

A blue heron stands in a shallow body of water, its reflection visible below. The background is a dense field of tall, golden-brown reeds or marsh grasses, also reflected in the water. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light, suggesting sunrise or sunset. The text is overlaid on the right side of the image.

Independent Evaluation: Chesapeake Bay Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction Grants Program

Chesapeake Bay Program Management Board – December 11, 2025

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CHESAPEAKE BAY STEWARDSHIP FUND

A pooled funding mechanism drawing resources from federal agencies, private companies, and other foundations that provides:

- **Competitive grants programs to advance on-the-ground restoration and conservation actions**
- **Direct grant support for critical networking, information sharing, and convening**
- **Hands-on assistance for prospective applicants and awardees**



CHESAPEAKE BAY STEWARDSHIP FUND

Competitive Grants Programs



INNOVATIVE NUTRIENT AND SEDIMENT REDUCTION GRANTS



SMALL WATERSHED GRANTS



CHESAPEAKE WILD GRANTS

CHESAPEAKE BAY STEWARDSHIP FUND

Competitive Grants Programs

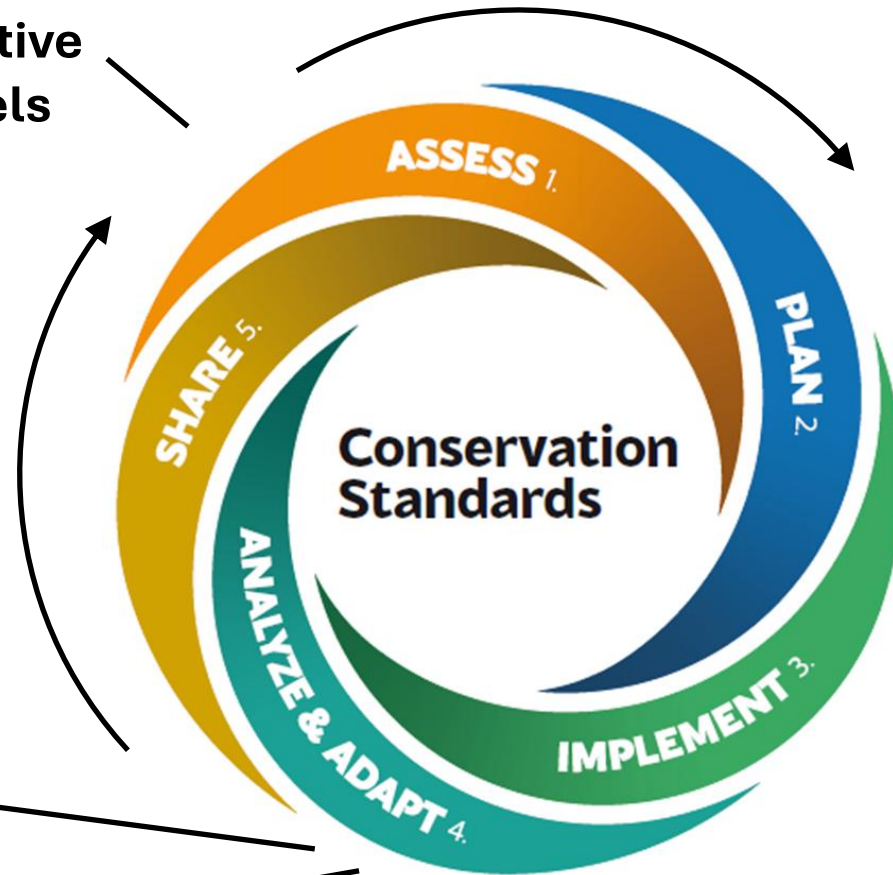


INNOVATIVE NUTRIENT AND SEDIMENT REDUCTION GRANTS

EPA Program Objectives:

- **Accelerate water quality improvements**
- **Actively transfer and disseminate lessons learned**
- **Work to institutionalize successful approaches**

**External assessment of
effective collaborative
conservation models
(2018)**



**TMDL Midpoint
Assessment (2017)**

**Independent Third-Party
Program Evaluation (2017)**

**UMD Environmental Finance
Center Report (2017)**

**NFWF Program Evaluation
and Adaptive Management**

Program Changes (2018-2025)

- Investing in collaborative models versus individual organizations/”projects”
- A higher bar for “collaboration”
- Investing in collaborative capacity alongside BMP implementation activities



Independent Third-Party
Program Evaluation (2025)

Implementation of
program changes
(2018 – 2025)

**NFWF Program Evaluation
and Adaptive Management**



EVALUATION FINDINGS

NFWF INNOVATIVE NUTRIENT & SEDIMENT REDUCTION PROGRAM



Chesapeake Bay Management Board
December 11, 2025

Photo: Chesapeake Bay Program



Photo: Chesapeake Bay Program

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

- How did funding meet collaboratives' capacity needs?
- What did increased capacity enable collaboratives to accomplish?
- How did increased capacity further INSR Program's objectives---to accelerate BMP implementation, information sharing & institutionalization of effective approaches?
- Have these investments in collaborative capacity improved modeled water quality outcomes?
- What are additional collaborative capacity needs that would further INSR Program's objectives?

