

# Chesapeake Bay Program Governance & Accountability Recommendations

In response to the 2024 Chesapeake Executive Council [\*Charting a Course Beyond 2025 Charge\*](#) to strengthen and streamline the partnership, the ad hoc Governance and Accountability Team prepared—and the Principals’ Staff Committee now recommends—the following actions to address its priority challenges, “Priority Setting and Decision-Making” and “Roles and Responsibilities.”

The Governance and Accountability Team has also developed initial considerations for four additional challenges—“Complexity and Structure”; “Transparency”; “Accountability and Adaptive Management”; and “Communication and Coordination”—but these recommendations remain under deliberation and are therefore not included in this document.

## Priority-Setting and Decision-Making Recommendations

- 1) A Policy Steering Committee should provide strategic direction for the partnership by establishing and implementing a collaborative priority-setting framework.
- 2) Clarifying decision-making authority is recommended to enhance operations across all levels of the governing structure, particularly when considering how best to streamline outcome implementation actions and delegate decision-making.
- 3) Federal agency coordination should be strengthened at each level of the governing structure, including transparency in decision making.
- 4) Consensus-based decision-making should be re-evaluated to determine whether alternative methods could be more effective at different levels of the partnership, while acknowledging the necessary balance between efficiency and egalitarianism.

## Role & Responsibility Recommendations

- 1) Minor updates to the roles and responsibilities of the Chesapeake Executive Council are recommended to emphasize their strategic direction, policy-setting and public-facing functions.
- 2) Major updates to the roles, responsibilities and operations of the existing Principals’ Staff Committee are recommended to strengthen its functions as a body of politically appointed or organizational executives. This recommendation results in a significant shift in the focus of the Principals’ Staff Committee to include strategic direction and priority setting, while focusing less on approving operational decisions.
- 3) Major updates to the roles and responsibilities of the program’s operational and implementation-focused elements are recommended to strengthen workflow and coordination.
- 4) Updates to the roles and operations of the Advisory Committees are recommended to increase their engagement across the partnership and to encourage greater collaboration amongst themselves.

These governance recommendations were approved by the Principals’ Staff Committee on November 6, 2025.