



Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC)

to the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP)

[November 2025 Meeting](#) | Topical Meeting

November 18, 2025 | virtual

Meeting Minutes

Attendance:

STAC Members: Matt Baker (UMBC), Chris Brosch (DE DA), Tony Buda (USDA-ARS), Kathy Bunting-Howarth (NY Sea Grant), Bill Dennison (UMCES), KC Filippino (HRPDC), Carl Friedrichs (VIMS), Ben Hayes (Bucknell University), Kathy Gee (OptiRTC, Inc.), Jeni Keisman (USGS), Scott Knoche (Morgan State, PEARL), Yusuke Kuwayama (UMBC), Erin Letavic (HRG), Dave Martin (TNC), Molly Mitchell (VIMS), Mark Monaco (NOAA), Brent Murry (WVU), Greg Noe (USGS), Efeturi Oghenekaro (DOEE), Kevin Orner (WVU), Leah Palm-Forster (UD), Joey Reustle (Hampton University), Kenny Rose (UMCES), Mike Runge (USGS), Larry Sanford (UMCES), Joe Wood (CBF), Weixing Zhu (Binghamton University)

Administration: Meg Cole (CRC), Tou Matthews (CRC)

Guests: Rich Batiuk, Doug Bell (EPA), Jess Blackburn (Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay [Alliance]; Stakeholders' AC), Katie Brownson (USFS), Sarah Brzezinski (EPA), Cal Buelo (EPA), Elliott Campbell (MD DNR), Dan Coogan (EPA), Leila Duman (MD DNR), Lisa Duriancik (USDA), Melissa Fagan (CRC), Rachel Felver (Alliance), Lara Fowler (PSU), Amy Handen (EPA), Tanya Heikkila (CU Denver), Gina Hunt (MD DNR), Lew Linker (EPA), Amanda Mainello-Land (NC State), Kevin McLean (VA DEQ), Laura Cattell Noll (Alliance; LGAC), Lucinda Power (EPA), Kristen Saunders (MD DNR), Kim Sitta (McCormick Taylor), Natalie Snider (MD DNR), Kathy Stecker (MDE), Breck Sullivan (USGS), Patrick Thompson (EnergyWorks Group), Richard Tian (UMCES), Penny Vlahos (UConn), Lisa Wainger (UMCES), Allison Welch (CRC), Adam Willis (Baltimore Banner), Maggie Woodward (CBC)

Meeting Overview

The STAC November 2025 [Topical Meeting](#) examined decision-making, governance, adaptive management, and accountability within the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). Developed in coordination with the STAC Governance and Accountability Ad-Hoc Workgroup, the meeting was intended to inform ongoing discussions regarding the [revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#) and proposed partnership structure. Participants heard perspectives from governance researchers and restoration practitioners working in other large ecosystem restoration efforts and discussed how governance structures and processes influence decision-making, accountability, adaptive management, and collaboration. The meeting was designed as an opportunity to explore different approaches and perspectives rather than develop formal recommendations.

Meeting Introduction

STAC Chair Bill Dennison (UMCES) welcomed participants and provided an overview of STAC's role within the partnership. Dennison reviewed the committee's responsibilities in providing independent scientific and technical advice through workshops, reviews, and synthesis activities. He also described recent changes to STAC's meeting format, including the shift toward a combination of annual retreats, hybrid meetings, and shorter virtual topical meetings.

Dennison provided an update on the CBP's ongoing efforts to revise the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement and associated governance structure. He reviewed the draft organizational framework presented to the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) and discussed the STAC Governance and Accountability Ad-Hoc Workgroup's efforts to consider how adaptive management and accountability functions may operate within the proposed structure. Dennison noted that the meeting was intended to inform those discussions by examining how decision-making processes, governance structures, and accountability mechanisms function in other collaborative restoration efforts and by providing an opportunity for participants to discuss potential implications for the CBP.

Introduction of CBPO Director, Dan Coogan (EPA)

In September 2025, Dan Coogan (EPA) was selected as Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office (CBPO). Coogan joined the meeting to introduce himself to STAC and discuss his professional background, decision-making philosophy, and perspectives on the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. Coogan described more than two decades of experience with EPA, including work supporting multiple presidential administrations, overseeing agency COVID-19 operations, implementing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act ([IIJA](#)) and Inflation Reduction Act ([IRA](#)), and managing organizational change and program implementation. He noted that much of his career has involved working across changing priorities and complex operating environments while supporting the goals of different administrations.

