

Governance and Management Framework

for the Chesapeake Bay Program



Chesapeake Bay Program
Science. Restoration. Partnership.

Governance and Management Framework for the Chesapeake Bay Program



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I. INTRODUCTION

This document describes the organizational function and governance for the Chesapeake Bay Program in advancing Bay restoration, conservation and protection through the [Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#) (the *Watershed Agreement*) signed in 2014 and revised in 2025.

Section 117 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S. Code § 1267 – Chesapeake Bay), as amended defines the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) as “the program directed by the Chesapeake Executive Council in accordance with the Chesapeake Bay Agreement.” It further defines the Chesapeake Executive Council (EC) as the signatories to the *Watershed Agreement*, calls for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to maintain a Chesapeake Bay Program Office (CBPO), and authorizes funding to be used for protecting and restoring the Chesapeake Bay. This governance document is and must remain consistent with all that is described and defined under Section 117 of the Clean Water Act as amended.

The CBP also refers to the collective partnership to restore, protect and conserve the Bay and its watershed. Currently, members of the EC are: the Chesapeake Bay Commission, the District of Columbia, the State of Delaware, the State of Maryland, the State of New York, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, the Commonwealth of Virginia, the State of West Virginia, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (as an executive representative of the federal government). The CBP currently includes four advisory committees, established by the EC, and invites participation from a broad range of stakeholders (including, but not limited to, local governments, academic institutions, businesses, industry stakeholders, local watershed and other non-governmental organizations, and individuals). The policies and practices detailed within this document apply to CBP partnership participants. For information on the over 40-year history of the partnership and its efforts in Bay watershed restoration, conservation and protection, see the CBP website at: <https://www.chesapeakebay.net>.

As the CBP has embraced an “adaptive management” approach to respond to changing conditions and better information, the structure and governance of the program will change and evolve over time to better plan, align and assess partner activities and resources to meet CBP goals. Likewise, revisions to this document will be made periodically, or as needed.

II. CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM VISION AND PRINCIPLES

The CBP's vision and principles are established in the *Watershed Agreement*.

Vision: “We envision a Chesapeake Bay region where clean water flows, wildlife thrives and farms, forests and fisheries are healthy and productive. It is a place where people from all walks of life feel connected to the land, to the Bay and local waterways, to their communities and to the rich cultural heritage that makes this watershed unique. Together, we are building a future that is environmentally and economically sustainable, resilient and full of possibility—where everyone can enjoy and help conserve the natural beauty of the Bay, and the lands and waters that surround it, today and for generations to come.”

Principles: “The Chesapeake Bay Program commits to operate under the following principles, which reflect the partners’ collective, core values. The principles guide the work of the partnership in our governance and as we develop policy and take action to achieve the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*’s goals and outcomes.

Science

- Use place-based approaches, where appropriate, to target specific geographic areas and produce recognizable benefits to local communities while contributing to larger ecosystem goals.
- Maintain and enhance a coordinated watershed-wide monitoring, modeling, and research program to support decisionmaking and track progress and the effectiveness of management actions.
- Integrate social science holistically throughout the partnership to support adaptive management, more effectively engage with communities, and incentivize individual and collective behaviors that support partnership goals.
- Adaptively manage at all levels of the partnership to foster continuous improvement informed by the best available science and strong working relationships.
- Use science-based decision making, consider Indigenous and local knowledge, and seek out innovative technologies and approaches to support sound management decisions in a changing system.

Restoration and Conservation

- Achieve goals and outcomes in a measurable and timely way at the least possible cost to the public.
- Conserve working lands and support economically viable forests and farms to best position landowners to help protect the Chesapeake Bay.
- Acknowledge, support and embrace local governments and other local entities in watershed restoration and protection activities.
- Anticipate and respond to changes in the landscape and environmental conditions, including long-term trends in sea level, temperature, precipitation, land use and other variables.

Partnership

- Represent the interests of people throughout the watershed fairly and effectively.
- Meaningfully engage the public to foster collaboration and grow the partnership to support

and carry out the restoration, conservation and protection activities necessary to achieve the goals and outcomes of this *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.