COLLABORATIVE MODELS



Photo: Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley

Collaborative as an "umbrella" term

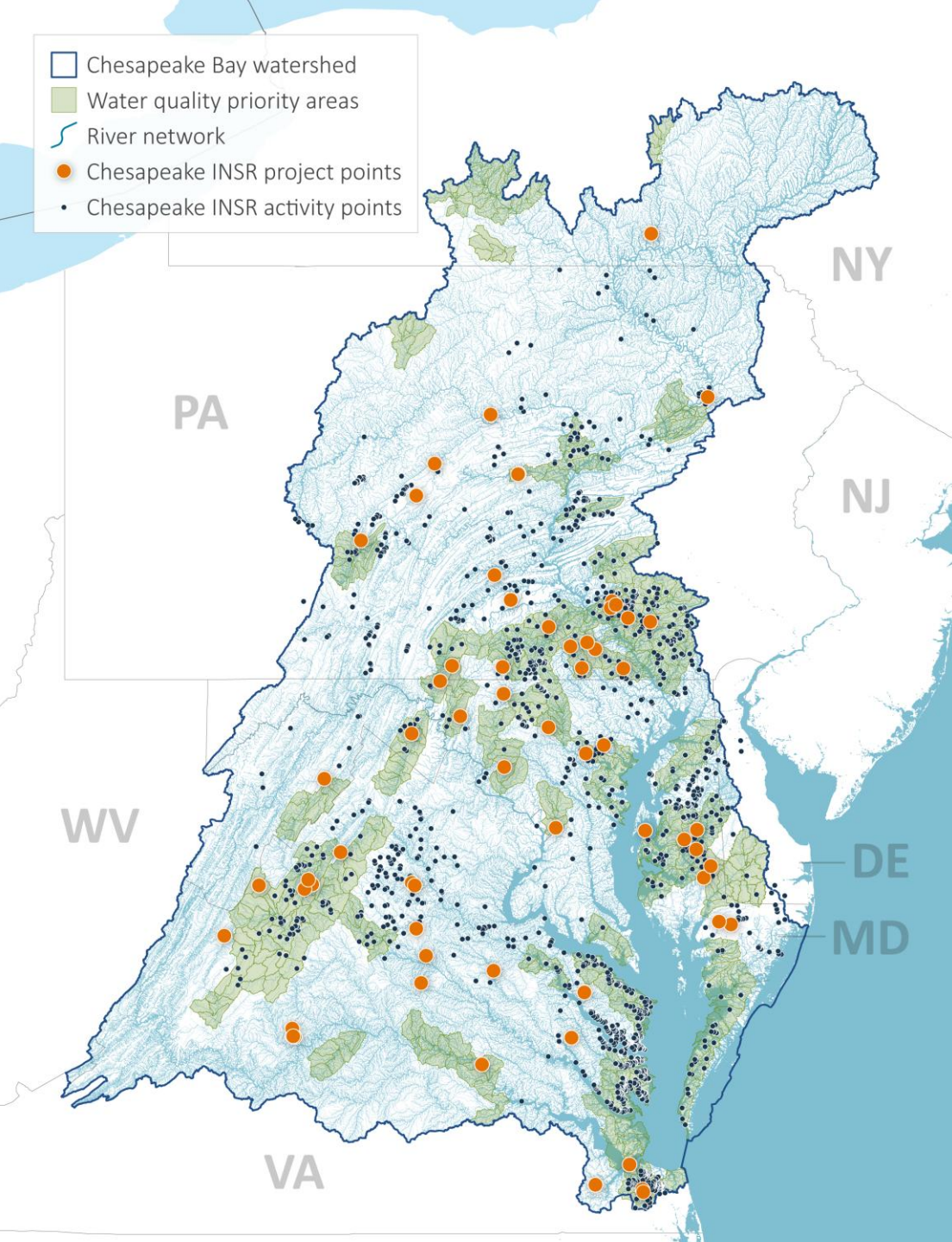
- ✓ Mid-Atlantic 4R Nutrient Stewardship Association
- ✓ Mountains to Bay Grazing Alliance
- ✓ Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative
- ✓ Upper and Middle James Riparian Consortium
- ✓ Upper Susquehanna Coalition

No One Size Fits All

GENERATING COLLABORATIVE IMPACTS



Meeting a collaborative's capacity needs enables collaborative activities and outcomes that in turn generates collective impacts.