Coogan discussed his approach to decision-making, noting that many decisions involve balancing competing interests and priorities. He emphasized the importance of understanding how decisions may affect different groups, seeking input from those impacted, and considering both short- and long-term consequences. Reflecting on his first several weeks with the Chesapeake Bay Program, Coogan described the partnership as a successful model for ecosystem restoration and highlighted the importance of building on its accomplishments while remaining responsive to new challenges and opportunities.

Expert Panel

Lara Fowler (Penn State University) moderated a panel of speakers with experience in governance, collaborative decision-making, and ecosystem restoration. Fowler noted that the discussion was intended to help participants think beyond organizational charts and consider how governance functions in practice, including how information moves through organizations, how decisions are made, how conflict is managed, and how accountability and adaptive management are implemented across complex partnerships.

Lessons from Inside and Outside the Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership

Governance Research and Processes from the California Delta – Tanya Heikkila (UC Denver)

Tanya Heikkila (UC Denver) presented research examining governance and adaptive management across large ecosystem restoration efforts, including the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Heikkila described governance as consisting of rules, structures, and processes. Governance rules determine who participates in decision-making, how information is shared, and how decisions are made. She noted that decision rules often involve tradeoffs, citing consensus approaches as one example that can increase legitimacy while also slowing decision-making. Governance structures provide the venues in which decision-making occurs and should be aligned with the scale and complexity of the problems they are intended to address. She emphasized the importance of incorporating diverse forms of knowledge, including scientific, experiential, and forward-looking perspectives, and highlighted the role of boundary-spanning organizations and individuals in connecting information across governance networks.

Drawing on research from the California Delta, Heikkila discussed findings from participant surveys examining adaptive management and learning within the Delta governance system ([Lubell, Pozzi, Heikkila, and Gerlak 2025](#)). Survey respondents generally reported that learning and adaptation were occurring, though perceptions were stronger during planning activities than during implementation and evaluation. Trust, representative participation, leadership, coordination, and communication were all associated with stronger perceptions of learning and adaptive management. Heikkila highlighted the Delta Science Plan as an example of a framework intended to support learning through coordination, monitoring, and incorporation of new information into decision-making ([Delta Stewardship Council, Delta Science Program 2019](#)). Ahead of the discussion, Heikkila shared the [summary report](#) from the 2023 Adaptive Management Forum hosted by the Delta Science Program.

Heikkila concluded by presenting a series of diagnostic questions related to governance rules, structures, and processes. These included questions such as: Do key actors have decision-making authority? Are the right actors at the table for the problems being addressed? Is information reaching the appropriate decision-makers? Are hard conversations being addressed and supported through facilitation or conflict-resolution mechanisms? Are feedback loops from monitoring formalized? And are experimentation, learning, and reflection encouraged within the governance system? She encouraged participants to use these questions to assess governance effectiveness and identify opportunities to strengthen learning and adaptation.

[*Long Island Sound Partnership's Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee – Penny Vlahos \(UConn\)*](#)

Penny Vlahos provided an overview of the Long Island Sound Partnership's Science and Technical Advisory Committee ([LIS STAC](#)), which includes academic, state, regional, and federal representatives from across the watershed. She described the committee's role in identifying research priorities, reviewing emerging science, and helping translate scientific findings into management advice for the broader partnership. Vlahos noted that one of the committee's primary functions is serving as a bridge between the scientific community and decision-makers responsible for restoration planning and implementation.

There are several strengths of the current Long Island Sound governance framework, including broad participation, transparency, bipartisan support, and the use of clearly defined goals and metrics to guide restoration efforts. At the same time, she noted that maintaining engagement across a large partnership can be challenging. Meeting fatigue, communication across multiple organizational levels, and recruiting new participants and expertise remain ongoing concerns. She also observed that restoration programs must continually balance long-term goals with changing priorities, emerging issues, and new scientific information.

Vlahos reiterated the importance of accountability. She described how the partnership uses strategic planning, implementation tracking, and periodic assessments to evaluate progress and inform future actions. Vlahos emphasized the value of "accountability loops" that connect research, management actions, evaluation, and future planning, and noted that these feedback mechanisms work to incorporate scientific information into decision-making and align restoration efforts with partnership goals. The LIS partnership is currently developing a new Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP), a year-long planning effort followed by approximately eighteen months of development and review ([Long Island Sound Partnership 2025](#)). Vlahos mentioned that the process provides an opportunity to reassess priorities, incorporate new information, and identify future research and management needs while maintaining continuity with existing restoration goals.