- Facilitate outreach to and welcome participation by all communities regarding the partnership's activities, decisions and implementation.
- Collaborate to achieve the goals and outcomes of this *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*.
- Operate with transparency in program decisions, policies, actions and reporting on progress to strengthen public trust and confidence in our efforts.
- Strive for consensus across the partnership when making decisions.
- Include tribal nations in the partnership in a manner that appropriately considers their unique status as independent sovereign nations and as original stewards of the land."

III. COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND JUSTICE (DEIJ)

The EC's "Statement in support of diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice" signed in August 2020, stated in part that the partnership¹, "commits to:

- Strengthen and improve diversity, equity, inclusion and justice in our organizational structure, leadership, policies, strategic goals, restoration and conservation activities, workplans and program delivery, including guidance on including DEIJ and environmental justice criteria in grant targeting and evaluations.
- Engage, recruit and retain leadership, staff, appointees, interns and volunteers that reflect the diversity of people living within the Chesapeake Bay region.
- Foster a culture of inclusion, respect and mutual learning within the Chesapeake Bay Program by leading organizational change and empowering new voices and perspectives in our outreach, engagement and internal decision making.
- Following consultation and coordination, determine how to best include federally recognized tribes in the Bay watershed in partnership activities.
- Develop long-term relationships, partnerships and increased collaborative planning with organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented populations that result in informed and mutually beneficial decisions and outcomes.
- Ensure the benefits of our science, restoration and partnership programs are distributed in a fair and equitable manner without adverse, disproportionate impacts on vulnerable populations, especially those of lower economic status, indigenous, historically underrepresented communities and people of color.
- Continue to learn and share best practices as an organization in our evolving understanding of how best to promote diversity, equity, inclusion and justice."

¹ The statement also says "we acknowledge that this statement is voluntary and not a contract or assistance agreement....[It] does not pre-empt, supersede or override any law or regulation applicable to each signatory." Each signatory will, of course, act in accordance with all applicable laws, regulations, and Administration policies. In addition, Federal Agency activity will comport with Administration priorities regarding DEI programs and activities, including those outlined in Executive Orders.

IV. ETHICAL BEHAVIOR GUIDELINES

The actions of the CBP and its participants must remain consistent with all applicable federal and state laws and regulations regarding conflicts of interest. No participant in a CBP discussion shall seek to influence consensus or action by the group in such a way as to derive any direct or indirect personal profit or gain for him or herself^{2,3}, or the member's business or other nonprofit affiliations, family and/or significant other, employer, or close associates who may stand to receive a benefit or gain. Any participant in a discussion which may fall under the descriptions above is expected to announce that they may have a potential conflict of interest and shall refrain from further participation in any discussion or decision on such matter. Chairs and co-chairs of meetings shall remind all members of this policy annually.

Chairs and co-chairs of meetings are expected to be particularly sensitive to the actual or appearance/perception of conflicts. Chairs and co-chairs are responsible for implementing recusals and ensuring documentation (in meeting minutes or notes).

Questions regarding ethical guidelines or suspected violations of this policy should be reported to the director of the CBPO for further review or elevated to the chair of the Policy Steering Committee (PSC) where appropriate.

All participants in the CBP partnership should be familiar with these ethical behavior guidelines, conduct themselves in a manner that places the highest priority on allowing consensus to occur and be respectful of all opinions, including balancing the priorities of the members' respective organization/jurisdiction with the priorities of the partnership.

