

Timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation

This document is submitted to Plenary for decision.

1 Issue

A decision is required on the timing of the GEO Mid-Term Evaluation. The Strategic Plan Reference Document proposed that a comprehensive evaluation be conducted mid-way through the Strategic Plan period, but it did not identify a specific date.

Based on the experience of previous GEO evaluations, the process for conducting the evaluation should begin about two years prior to the Plenary meeting at which the evaluation report will be presented. Since the Strategic Plan Reference Document also foresees conducting a second comprehensive evaluation near the end of the Strategic Plan period, the choice for the timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation is essentially between having the final evaluation report presented to the GEO-XVII Plenary in 2020 or the GEO-XVIII Plenary in 2021.

2 Considerations

2.1 Evaluation is different than monitoring and progress reporting

The term “evaluation” as it is used in this document—and by most international, governmental, and non-governmental organizations—refers to a **systematic and objective assessment** of an on-going or completed project, program, or policy, and its design, implementation and results.¹

¹ The definition used here is derived from the World Bank Group. It is consistent with the use of the term in the *GEO Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Document (2009)*.

Evaluation in this sense is distinct from ongoing monitoring of performance against defined objectives and is also distinct from reporting on progress. Monitoring and reporting are generally considered to be management functions and, in the GEO context, are the responsibility of the Secretariat. In contrast, evaluations are, in most organizations, conducted by independent evaluators who are at some degree of distance from those responsible for implementing or overseeing the program or other entity being evaluated.

In the GEO context, prior to 2016, evaluations were planned and overseen by the Monitoring and Evaluation Working Group (M&EWG) and each evaluation was conducted by a separate Evaluation Team convened for that evaluation. Evaluation Team members were nominated by GEO Members in response to a call issued by the GEO Secretariat. After receiving their terms of reference from the M&EWG, the Evaluation Team would design and implement the evaluation. Each final evaluation report was presented to the GEO Executive Committee, which would then prepare responses to the recommendations in the report. The evaluation report, together with the Executive Committee responses, was then presented to Plenary. In total, six evaluations were conducted under the M&EWG from 2010 to 2015.

While other methods of conducting evaluations are possible, the design of the pre-2016 evaluation process was the subject of considerable discussion within GEO, starting with the 2008 Paris Workshop and concluding with the 2009 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework Document. Evaluations in GEO were expected to be consistent with GEO's voluntary, non-binding principles, affordable within the limited resources of the Trust Fund, based on a transparent process open to GEO participants, and maintain a degree of autonomy sufficient to assure credibility of the findings within the GEO community. Moving to a different evaluation process, while possible, may have implications for the timing of the evaluation report which cannot be estimated without further details of the intended process.

Monitoring and reporting of progress in implementing the GEO Work Programme will continue as usual, regardless of the choice of timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation.

2.2 Timing

The time required to plan and conduct an evaluation is significant. The usual timeline followed by the pre-2016 evaluations was as follows:

April	– Issue call for nominations to the Evaluation Team
June	– Deadline for nominations to be received
September	– Initial meeting of the Evaluation Team – Preparation of evaluation plan
October	– Evaluation Team provides evaluation plan for review – Data collection begins
January	– Evaluation Team meets to discuss results and begin drafting report
April	– Draft report completed and sent for review
May	– Report finalized
June	– Transmittal of final report to Executive Committee
July – August	– Executive Committee prepares its responses to the evaluation recommendations
September	– Final evaluation report distributed as a Plenary document, together with the Executive Committee responses to the evaluation recommendations
October/ November	– Evaluation report presented to GEO Plenary

The eight months (or sometimes less) available to the Evaluation Teams to complete their work was found to be less than ideal and was only possible to achieve through the re-use of tools (such as surveys) from one team to another and through some amount of overlap of Evaluation Team members. Due to the annual cycle of evaluations being conducted prior to 2016, the time available to conduct the evaluations could not be lengthened. Now, given that there will be fewer evaluations (but more comprehensive), and based on the recommendation of past Evaluation Teams, it would be advisable to extend the period of the evaluation. For this reason, it is proposed that the call for nominations to the Evaluation Team be issued in January of the relevant year.

3 Options

There are two suggested options for the timing of the Mid-Term Evaluation:

	<u>Evaluation launched</u>	<u>Findings reported</u>
Option 1	January 2019	GEO-XVII Plenary in 2020
Option 2	January 2020	GEO-XVIII Plenary in 2021

The Secretariat recommends Option 2.

This recommendation is based on the launch this year of a process to develop a Strategy for a Results-Oriented GEOSS, which has been championed by Secretariat Director Camara. Based on the schedule approved by the Executive Committee at its 44th meeting, implementation of new or revised activities required for the realization of the Strategy would not begin until after the Strategy has been presented to the GEO-XVI Plenary for approval, that is, not until early 2020. For the Mid-Term Evaluation to consider questions related to the implementation of the Strategy for a Results-Oriented GEOSS, a later date commencing the evaluation would be preferable. An evaluation report presented in 2021 could also inform the expected transition to a new Secretariat Director in 2022.