Governance Experience in the CBP Partnership and Various Other Restoration Partnerships – Rich Batiuk

Rich Batiuk, former Associate Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office, reflected on lessons learned during more than four decades of Chesapeake Bay restoration and collaborative partnership management. He described how the Chesapeake Bay Program has evolved over time in response to new scientific information, changing priorities, and emerging challenges, noting that many aspects of the current governance structure were developed through experience rather than design. Batiuk's top ten lessons are listed below ([Batiuk et al. 2025](#)):

1. Assure the presence and maintenance of strong and effective leadership
2. Be appropriately transparent everywhere and at all times, sharing both what is known and what is not known
3. Engage everyone, welcoming and encouraging participation from all
4. Secure long-term funding and support from multiple sources
5. Empower participation by seeking, soliciting, and using active participation from all voices
6. Use science to inform and confirm
7. Employ monitoring and modeling consistently and continuously in a manner that allows for ongoing improvement and evolution
8. Communicate conditions effectively and frequently, both good news and bad news
9. Be adaptable in incorporating new information and insights while maintaining clear, strong, and measurable goals and avoiding backsliding
10. Ensure accountability, including mandatory action when voluntary action proves insufficient

Batiuk encouraged participants to use the partnership's history as a resource when considering future governance changes. He discussed the tension between streamlining organizational structures and maintaining opportunities for collaborative decision-making, observing that the CBP's success has relied on bringing together a broad range of partners and perspectives. He cautioned that efforts to simplify governance should be undertaken carefully to avoid losing valuable institutional knowledge and established pathways for participation; further he discussed the role of science, monitoring, and modeling in informing management decisions and stressed the need to communicate both accomplishments and remaining challenges.

Batiuk also highlighted the contribution of advisory committees, noting that they provide expertise, independent perspectives, and connections to communities that may not otherwise be represented in partnership discussions. Batiuk encouraged participants to build upon the CBP's strengths while remaining adaptable to future challenges. Successful partnerships, he noted, require both continuity and change, preserving the relationships, experience, and collaborative culture that support long-term restoration efforts while continuing to evolve as conditions change.

Panel Q&A:

- Larry Sanford (UMCES): How do restoration partnerships balance discussions about governance and program operations with actually achieving restoration outcomes?
 - Batiuk: During development of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, Cabinet Secretaries established a set of principles and a framework several years before implementation began. Providing clear direction from leadership while allowing flexibility in how goals are achieved helped focus efforts on restoration outcomes rather than process alone.
 - Heikkila: Maintaining an adaptive management framework helps keep desired outcomes at the center of decision-making. While implementation is rarely straightforward in complex

systems, the framework encourages participants to continually connect planning and implementation activities to desired outcomes.

- Vlahos: Clear targets, action items, and measurable metrics help keep discussions focused and prevent governance conversations from becoming overly theoretical. Metrics provide a way to evaluate progress, adjust course when needed, and maintain participant engagement.
- Sarah Brzezinsky (EPA) [chat]: Penny, can you speak to how the new CCMP ([Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan](#)) integrates uncertainties into its cost estimates for implementation actions? In particular, I'm interested in learning more about the process or structure for translating those cost estimates to tangible funding for implementation actions and if/how LIS prioritizes efforts.
 - Vlahos: The partnership uses five-year targets and initially prioritizes achievable "low-hanging fruit" to generate early successes and maintain momentum. Progress is evaluated regularly, priorities are reassessed annually, and funding allocations are adjusted based on accomplishments, remaining needs, and implementation challenges. Examples included debris removal efforts and combined sewer overflow separation projects where costs and implementation pathways were well understood.
- Kristin Saunders (MD DNR) [chat]: Can the panelists reflect on experience or observations of managing the tension in partnerships between hierarchical management approaches within the context of or in direct conflict with networked and broad participation approaches. It seems that this tension continues to play out within the Chesapeake Bay partnership, particularly around structure and decision making moving forward. We could use some inspiration around this.
 - Batiuk: During TMDL development, leadership established clear responsibilities and decision-making authority while simultaneously emphasizing transparency and stakeholder engagement. Public meetings, outreach to agricultural groups, homebuilders, and local elected officials, and repeated opportunities for feedback helped create buy-in while maintaining clear decision-making authority.
 - Heikkila: Effective governance requires both top-down authority and bottom-up participation. She described this as a form of "state-reinforced self-governance," where leadership provides accountability, resources, and capacity while local actors contribute expertise and collaboratively address problems. The resulting tension is unavoidable but can be productive.
 - Vlahos: Conflict should not necessarily be viewed negatively. Differing perspectives can identify weaknesses, misunderstandings, and overlooked considerations that ultimately strengthen decisions.
- Gina Hunt (MD DNR) [chat]: Penny- How often are these committees meeting? You mentioned STAC on the committees... but we have a lot of outcomes and committees. Also curious, what level is the staff at the committee level? On the ground level folks or more management?
- Yusuke Kuwayama (UMBC) [chat]: Tanya – I believe a key feature of adaptive management is an embrace of risk and uncertainty as a way to build understanding of the system being managed. But to operationalize this, it seems like one needs to identify a watershed program's collective preferences about risk and uncertainty. Do you have a sense of how the programs you study have tried to characterize the willingness for different stakeholders to take on risk/uncertainty?
 - Heikkila: Risk tolerance varies substantially depending on organizational responsibilities, missions, and experiences. Stakeholders managing critical infrastructure may view uncertainty differently than those focused on restoration, Tribal interests, or environmental

