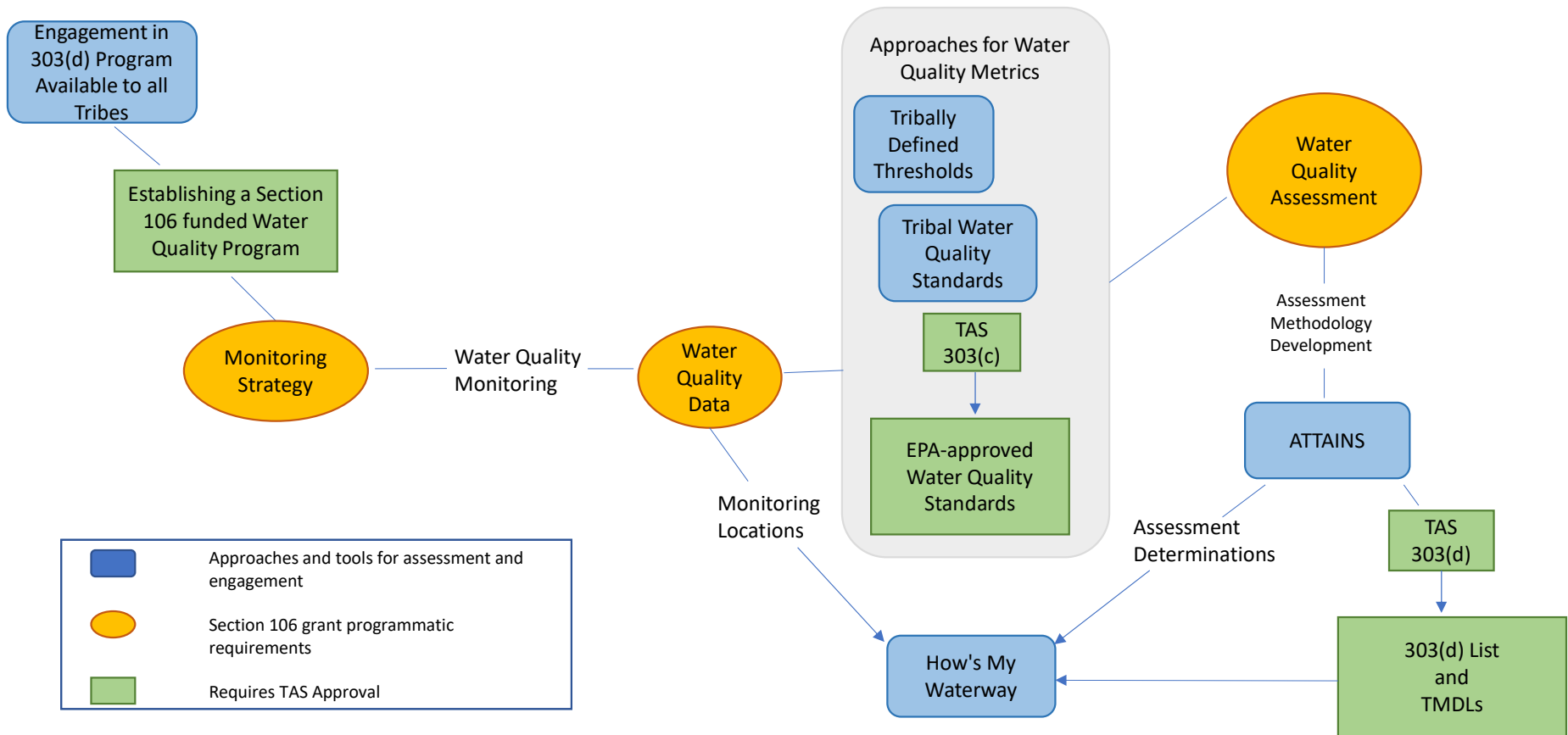




**Pathways for Tribal Water Quality
Assessment Programs**
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Pathways for Tribal Water Quality Assessment Programs