2018-2024

INSR Grantees

(70 grants awarded, 41 collaboratives)

- ✓ 265,273 acres BMPs
- ✓ 889 miles of BMPs
- ✓ 290,102,065 lbs – Sediment
- ✓ 3,735,008 lbs – Nutrients

IMPACTS

IMPACTS GENERATED

IMPACTS

FOUNDATIONAL

Related to enhanced relationships and increased connections

OPERATIONAL

Positive changes that allow collaboratives and their partners to function more effectively

OUTCOME

Shifts that move collaboratives toward fulfilling their core purpose or *raison d'être*

INTEGRATED

Long-term effects stemming from institutionalized approaches

INSR Awards and Match: 2018-2024

\$114,447,091

\$74,032,634

■ Matched funds

■ INSR funds

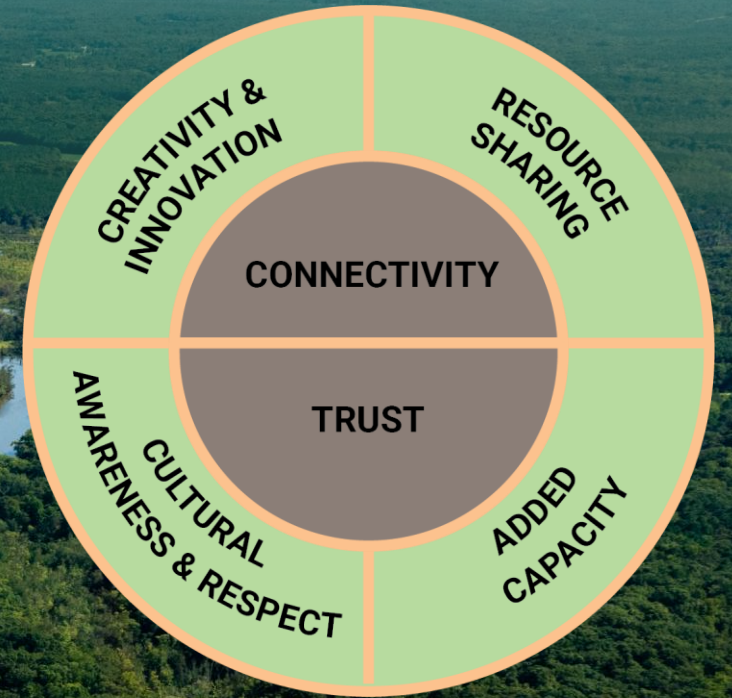
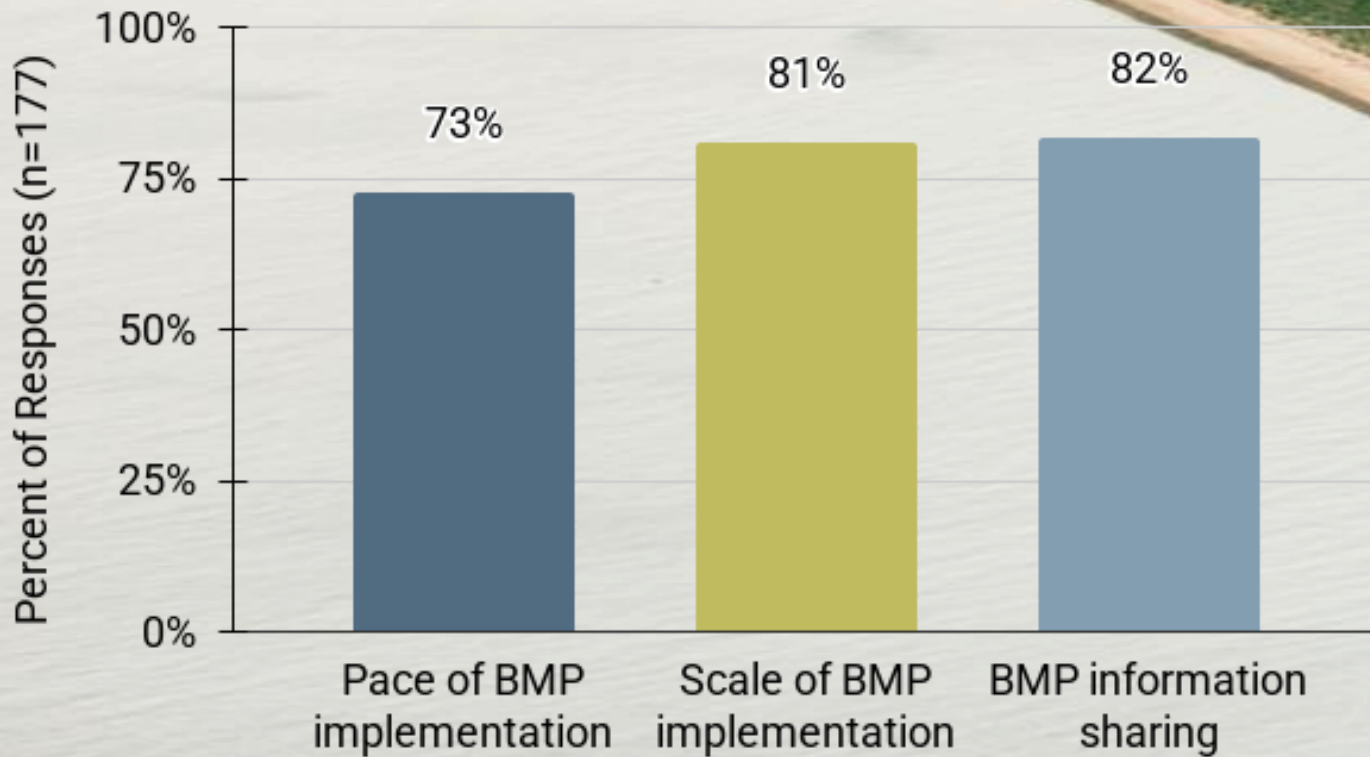
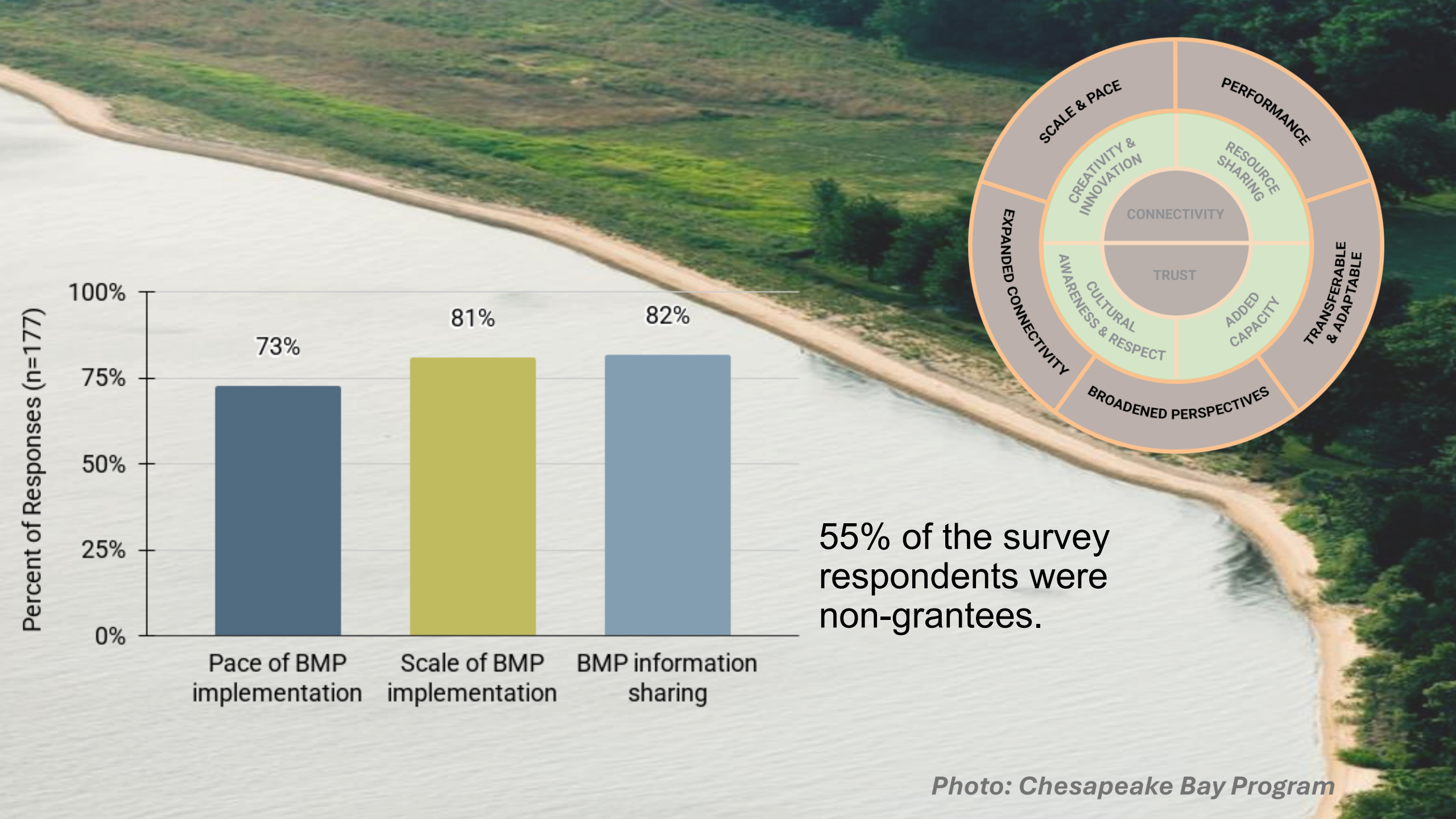
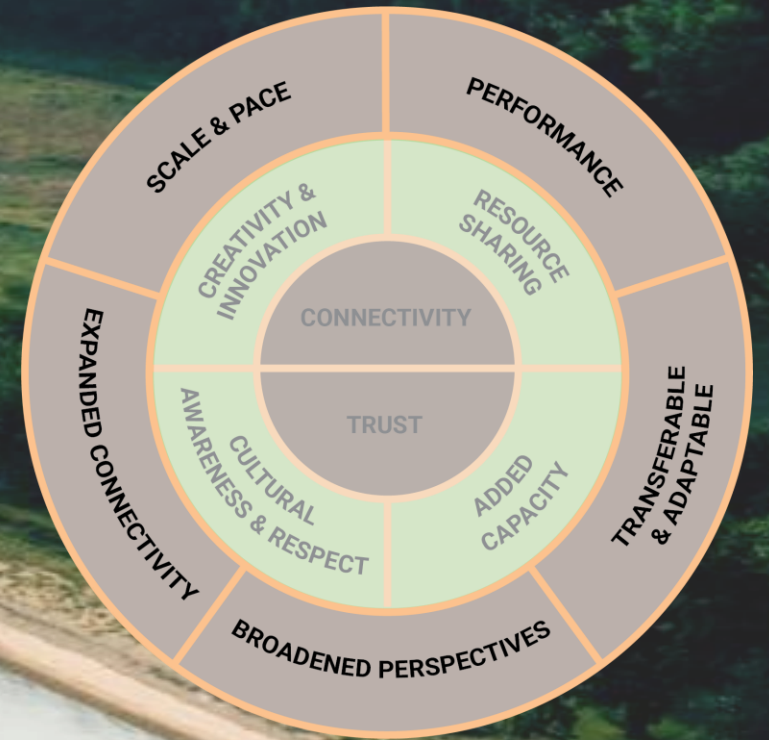