justice concerns. Formal approaches such as Decision Making Under Deep Uncertainty can help participants explore future scenarios and discuss uncertainty in a more structured manner.

- Joe Wood (CBF) [chat]: Tanya – I was particularly interested in the point that trust is essential; and think there is reason to believe mistrust is significant challenge in our current framework. Can panelists reflect on any specific actions programs have taking in other programs to assess and promote trust among partners? It seems many changes could be made to structure or governance could be made, but without building trust, they may be ineffective.
 - Vlahos: Changes to governance or management approaches often impose costs on participants. Efforts to minimize uncertainty and acknowledge those impacts can help maintain trust during periods of change.
 - Batiuk: The Chesapeake Bay Program's two-year milestone framework initially strengthened accountability and trust by establishing expectations and consequences. However, trust can erode when accountability mechanisms are not consistently implemented or enforced.
- Erin Letavic (HRG) [chat]: Can the panel provide examples of accountability in partnerships (i.e., triggers and consequences) that effectively motivate progress, other than lawsuits?
 - Heikkila: In the Everglades, concerns about losing federal funding prompted states to develop new funding approaches and accelerate restoration activities. She also described the Franks Tract Futures project in the California Delta, where extensive stakeholder engagement and scenario planning helped develop solutions that addressed salinity concerns while providing benefits to multiple interests. Crises can create opportunities for innovation, but successful responses often require deliberate engagement and collaborative problem-solving.

Breakout Groups

Following the panel discussion, participants divided into facilitated breakout groups focused on either consensus and decision-making or adaptive management. Participants were asked to reflect on how governance structures and processes influence decision-making, accountability, transparency, learning, and adaptation within large restoration partnerships. Discussion topics included decision-making authority, consensus-building, accountability mechanisms, trust, adaptive management implementation, and opportunities to improve communication and coordination across the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership. Notes were captured through collaborative virtual whiteboards and summarized during the breakout group report-outs.

Consensus and Decision Making Group 1 Report-Out

- Transparency in decision-making: uncertainty around where any particular decision gets made, where in the hierarchy a particular decision gets made (at the EC level, at the GIT level, somewhere in between?). Clarity ahead of the time of decision-making would help all the groups function.
 - Does the GIT have the authority to make a decision? If so, is it going to be second-guessed by higher levels?
- Decision-making processes: different levels do not necessarily need the same decision-making processes.
 - Consensus might be appropriate at the EC level for political reasons, GITs may work do better with simple majority voting
- Voting bodies: how to determine the right to vote from a participatory standpoint.

- If someone shows up the day of a vote but hadn't attended any meetings leading up to the vote, do they have to earn the right to be participating or to be helping make the decision?