CWA Section 303(d) for Tribes

- Tribes can develop capacity and prepare to apply for TAS for 303(d) by **creating assessment methodologies** and **voluntarily publishing their water quality assessment reports in ATTAINS**.
- Requirements for Section 303(d) do not apply until the Tribe has chosen to apply for TAS.
- Once a Tribe has been approved for TAS, impaired waters list submission will be required.
- Training and technical support are available to help Tribes develop assessment methodologies and submit assessments through ATTAINS regardless of TAS status. Additional support with impaired waters list development and submittal requirements, as well as subsequent TMDL development, is available to Tribes with TAS.
- [Chapter 8 of the CWA Tribal Section 106 Guidance](#) contains further information on program expansion to take on regulatory authorities.



Water Quality Assessment

- First and foremost, **Water Quality Assessments** are for tribal use to **understand and communicate the status of water quality** on tribal lands. The Water Quality Assessment also serves as a grant deliverable for CWA Section 106 Tribal Grants and informs EPA about water quality on tribal lands.
- Tribes compare the data against thresholds or WQS to determine whether the **tribal goals are being met** or **designated uses are being supported**.
- Tribes can submit a written Water Quality Assessment report or as an alternative can choose to submit Water Quality Assessment decisions and the supporting documents through the Assessment and TMDL Tracking and Implementation System (**ATTAINS**) and make these decisions available through EPA's **How's My Waterway** website.
- The development of **assessment methodologies** that describe how data are compared against thresholds or water quality standards to make assessment determinations and the voluntary use of ATTAINS can be technical tools to assist a tribe with their water quality programs. They are also useful steps toward developing capacity to apply for **TAS for Section 303(d)**.
- A variety of resources and training materials as well as technical support options are available to tribes who are interested in developing assessment methodologies and using ATTAINS for reporting of either Water Quality Assessments or for 303(d).

Assessment Methodology

- Preparing for data analysis begins with **documenting a process to utilize the data to make water quality management decisions**. The assessment process is a key feature of water quality programs because it is the process of evaluating monitoring results against thresholds or WQS and determining whether waters are meeting tribal goals.
- An **assessment methodology** documents the process by which tribal staff plans to perform assessments and reach conclusions about whether tribal goals are being achieved and designated uses are attained. A clear methodology ensures that decisions are transparent and reproducible. It also provides a roadmap to enable future staff to follow the same process to make assessment decisions that can be compared over time to discern changes in water quality.



Assessment, Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) Tracking and Implementation System (ATTAINS)

- ATTAINS is EPA's database that houses assessment determinations, restoration activity information, survey data and geospatial information.
- ATTAINS includes state or tribal-reported information on support of designated uses or tribal goals in assessed waters, impaired waters, identified causes and sources of impairment and the status of TMDLs or other restoration activities.
- ATTAINS is available to tribes regardless of 303(d) TAS status.



Benefits of Assessment Reporting through ATTAINS

- Assessment decisions and supporting documents can be reported in ATTAINS and can fulfill the Section 106 Tribal Grant deliverable requirement.
- ATTAINS information is readily available for new staff and provides a **starting point for future work** to build upon.
- ATTAINS offers a variety of reports and graphical representations of assessment decision information so current information as well as changes in causes, sources and **water quality status can be easily visualized**.
- ATTAINS helps Tribes ensure that the data they are collecting is meeting their needs and providing the information necessary to **determine if designated uses are supported or tribal goals are being met**.

ATTAINS Resources

- There are a variety of options for ATTAINS training
 - The **ATTAINS Tribal Roll-Out** offers technical assistance to introduce participating tribes to ATTAINS. Tribes gain technical expertise in assessment reporting to enhance their assessment process, receive technical training and support from EPA and build connections with Tribal mentors.
 - ATTAINS trainings and technical support are offered at a many tribal conferences as well as at EPA's National 303(d) Program annual meeting.
 - EPA regional data management coordinators and assessment staff can provide additional individual training and technical support.
 - [Contact your EPA regional 303\(d\) staff for more information](#)