Photo: Chesapeake Bay Program



55% of the survey respondents were non-grantees.



“Because of the INSR grant funding collaborative capacity, we are more effective in....”

- Coordinating communication (90%)
- Increasing partner member engagement (88%)
- Managing projects and programs (88%)
- Setting priorities (87%)
- Tracking actions and outcomes (87%)

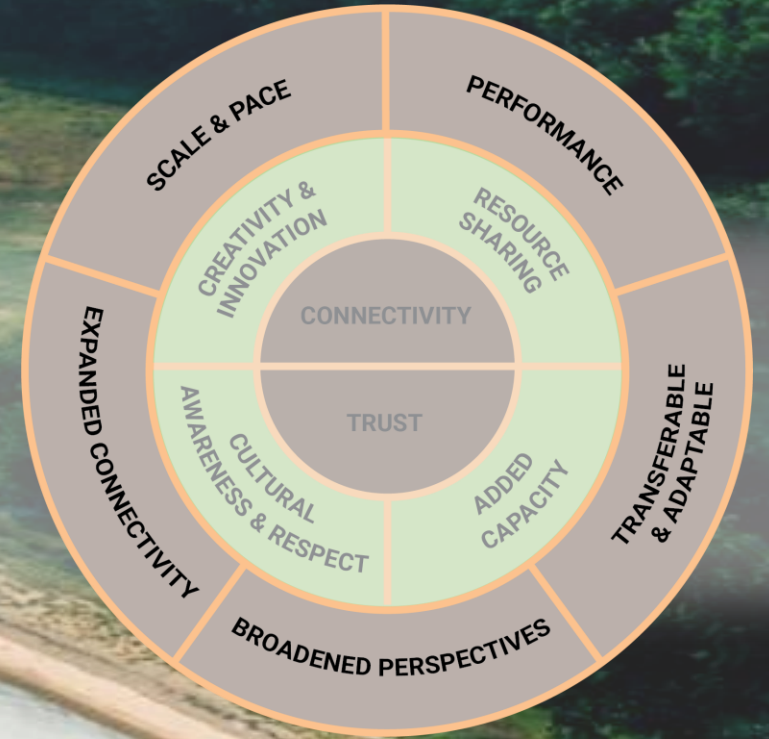
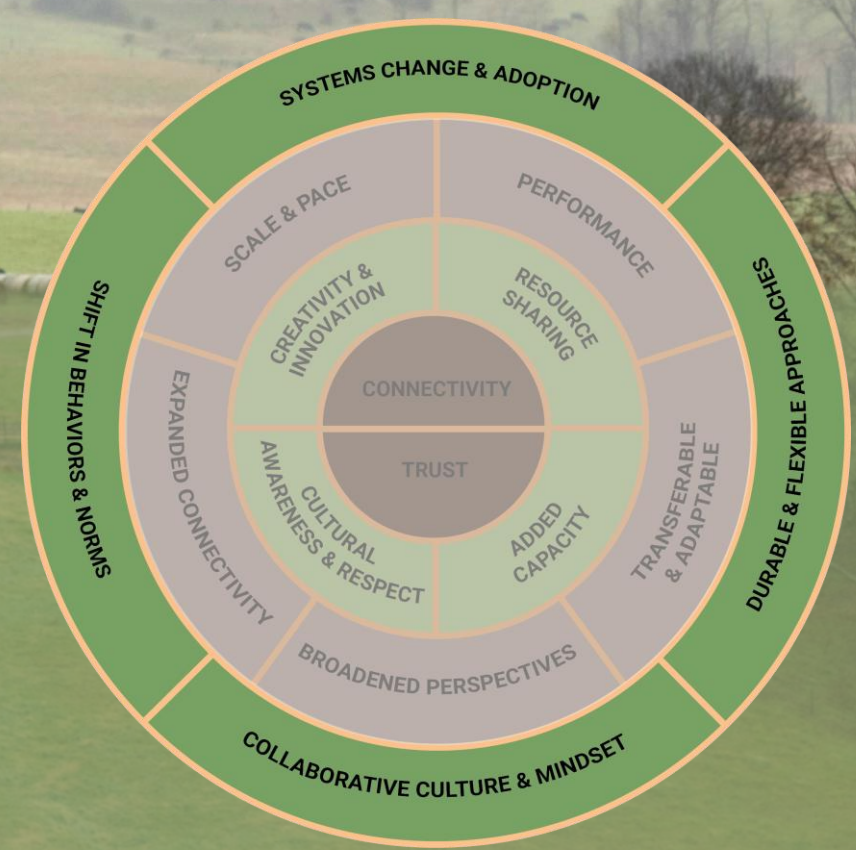
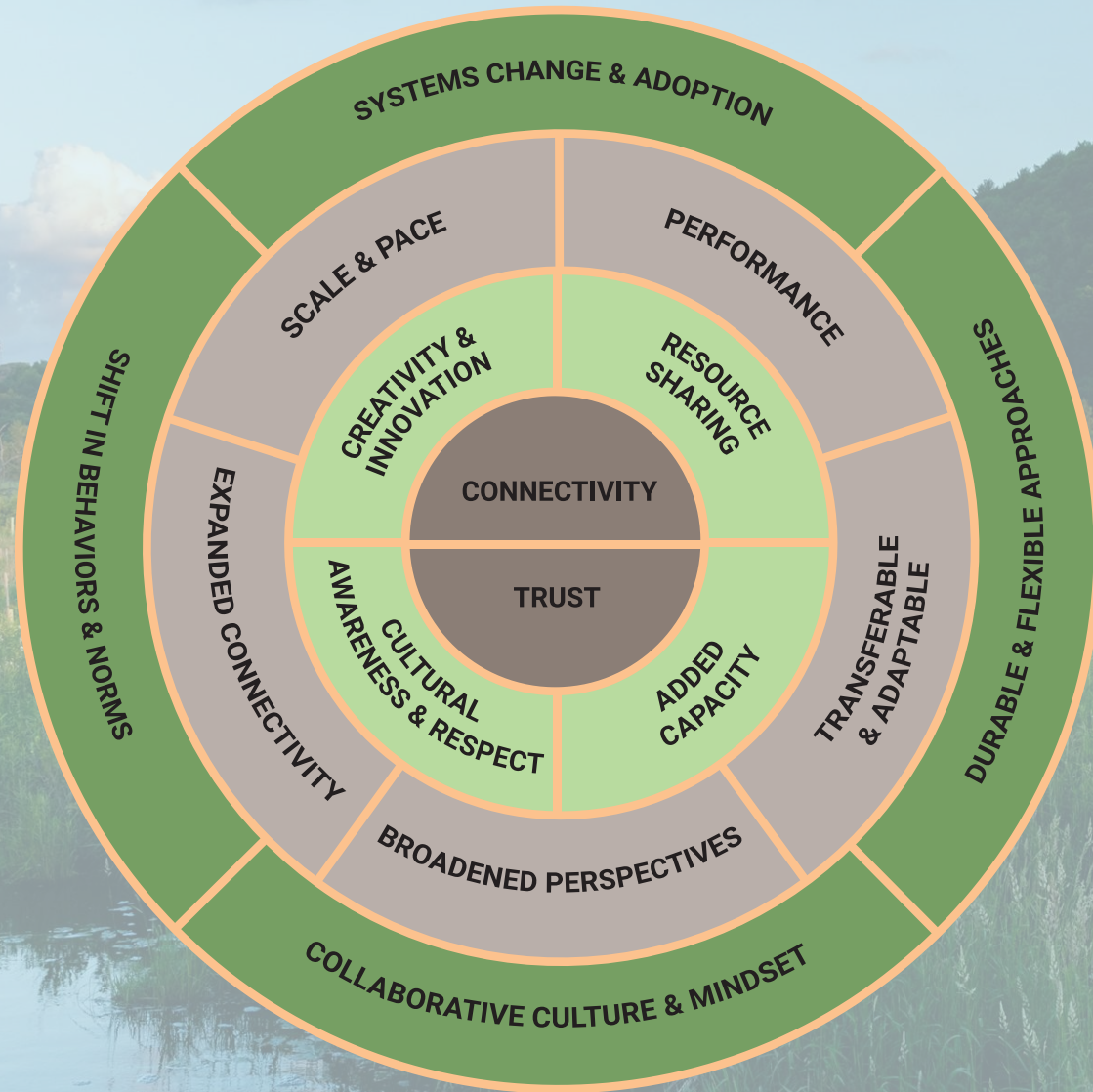


Photo: Chesapeake Bay Program

“This partnership represents a paradigm shift in attaining voluntary conservation action.... The partnership functions as a model for this proven market-driven approach to be disseminated across the state and watershed by other organizations and businesses.” – Grantee



COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY IMPACT MODEL



This model is trademarked. Suggested citation:
Mickel, A.E. & Farrell, S.D. (2025).

Do more, better, together: Investing in collaborative work to make a difference.

