

**2023 SRS Biennial Meeting
May 11-12, 2023**

Key Takeaways from the Day 2 Chesapeake Bay Café

At the 2023 Biennial Meeting, approximately 80 in-person participants and 20 virtual participants from the Chesapeake Bay Program engaged in a World Café process, referred to as the Chesapeake Bay Café. This process facilitated large group collaborative dialogue around questions that matter to our work within the Chesapeake Bay partnership. Small groups of around five persons each engaged in three rounds of 20-minute discussions regarding specific questions as they moved from table to table or via WebEx breakout rooms for virtual participants. Participants contributed to the previous round of discussions as they further explored the new round of discussions. Participants recorded their key ideas on butcher block paper set on each of the tables or via Jamboards if they were virtual.

Pre-designated facilitators managed their respective topics and questions remaining at the same table or virtual breakout group and summarized group discussions and key takeaways, which is shared in the Café Summary document. This document summarizes those key takeaways from Day 2 that focused on EC Charge questions. Full summaries are also available in a separate document.

Question #1: Value of the Partnership (EC Charge #7, #8, #9)

Participants were asked: What is the value of the Partnership to you in restoring/protecting/improving the Bay and its watershed? What would make it more valuable to you? What would add value? How would you make the Partnership more valuable to all communities? What is at risk without having the Partnership?

1. We need to **define our partnership** (e.g., a convener of partners, technical assistance providers). We shouldn't try to be all things to everyone. We provide resources and information to those at the local level; however, we are not the engager of individuals at the local level.
2. We need to **remove "inside" "outside" perspective**, where it seems to be EPA versus everyone else. We need to move past the "know the rules mentality" and be a more open minded, creative, and solution driven.
3. Water travels beyond jurisdictions. Participation and focus depend on **geographic location**. Do we need the **public to know about the partnership**? Will we (we equals all partners) sum up the accomplishments of the partnership at the end of 2025?
4. The **partnership is a Network of Networks and accessing the broad partnership requires understanding the connections and being strategic** about how to involve those whose voices that are not contributing. The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee needs to utilize our networks (and the resources they bring) more effectively. The work should not just focus on the outcomes but our governance, how we work, and how we can bring others into the work. We should be engaging others not just outreaching to others.
5. There would be a loss without the partnership that **would touch every dimension of the work and focus** of our management targets and efforts.
6. There is a **strong sense of the value of our work** which stands on sound science and science excellence.

7. There is collective interest in improving the value of the partnership by **garnering greater direction and representation of more socially-derived perspectives on how to manage the resources going forward** (i.e., interpreted or translated by me as CBP demonstrating a greater use of social science in support of our work going forward), and bringing in new partners.
8. As we hear calls for accelerating progress, we **need to slow down** as we have intense internal schedules for the (staff) resources available. This may be a capacity issue, or a need to look into how we do our business each day to achieve our goals and outcomes and assess our efficiency and effectiveness with our available time and resources.
9. For increasing value to all communities, we need to **create more time and allow more space for greater interaction and collaboration with the public** to ensure representation of perspectives. We should also **assess how the CBP conducts business**, inviting new approaches into our work, generating greater balance across investments addressing diverse outcomes, all while better managing expectations.

Question #2: Stakeholder Engagement (EC Charge #7, #8, #9)

Participants were asked: What concerns do you have with stakeholder engagement? What excites you about stakeholder engagement? Consider the stakeholders represented on the three Advisory Committees, what does “effectively hearing from and listening to” them look like?