Consensus and Decision Making Group 2 Report-Out

- A space for mediation: the consensus continuum works relatively well but when you get to a point where you can't proceed, sometimes things will flounder. Without a mediation process and someone to facilitate, the work is done amongst each other and sometimes not effective, nor does it accelerate progress.
- Discipline, accountability: once we set up the system, be accountable to one another to follow the system and accept accountability for not following the system.
 - Such as: participating in agenda development that is extra effective, assisting with the report-outs, ensuring that decisions made are reported out in a meaningful way to intended audience.
- Discipline, tools: utilizing tools that are developed specifically for the Bay Program partnership.
 - Have heard of Chesapeake Decisions but never used it as a resource to follow what is going on within the partnership. Perhaps tools can be used more effectively to share the decisions that are made across the partnership without having to attend meetings to know what happened.

Adaptive Management Group 1 Report-Out

- Revisiting frequency: revisiting things more frequently is important but there needs to be some thought put into the adaptive management portion, such as the change in how we manage and how often to manage. Process will likely be different for each indicator since some indicators take a long time to become noticeable.
- Length of perspective: if we're assessing an indicator every three years, it doesn't mean we're assessing it in a vacuum – just what happened in the past three years. Have a longer perspective if looking at the whole history of that indicator every three years.
- Steady goal: keeping the goal constant is important in building flexibility into plans while maintaining accountability. Actions taken to achieve the goal are flexible (adaptive part) but goals themselves not necessarily changing.
- Understanding adaptive management: some people really understand the partnership process and some don't. STAC could review the science for a way to build a better understanding of the process so people know how information flows through the goal and how to affect change.
- Bottom-up approach: lean into what the states are doing, particularly those who are doing a lot of the science, not necessarily those at the high level of jurisdictional government. This way we can understand what they are looking at and how that can flow into our goal setting.

Adaptive Management Group 2 Report-Out

- Fitting adaptive management into new Bay Program structure:
 - Lowest level: each GIT (equivalent) report progress to PSC on annual basis. Reports basic and not very detailed; include where they are, what has worked, what has not worked, where to go from here.
 - Could establish a thematic focus each year as topics become relevant
 - One of the big problems with current SRS process is biennial reporting that puts a lot of pressure on staff and takes a lot of time.
 - Higher level: all do formal evaluation for the 2033 midpoint assessment.
- Importance of maintaining trust:

- Modeling effort currently in strange position, group talked about how STAC can contribute to increasing the transparency of the modeling and trust in the modeling
- Adaptive management involves risk (to some extent):
 - Group talked about who gives permission to be risky. In CESR report, STAC identified sandboxing approach as a reasonable way to take risks – but who gives permission to go outside the bounds?

Adaptive Management Group 3 Report-Out

- Group discussed their experiences in other systems in ensuring that adaptive management is implemented in a correct and efficient manner. While continuing to scale up projects and systems, it is difficult to maintain adaptive management; ineffective use can sometimes create additional problems such as lack of trust. Discussed what we can do strategically and tactically to make sure adaptive management is used as an effective tool.
 - Adaptive management should not be used for everything all the time, very effective for certain situations. Strategic introduction: try it on a few situations, a subset of which are not challenging and can have early successes. At the same time, demonstrate that it can be used for more complicated situations.
 - Trust underlies everything we do
 - Potential is great, implementation is lacking. Needs to be implemented in a way that plays to its strengths
 - Adaptive management uses a certain kind of data that's important for it to be effective, but that's not always the data we monitor (mainly status and trends, little interpretation). Have all the ingredients when combining the monitoring, modeling, and other studies.

Plenary Discussion:

Following the breakout group report-outs, participants reconvened for a facilitated discussion led by Fowler. The conversation focused on themes that emerged repeatedly throughout the panel presentations and breakout sessions, including trust, transparency, accountability, adaptive management, and decision-making authority. Participants reflected on how these concepts currently function within the CBP and considered how governance processes could better support restoration outcomes moving forward.

Several attendees noted that many of the challenges discussed during the meeting were not necessarily structural but instead related to communication, trust, clarity of decision-making authority, and accountability. Discussion also explored how adaptive management can support innovation while maintaining continuity and accountability within a mature restoration partnership.

- Fowler: The CBP remains a globally recognized restoration effort, but governance challenges continue to create meeting fatigue and uncertainty regarding how decisions are made. Participants want to engage effectively, understand where decisions are made, and have confidence that their efforts contribute meaningfully to outcomes. Questions raised throughout the meeting included: Which decisions are made by whom? How is trust established? How do transparency and openness function within the partnership? How do participants know who is responsible for what? Adaptive management may be an appropriate tool in some situations but not all situations, and different governance challenges may require different approaches.
- Batiuk: The question of who gives permission to take risks is not new. During development of the Chesapeake Bay TMDL, the Principal Staff Committee provided that direction by establishing principles,

expectations, and parameters rather than waiting years for the partnership to determine every detail. Adaptive management requires leadership willing to establish those boundaries and empower innovation. Partnerships also need systems capable of collecting information and feedback so that actions can be evaluated and adjusted over time.