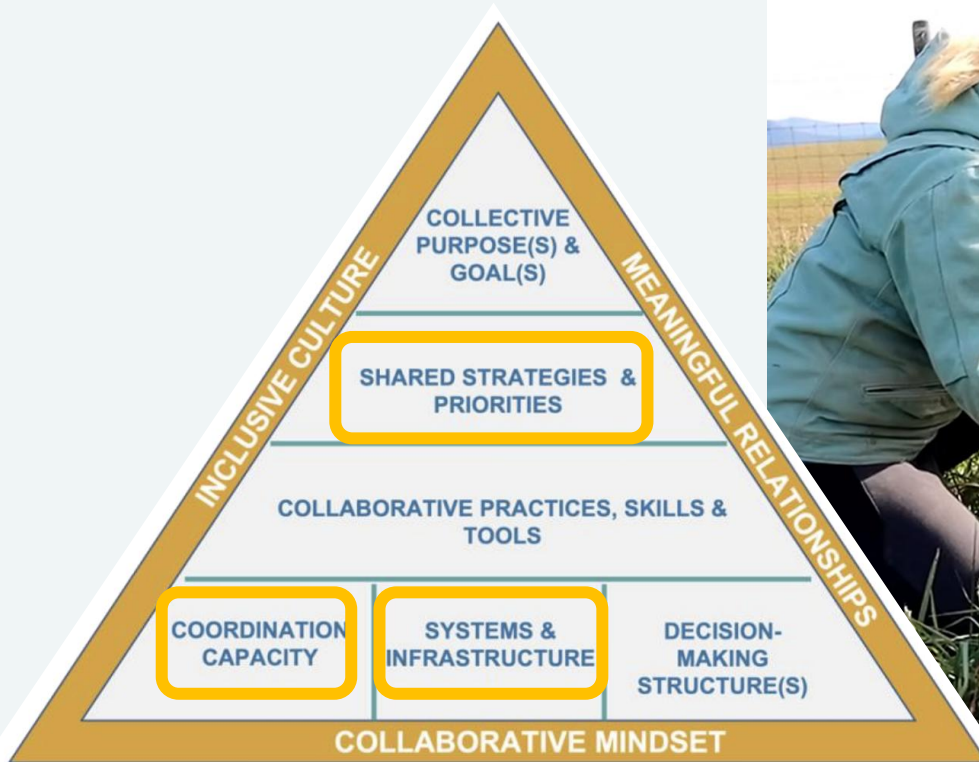
GENERATING COLLABORATIVE IMPACTS



Meeting a collaborative's capacity needs enables collaborative activities and outcomes that in turn generates collective impacts.

COLLABORATIVE CAPACITY

CAPACITY



Collaborative Capacity Framework



Photo: Virginia Soil Health Coalition

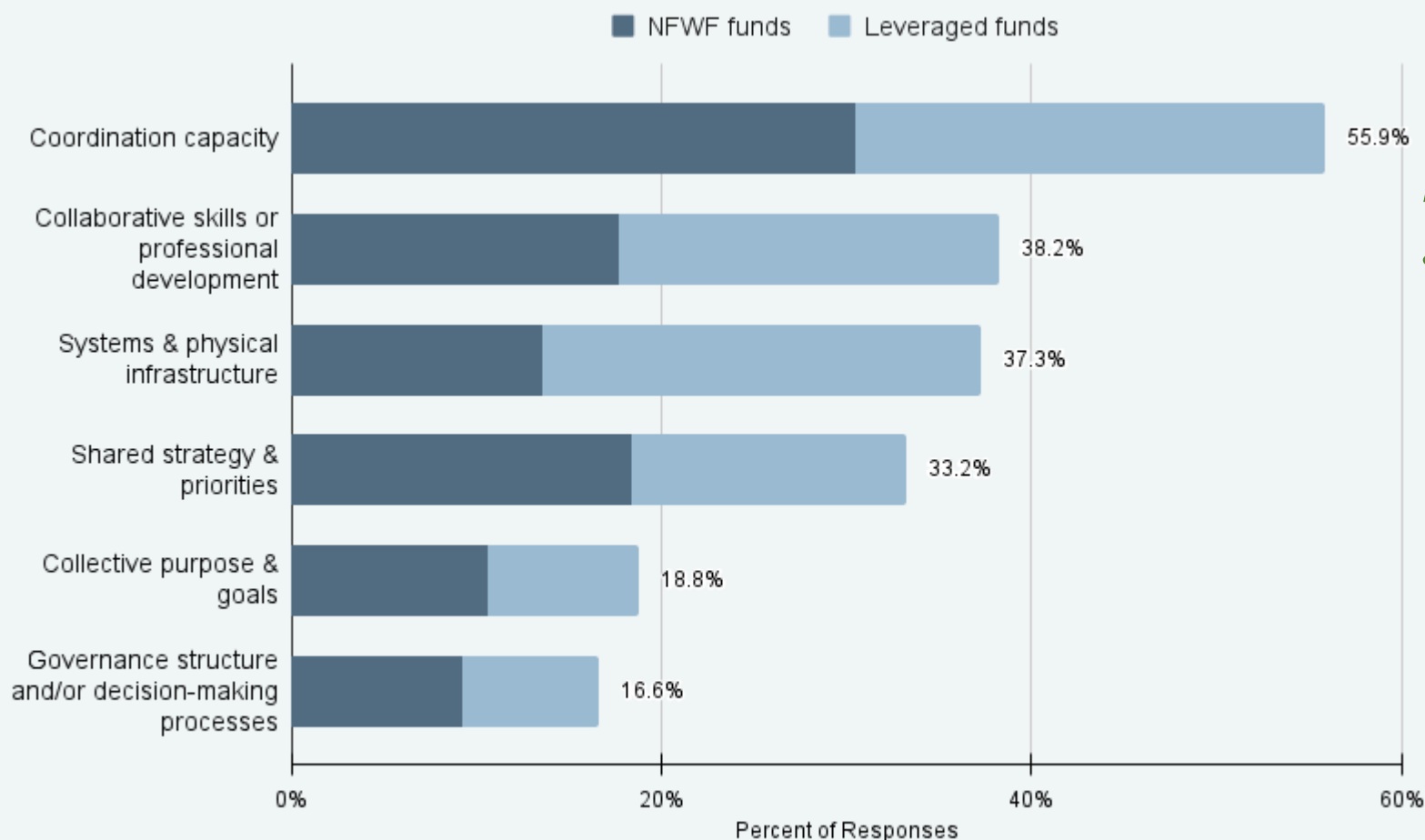
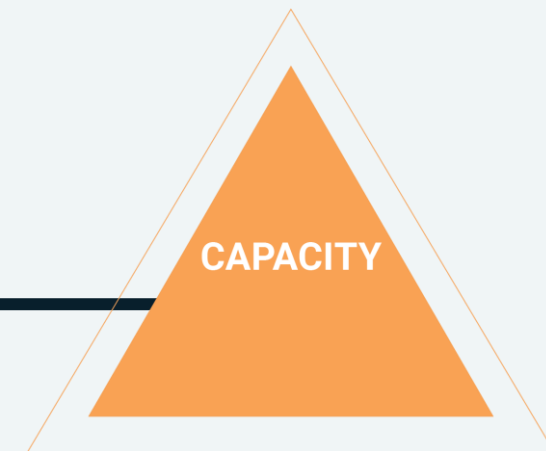
Virginia Soil Health Coalition