1. **Stakeholder engagement needs to go both ways.** In addition to inviting them to our meetings, we need to extend efforts to go to them for collaboration beyond just “listening”. There should be a **communication flow path both to and from stakeholders** that feeds back to the partnership through trusted sources.
2. Our **outreach to stakeholders isn’t enough**; not broad enough, not targeted enough, not outside our usual paths, not active enough, (passive), not diverse enough. But we don’t seem to have the capacity to do more.
3. **Connect our partnership to the existing networks** to move information in both directions and become the feedback loops to inform our work.
4. Acknowledge that **larger corporations are stakeholders** as well, and they have varying levels of interest in engagement depending on their relationship with members of the CBP. Maybe taking initiative to hear their perspectives to understand.
5. **Marginalized communities look different in different places.** How we engage with them should be location dependent.
6. **More resources are needed for communication and engagement of our stakeholders** – both to gather and process that information.
7. **We don’t have enough trained communicators, trusted sources, or translators.**
8. **Go into community with authentic engagement and LISTEN** to their needs, not with our list.
9. **Get beyond our traditional sphere** to include watershed organizations, community organizers and advocates, conservation districts and volunteer groups.
10. **Communication to the public at large should run through trusted sources** versus coming from the Bay office.
11. If you aren’t **geared up for a good engagement strategy**, don’t do it. It’s hard to undo bad communications/engagement.

12. There was an overarching theme of frustration and acknowledgement of the **lack of authentic engagement**. However, the majority of comments were suggestions in how it could be improved. Authentic relationships, going to practitioners and those on the ground implementing efforts, and thoughtful mitigation of bureaucratic processes.
13. Consider **making Choose Clean Water Coalition a signatory** on behalf of stakeholders, practitioners and NGO community.
14. Need to **engage the agriculture industry**. Biggest focus for needed nutrient reductions.
15. **Urban sector should have a technical assistance mechanism** similar to Ag. Ag extension offices are an example of this. Will require training and development of staff.
16. **Co-develop actions, plans, agreements when in community and invest in and recruit community organizers** to bridge to hyper local community level.
17. Need **better branding for CBP**.
18. Need to **manage expectations more**.
19. Need to do a better job of **flipping the narrative** in our favor.
20. We should have a **full-on partnership conference about our goals** (and outcomes).
21. **Increased clarity in roles of Advisory Committee members** would increase efficiency when communicating needs to MB and this may not even be the correct channel for addressing the identified needs. Maybe a dedicated facilitator between these groups could address this challenge.
22. Have **authentic engagement with our own Advisory Committees** throughout the year and show action that directly correlates to their recommendations.
23. We should **recognize the strengths of Advisory Committees** and how to leverage them better. We should bring them more into our regular work (brief them more; seek advice more), provide more briefings to them.
24. We need to **educate partners about who and what the Advisory Committees are** and how they can help us. Integrate them into the feedback/learning loops.

Question #3: Refining the Agreement (EC Charge #3, #4)

Participants were asked: What is working well with the Watershed Agreement? What is not working well? What is working well with the Watershed Agreement? What is not working well? Does our governance structure and process need to be changed? Why?

1. **Building trust and credibility** is very important, especially at the federal government level.
2. Use language and communication strategies that **resonate with your targeted audiences**.
3. **Bring in the people element** when considering updating or revising the Watershed Agreement goals and outcomes.
4. **Meet people where they are**; don't impose your priorities – hear from local communities what their priorities are and go from there.
5. General need for **more public involvement and input and integration of social science concepts** and practices.
6. Complex problems will require complex solutions across the Bay and the greater watershed. **Change is needed**, as doing the same things that aren't working will not lead to reaching our goals.
7. **Focus on what's realistic to accomplish** – incorporate more S.M.A.R.T. goals.