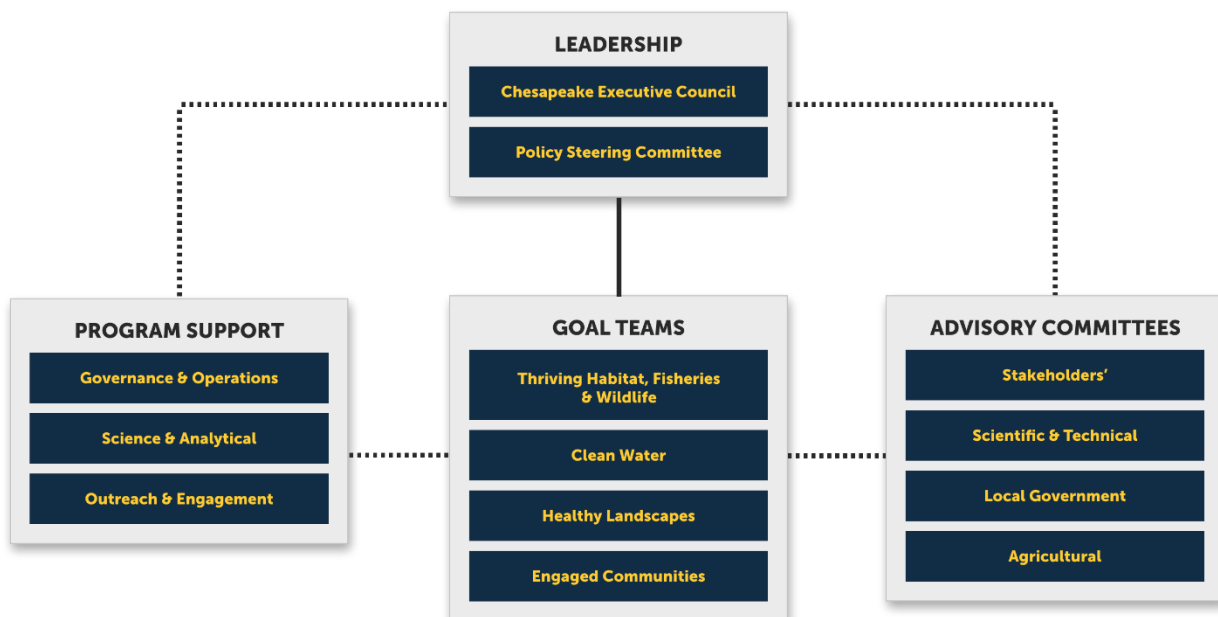
² The federal criminal conflict of interest statute, 18 U.S.C. § 208, prevents you from participating personally and substantially in particular matters that will have a direct and predictable effect on your financial interests and those imputed to you.

³ The federal loss of impartiality rules at 5 C.F.R. Part 2635, Subpart E, prevent you from participating in specific party matters where someone with whom you have a covered relationship is a party or represents a party, if a reasonable person with knowledge of the relevant facts would then question your impartiality.

V. ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

The CBP is constituted into two organizational components: a leadership component and implementation component (Figure 1). The general purpose, roles and responsibilities, leadership and membership framework, and operational details of each component, and their subcomponents, are described within this section. The CBP's leadership component is comprised of the EC and the PSC and is generally responsible for setting the vision and policy direction and implementation for the CBP. The CBP's implementation component is comprised of three types of bodies: Goal teams, advisory committees, and partnership support groups and is generally responsible for coordinating and driving progress towards the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*. Within goal teams, additional bodies (i.e., workgroups and action teams) may perform day-to-day execution towards implementing of the *Watershed Agreement*.

Figure 1. Organizational Structure of the Chesapeake Bay Program.



All partnership groups have specific pages on ChesapeakeBay.net. These pages include membership lists and information about the group's projects, publications and other initiatives, and can be accessed through <https://www.chesapeakebay.net/who/how-we-are-organized>.

A. CHESAPEAKE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL (EC)

The EC establishes the policy direction for the restoration, conservation and protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and its ecosystem and living resources. The EC also provides leadership to encourage public support and ensure transparency for the Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration, conservation and protection effort and is accountable to the public for progress made under the *Watershed Agreement*.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Provide the vision and strategic direction for the restoration, conservation and protection of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem and its living resources through the adoption of agreements, resolutions, and the issuance of letters, directives, or other policies.
- b. Approve revised or added goals of the *Watershed Agreement* and significant changes to outcomes (as described in Section V(A)(6)) and ensure that management strategies supporting the *Watershed Agreement* are developed and implemented.
- c. Provide leadership to encourage public support.
- d. Direct the PSC to develop and implement priorities for the restoration, conservation and protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed and its resources in alignment with the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.
- e. Provide public accountability on progress toward Watershed Agreement goal achievement.
- f. Report on progress and resource alignment decisions to the public annually.
- g. Direct changes as needed to improve program transparency and performance.
- h. Pursue opportunities to align resources and secure new resources to achieve identified annual priorities.
- i. Solicit and receive counsel and advice from advisory committees.