- ✓ Hired Director.
- ✓ Updated Strategic Plan.
- ✓ Created Centralized Comms. Hub.

Collaborative capacity refers to a collaborative's ability to perform its collective purpose and desired outcomes.

CAPACITIES FUNDED

NFWF-Funded Capacity-Building Elements



“Flexible funding like that provided by NFWF INSR grants has been critical to maximizing the implementation of BMPs on highest impact projects.” - Grantee

COLLABORATIVE ACTIVITIES & OUTCOMES

ACTIVITIES
OUTCOMES



Photo: Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay

Collaborative activities & outcomes are best described as the direct & more immediate results enabled by increased capacity.

- ✓ Collaborative Projects & Programs – 12 categories
- ✓ Collaborative Development & Functioning – 8 categories

SUMMARY OF CHALLENGES

- ✓ Meeting Growing BMP Demands & Sustaining Investments
- ✓ Sustaining Collaborative Health
- ✓ Measuring & Reporting Co-Benefit Impacts
- ✓ Communicating Impact & Return on Investment
- ✓ Regional Gaps & Inefficiencies

RECOMMENDATION #1

Strengthen & Expand the NFWF Chesapeake Bay Grant Program Portfolio

- ✓ Fully Invest in Collaborative Capacity
- ✓ Sustain Project Investments
- ✓ Scale & Connect the NFWF Chesapeake Bay Grant Programs
- ✓ Expand the Field Liaison Program
- ✓ Increase Efficiencies with Grant Application & Administration Processes

RECOMMENDATION #2

Formalize the Emerging Chesapeake Bay Practitioner Network

- ✓ Assess & Affirm the Purpose/Value of Establishing a Practitioner Network of Networks
- ✓ Provide a Centralized Hub to Access Essential Resources
- ✓ Continue & Expand Support for Regional Forums
- ✓ Establish a Grantee Peer Learning Cohort

RECOMMENDATION #3

Broaden Evaluation & Reporting Metrics & Tools

- ✓ Develop Core Collaborative Capacity & Impact Performance Measures
- ✓ Initiate the Development of a Social Network Model for NFWF Grant Programs
- ✓ Measure & Report Co-Benefit Impacts
- ✓ Centralize & Standardize Core Reporting Metrics Currently Captured in Multiple Platforms



Key Takeaways

- ✓ Scalable & Durable Impact
- ✓ Resourced Capacity Drives Collective Outcomes
- ✓ Accelerated Progress
- ✓ Leveraged Resources
- ✓ Ongoing Innovation

QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS



Photo: Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy

NFWF Response to Recommendations

Evaluator Recommendations	NFWF Actions/Response
Sustain and expand NFWF Chesapeake Bay program focus on enhancing collaborative capacity to drive implementation outcomes	Plans to pilot in 2026 a new approach to longer-term, more flexible funding for effective collaboratives
Formalize the emerging network of Chesapeake Bay collaborative practitioners	Exploring peer learning models to support INSR grantees
Broaden evaluation and reporting metrics and tools	Develop measures/metrics of collaborative capacity; enable more flexible reporting approaches