8. **Emphasize and account for the interconnectedness of outcomes in management/funding/policy decisions.** This will lead to more effective administration and restoration/protection and help communicate complexity and uncertainty (multiple factors at play) of efforts, which affects accountability (i.e., focused on outcomes and learning not counting).
9. **Find the commonalities amongst outcomes** – how can they benefit each other? Do more **cross-pollinating across the outcomes** (and GITs/workgroups) and look for those intersectionalities.
10. **Cross-collaboration between workgroup GITs** may be a way for the partnership to become much nimbler is how we solve problems.
11. **Look at the return on investment and equity when it comes to meeting the goals and outcomes.** Understand how we got to where we are today (e.g., what was the driver in committing to a specific outcome) but **realize that today's priorities may be different.**
12. The current goal of “restoration” sets us up to fail, as highlighted by the CESR report. The Bay of the future will never be of the Bay of the past. We need to find common ground on **reasonable and achievable goals that protect all resources**, living and otherwise.
13. **Practical approaches to indicators that account for a holistic view** were seen as a path forward to assess multiple goals at once.
14. CBP and the Watershed Agreement provide for critical needs of focused action and shared vision, but the **size/complexity of Agreement and partnership lead to silos, myopic approaches** (i.e., approaches that lack systems perspective and don't connect outcomes), **and competition for resources** (which leads to less effective management).
15. More **power-sharing across additional dimensions** (e.g., other than water quality, younger generation) is needed; possible organizational scheme that incorporates connection between traditional hierarchy and innovators, with bottom-up approach.
16. One emerging theme revolved around the idea we can't apply one tool or solution across the watershed, as the various regions differ in terms of environmental, social, and economic factors. **Smaller, focused action teams from across the partnership** were seen as a potential way to tackle local problems in a focused way.
17. A proposed idea to **form an action team that concentrates on a specific area** was well received in the group.
18. The current structure (SRS and decision making) is burdensome and ineffective. Adaptive management is important, but SRS and workgroup/GIT structure could be revised and streamlined to **be less burdensome, more integrated, and more effective.** Adaptation timelines should be extended and “paperwork” should be minimized so more time can be spent on implementation and doing the work.
19. Limitations on time and resources point to **more efficient ways of monitoring** (and verification) as possible solutions.

Question #4: Additional Information for the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee (EC Charge #1-9)

Participants were asked: What do you care most about that you want the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee to know, focus on, or include in the planning for their work? Where are some areas for meaningful change that need to occur?

1. **Goals and outcomes need to be clarified**, have less ambiguity, be measurable, and have more aggressive targets and implementation. Further, the term water quality causes a lot of divides.
2. Only establish **quantifiable outcomes** when we have commitments to establishing common terms and vernacular, accounting system, personnel, and funding.
3. Focus on **core endpoint interests**.
4. **Aspirational inspirational goals versus practical achievable goals** are OK but these are often best evaluated qualitatively.
5. **Refine outcomes outside of TMDL water quality**, if not quantifiable refine language to be more specific so that measurement of progress is more doable and practical.
6. Provide **the same weight to people** as is given to the environment.
7. **Rebuilding/reimagining the partnership**. Chesapeake Bay Program should include full-time representatives, a clear team that can represent their state. We need to be more inclusive and with a deeper reach within communities. Digging into the state and regional level with NGOs who can work with the locals will improve visibility and help with relaying messaging.
8. **Consider the structure of our partnership and our SRS process**. Be more collaborative, efficient, and less bureaucratic.
9. Restructure the **Management Board**.
10. Different structure that includes **more representative leadership voices**.
11. **Ensure the organizations members reflect the demographics** of the watershed.
12. We need **different voices in the conversation**.
13. **Expand adaptive management**.
14. Push the **SRS system** down into the GITs and use summary stats for the Management Board.
15. Focus on **integrating more local partnerships and community organizations** (e.g., children, families, women, men, recreational users, hunters, fishermen, those with historical knowledge).
16. **Convey our work and progress in plain language** and look at ways to **increase accessibility** for things that matter.
17. **Better communication and collaboration among the partnership**. Siloed groups, not moving in the same direction.
18. Address **how what we do impacts communities**. This includes knowing where the neighborhoods are located and mapping spending on projects to where jobs are created.
19. Create **authentic partnerships**.
20. Evaluate and consider **breaking the TMDL out from the CBP daily management**.
21. **More transparency on where funding goes and opportunities to provide input on targeting resources**.
22. **Include stressors not limited to N, P, sediment**. A prioritized group of **toxic contaminants** should be considered.