, and
- Assessing and interpreting data.

The workgroup will propose strategies for program development and network design, data management and transfer and access, and data analysis and interpretation and reporting in support of the evolving information needs of water-quality management. These strategies will include support of the development of water quality information for national assessments, e.g., the Integrated Water Quality Monitoring and Assessment Report. These strategies will reflect and inform the needs of the National Water Quality Monitoring Council and affiliated subgroups.

WIS Workgroup Objective and Operating Principles
The objectives of the WIS workgroup are to:

1. Provide guidance to the monitoring and assessment community to ensure that program/network designs connect the information produced by monitoring and assessments efforts to long-term and current questions of water quality management
2. Refine and promote strategies related to the management, access, and exchange of water quality data between and amongst various water quality communities
3. Define, promote, and communicate comparable methods of data integration, analysis, and interpretation as well as methods of conveying the results of these activities

The WIS workgroup will maintain a perspective representing water quality monitoring and assessment needs within the watershed context (including atmospheric deposition, groundwater, and surface waters). WIS will accomplish its objective through the establishment of standing teams with a specific focus and ad hoc project teams to be developed as needed. WIS workgroup co-chairs and team leaders will serve as a Steering Committee for the purpose of ensuring coordination between WIS teams as well as with other Council workgroups. At present, there are three WIS standing teams: Program Development & Network Design Team, Data Management & Access Team, and Data Analysis & Interpretation Team. If additional tasks become necessary, the WIS Steering Committee will draft charges and form new teams.

WIS Products and Outcomes
It is anticipated that the WIS standing and ad hoc teams will develop tangible products and/or stated outcomes in accordance with WIS Goals and Objectives. The WIS Steering Committee will work with each team to establish short- and long-term goals for team products and outcomes. In addition, the WIS Steering Committee will coordinate between its teams to evaluate and promote tools to design monitoring programs, document best current practices, and develop and/or promote specific information and guidance for the monitoring and assessment community. The WIS Steering Committee will document the results of specific team tasks and promote their use.

The expected outcomes of the WIS workgroup are:

- Coordinate with other workgroups and facilitate partnerships between groups working toward similar objectives both nationally and internationally
- Provide technical expertise to other Council workgroups, including:
  - Technical support to the National Monitoring Network as needed to refine program/network design, data management and access strategies, and data analysis and interpretation guidelines
  - Program and content support to the Communications & Outreach workgroup and its Conference Planning team as a mechanism to inform the water quality monitoring and assessment community about WIS concepts and products
  - Coordination of product development, e.g., program design tools and comparable methods of data integration, analysis, and interpretation, with the Methods and Data Comparability Board

Specific WIS workgroup and team tasks and deliverables will be evaluated biennially.