

# Environmental Quality Board Strategic Plan

## Introduction

The 1973 Legislature established the Minnesota Environmental Quality Board (EQB or Board) as a forum for leadership and coordination across Minnesota state agencies on priority environmental issues that are interdisciplinary and cross-jurisdictional. As a public-facing board, the EQB strives to engage Minnesotans and provide meaningful access to conversations regarding the future of our environment.

Minnesota Statutes, chapter 116C establishes the Board, its membership, and power and duties. Minn. Stat. § 116C.04 gives the Board the responsibility to investigate interagency environmental issues. The law identifies a range of environmental matters for investigation, including air, water, solid waste management, transportation and utility corridors, energy policy, and planning.

Minnesota Statutes, chapter 116D – the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act – gives the EQB authorities and functions related to Minnesota’s Environmental Review Program. The Board serves as the coordinating body, with responsibilities to:

- Measure and improve the effectiveness of the environmental review program.
- Develop and maintain the state’s environmental review rules – including those that establish the types of actions for which environmental review is required and govern the environmental review process.
- Regularly review and report on those rules and the mandatory categories.
- Review and approve the forms for environmental review.
- Publish the EQB Monitor, which includes required notices for environmental review.
- Take various administrative actions related to environmental review.

## Supporting One Minnesota Plan

The EQB supports the State’s [One Minnesota Plan](#) and its mission to “Improve the lives of all Minnesotans by working collaboratively to implement policies that achieve results.” The EQB’s unique contribution to this goal is the ability to bring multiple agencies and the public together to advance interdisciplinary discussions on complex environmental issues.

As stated in the One Minnesota Plan, “Minnesota does better when state agencies and community partners collaborate to achieve common goals.”

EQB joins with individual Minnesotans, communities, and public and private organizations to work collaboratively and implement policies and programs that achieve results. With multiple state agencies and public members of the Board, collaboration across these spaces is a key identity for EQB to leverage and strengthen to support statewide goals.

Specifically, the EQB supports the One Minnesota Plan’s work to solve problems in the key priority area of Minnesota’s environment, while supporting thriving communities and ensuring equity and inclusion.

# Strategic Plan – July 2024 through June 2029

## Purpose and Overview

The purpose of this strategic plan is to provide a directional framework to guide EQB’s actions and decision-making over the next five years. The strategic plan aims to align our organizational aspirations with our capabilities to achieve meaningful and purposeful outcomes.

The strategic plan begins with EQB’s mission, vision, and organizational values. These three components provide high-level guidance about what work EQB can and should do and how that work should be done. They serve as a shared reference point for the EQB, our agency and government partners, and Minnesotans.

The strategic plan then lays out four key outcomes that the EQB wishes to achieve in support of our mission. These are designed to provide high-level direction and focus, while simultaneously accommodating emerging issues and dynamic state needs.

Each key outcome is followed by detailed strategies that represent the specific things EQB hopes to do over the next five years to support meeting the desired outcomes. These strategies will guide Board and staff activities, such as future work plans and decisions about allocation of resources.

## Mission

The EQB’s mission is to support informed decision-making that protects and enhances Minnesota’s environmental quality. We accomplish this by fostering meaningful conversations, supporting collaborative policy and program development, and ensuring effective environmental review of potentially impactful projects.

## Vision

Minnesota has healthy and sustainable environmental quality that equitably supports public health, economic vitality, societal quality of life, and sustained natural resources.

## Values

The EQB strives to incorporate the following key values in all our work and the way we do it:

- **Collaboration:** EQB facilitates connections across executive branch agencies, between branches of governments, and between government and those it serves.
- **Engagement:** EQB ensures that public voices, including diverse and underrepresented groups and those who will be most impacted, are actively included and considered in all our work.
- **Trust:** EQB is a trusted public entity in the work of enhancing Minnesota’s environmental quality and a reliable partner to State, Tribal, and local governments.
- **Equity:** EQB aspires to promote equity in the environmental, economic, and social wellbeing of all residents of Minnesota.

## Outcomes and Strategies

The outcomes are the results that the EQB aspires to achieve in our work. These outcomes are not specific to this five-year strategic plan but represent long-term goals; they can be seen as ideals we are working to meet. The EQB recognizes that there are gaps between what we are accomplishing and the goals we have set. While multiple actions and approaches could be taken to support each outcome, focused work in specific areas will help ensure we are effectively decreasing those gaps and getting closer to the desired outcomes.

Therefore, each outcome is followed by four strategies. These strategies define the actions and approaches the EQB will take in the coming five-year period to move towards achieving the specified outcomes. When a strategy is completed, another strategy may be added or implemented to ensure we continue to make progress. Organizational work planning will focus on work and projects with these strategic areas.

### 1. The EQB fosters meaningful conversations around environmental issues

**What does this mean?** The EQB convenes open, approachable, and accessible conversations. EQB ensures that public voices – including diverse and underrepresented groups and those who are most likely to be impacted by an issue under discussion – are provided a range of opportunities to become involved in key environmental discussions and are actively included and considered. EQB builds and maintains meaningful relationships with diverse groups statewide to support equal access for underrepresented groups and environmental justice communities to participate in conversations, policy development, and program implementation. EQB listens and learns from the input provided.