- Dennison: The Governance and Accountability Ad Hoc Workgroup intentionally invited speakers from other large ecosystem restoration programs to better understand how other partnerships address governance and decision-making challenges. This is the right time for the Chesapeake Bay Program to be having these conversations. Governance is not solely a natural science issue or a social science issue; it requires both perspectives. STAC is well positioned to contribute because the committee includes expertise from both disciplines.
 - Gina Hunt (MD DNR): Trust is important at every level of the partnership. If decision-making authority is delegated to Goal Teams, GITs, or workgroups, there needs to be confidence that those groups are informed, representative, and working toward partnership outcomes. If authority is delegated and then decisions are later reversed because higher levels of the partnership do not trust the outcome, that can be damaging. Active participation alone does not automatically create trust, and the partnership may need to think more intentionally about how trust is built across organizational levels.
- Sanford: Trust depends on open, honest, two-way communication. The partnership may benefit from facilitation and mediation resources that help address conflict constructively. Conflict itself is not necessarily a problem, but it needs to be managed thoughtfully. Communication between organizational levels does not always require large meetings; regular reporting and dialogue can help maintain understanding and trust.
- Dennison: trust affects brain function and there are four elements: care, sincerity, reliability, competence (from *The Thin Book of Trust (2nd edition)*, Charles Feltman, 2021). Who you are, your expertise, who you are communicating to, what you're talking about – those aspects are all relevant in building and maintaining trust. Trust is hard to obtain, easy to lose, and almost impossible to regain if you've lost it. This trust takes a lot of work but it's absolutely critical and important.
 - Fowler: "trust is gained in drops and lost in buckets"
- KC Filippino (HRPDC) [chat]: In terms of sandboxing, experimentation, innovation, whatever we want to call it, we also need to be mindful as to how that fits into the accountability framework. Does the current framework allow to adaptively manage innovation?
 - Molly Mitchell (VIMS) [chat]: Virginia continues to grapple with how to support innovation while maintaining continuity and accountability. Building on Mike Runge's comments, she noted that one challenge is concern that pilot projects or "sandbox" efforts may produce undesirable outcomes, leading decision-makers to avoid experimentation altogether. Another challenge is the perception that once an innovative approach is implemented, there may be no practical way to reverse course if it proves unsuccessful. Mitchell suggested this may reflect a weakness in how the adaptive portion of adaptive management is applied. As an example, she described the early use of concrete structures as small oyster reefs in front of living shorelines. The approach was initially controversial due to concerns about environmental impacts and installation challenges, including structures becoming dislodged and drifting away. Through continued refinement and improved installation techniques, the practice became more widely accepted and is now commonly used in Virginia.
 - Mike Runge (USGS) [chat]: If jurisdictions are only held accountable for outputs (BMPs implemented), then sandboxing isn't encouraged. If jurisdictions are accountable for outcomes, and have freedom to implement what they think will best achieve those outcomes, then sandboxing is inherently on the table.

- Fowler: one of the tensions heard in a breakout room: we're 42 years into the Bay Program, we're no longer in the experimentation stage and yet, there's still a need for experimentation. How do you handle the dynamic tension of the continuity and progress with opportunities for more flexibility?
 - Kenny Rose (UMCES): This may be partly a terminology issue. In fisheries management, practitioners generally avoid describing actions as experiments because of the implications for livelihoods and public trust. The concepts behind adaptive management may be sound, but the language used to describe them can influence how they are received.

Fowler concluded by noting that many of these themes are likely to remain part of ongoing discussions within the Governance and Accountability Ad Hoc Workgroup and the broader Chesapeake Bay Program partnership.

Post-Meeting

Following the meeting, the [November 2025 Meeting Synthesis](#) document was drafted by the STAC-led [Governance and Accountability Ad-Hoc Workgroup](#) and shared with STAC, meeting participants, and the broader partnership.

The [STAC February 2026 Meeting](#) will take place virtually on Friday, February 20, 2026.