EQB provides Minnesotans a unique space to discuss important environmental issues, particularly those that are cross-programmatic and interdisciplinary. EQB provides a forum for Minnesotans to talk to each other and to governmental decision makers about what matters so that Minnesota has healthy, sustainable and equitable environmental quality.

**Strategies.** The strategies for this outcome are about building relationships, systems, and structures that bring forward new perspectives and result in more participatory conversations at Board meetings and other Board-sponsored events.

- Strategy 1: Build and maintain meaningful relationships with diverse groups representing partners and interested and affected people statewide.
- Strategy 2: Regularly bring Minnesotans together to talk about environmental issues.
- Strategy 3: Create opportunities for partners and interested and affected people to bring forward key environmental issues for discussion.
- Strategy 4: Implement policies and processes to improve engagement with Tribal nations and their members.

### 2. The EQB supports innovative state policy and program development on priority and emerging environmental issues

**What does this mean?** EQB facilitates interagency coordination so that state agency programs are aligned to support the state's overall policy goals for public health and environmental protection. EQB provides a forum for sharing information about environmental problems – including the actions being taken and remaining gaps and opportunities – to make recommendations for collective state action to advance and improve environmental outcomes. EQB develops and shares data and information about key issues to serve as a foundation for policy and program development and to report on implementation progress. Current priority issues include climate, water, and biodiversity (pollinators).

**Strategies.** The strategies for this outcome are about ensuring connections in specific areas and continuing to explore and define roles in newer spaces, including those spaces where EQB could bring in information to a central hub and send out information back to the agencies or share it with the public.

- Strategy 1: Convene the interagency pollinator protection team ensure interagency coordination, develop cross-agency policies and programs, and report on progress towards protecting Minnesota’s pollinator species.
- Strategy 2: Advance water planning and policy development by supporting integrated cross-agency reporting on Minnesota’s surface water and groundwater conditions and aligning discussions about gaps and opportunities to protect Minnesota’s water.
- Strategy 3: Collaborate with the Climate Change Subcabinet to support information sharing and reporting on implementation progress around Minnesota’s climate goals and actions.
- Strategy 4: Develop and implement a process to regularly identify key environmental issues where EQB support and action can drive effective interagency coordination to improve program alignment and information sharing.

### **3. The EQB maintains and improves Minnesota’s environmental review program**

**What does this mean?** The EQB is a valued source of information for anyone seeking assistance with environmental review. The EQB ensures that Minnesota’s environmental review program meets the objectives of the Minnesota Environmental Policy Act and provides information that supports understanding the impact proposed projects will have on the environment. The EQB monitors, measures, and strives to continuously improve program effectiveness, focused on how the program provides usable information, supports engagement with the public, and follows a sound process.

**Strategies.** The strategies for this outcome focus on providing information and support to practitioners; improving evaluation and measurement of environmental review outcomes; and updating the program to align with current environmental priorities and incorporate up-to-date scientific information.

- Strategy 1: Provide guidance and training to support responsible government units and project proposers in completing EAWs.
- Strategy 2: Develop tools and guidance to support the inclusion of climate pollution and resiliency information in environmental review.
- Strategy 3: Improve data collection to support EQB’s ability to evaluate the effectiveness of Minnesota’s environmental review program and our provision of technical assistance.
- Strategy 4: Evaluate and develop any needed updates to Minn. R. 4410 to support program effectiveness and clarity in implementation.

## 4. The EQB works towards achieving environmental quality without disproportionate impacts

**What does this mean?** Through conversations, the EQB works to understand and gather information about the unequal distribution of both environmental and public health benefits and environmental and public health burdens. EQB shares and presents this information about disproportionate impacts and potential opportunities to mitigate them. EQB works to support responsible governmental units and state agencies in considering disproportionate impacts in environmental review and policy development.

Definition: Our concept of disproportionate impact comes from the Environmental Protection Agency's environmental justice definition, which says that people should be *"fully protected from disproportionate and adverse human health and environmental effects (including risks) and hazards, including those related to climate change, the cumulative impacts of environmental and other burdens, and the legacy of racism or other structural or systemic barriers; and have equitable access to a healthy, sustainable, and resilient environment in which to live, play, work, learn, grow, worship, and engage in cultural and subsistence practices."*

**Strategies.** The strategies for this outcome are largely developmental, focused on EQB learning and sharing information about disproportionate impacts, where those are or may be experienced, and how they can be described and evaluated.

- Strategy 1: Identify how EQB member agencies are working on disproportionate impacts and where there are tools or actions that can be used by EQB.
- Strategy 2: Ensure all EQB reports provide information on equity in implementing the state's environmental goals.
- Strategy 3: Explore possible frameworks and tools that could support consideration of the potential for disproportionate impacts in environmental review.
- Strategy 4: Participate in conversations around cumulative impacts, considering how that framework relates to environmental review requirements and how it may be used to identify disproportionate impacts.