2. Leadership and Membership:

The EC consists of signatory members to the *Watershed Agreement*. Leadership of the EC is rotated among the signatory members on a mutually-agreed basis determined at each annual meeting. In the event that a new EC chair must be selected at a time outside of the annual meeting, PSC members will act as a proxy for their EC member. The decision will be made at the next PSC meeting on behalf of the EC and will be memorialized in writing and signed by signatory representatives on the PSC on behalf of the EC members. The EC chair is responsible for planning EC activities and drafting the agenda for the annual meeting. Current EC membership is as follows:

- a. The governors of Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia.
- b. The mayor of the District of Columbia.
- c. The chair of the Chesapeake Bay Commission.
- d. The administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

3. **Federal Agencies:**

Federal agencies are formally represented by the EPA on the EC. The EPA administrator may invite representatives from federal agencies to attend private EC meetings based on issues being addressed at the meeting.

4. **Duration of Membership:**

State governors and the mayor serve for the duration of their elected terms. Federal members serve for the duration of their appointment to their agency. The Chesapeake Bay Commission (CBC) chair serves for the duration of their term.

5. **Operations:**

- a. **Ground Rules:** The structure of the EC meeting is coordinated by the chair and the chair's representatives with assistance from the CBPO under guidance of the PSC. The format, location, and content (e.g., presentations, breakout sessions, participants, speaking roles, and other participation details) of the EC meetings are to be determined well in advance of the meeting to ensure it is efficient and effective. At one meeting per year, the EC will:
 - Elect or re-elect a chair.
 - Receive the annual recommendations of the Advisory Committees and direct the partnership to respond to the Advisory Committee recommendations within 90 days.
- b. **Decision Making:** The partnership employs a consent-based decision-making approach. While consensus (unanimous full support) is the partnership's goal, a consent model enables the groups to gauge member positions through polling that captures agreement, disagreement, questions, and reservations (See Figure 2). If consent cannot be reached unanimously, the decision-making body may use a vote to proceed. Seven out of nine EC members (or their designees) must support a decision for it to be approved.
- c. **Quorum:** Seven out of nine EC members (or their designees) are required to establish a quorum of the EC. When situations arise such as a lapse in appropriations refer to guidance held in Section VI(F) (Unavoidable Absence from Meetings).
- d. **Attendance at Annual Meetings:** EC members are expected to attend the annual public meeting. In the event of an unforeseen conflict, the highest possible appointee should attend in their place. If an individual attends with the purpose of representing their signatory organization, that individual is invited to speak at the press conference following the meeting.
- e. **Frequency and Duration of Annual Meetings:** The EC meets at least annually. The meetings are typically half-day meetings held at highly visible venues as chosen by the EC chair.
- f. **Budgeted Resources:** Financial support for the annual EC meeting is provided by the CBPO and the EC chair.
- g. **Staffing and Support:** A CBPO employee is assigned to help coordinate activities of the annual EC meeting. Signatory representatives from all signatories are also to

provide staffing support. Additional support is provided by CBPO staff and/or contracted support.

- h. Business between Annual Meetings: The EC chair and/or the majority of EC members may schedule meetings in addition to the annual meeting. If that occurs, the purpose of the meeting will be stated in the call for the meeting and will be scheduled in consultation with all EC members. Public notice of meetings will be made, at a minimum, through the CBP website as soon as possible after logistics are confirmed.

6. Process for Issuance of Executive Council Directives:

EC directives specify the will of the EC on future actions that the CBP partnership should undertake. EC directives do not necessarily represent a commitment of resources by any individual EC member, but rather define the collective desire of the EC for work by the partnership.

Proposed EC directives are first approved by the PSC. If approved, the directive is then forwarded to the EC for approval. The proposed directive must be received by the PSC members at least 10 business days in advance of the PSC meeting at which it will be discussed. After discussion, all PSC members will be polled for the record on: a) their EC member's position on issuance of the directive as described in Section VI(D) (Decision Making Process) and, b) their EC member's commitment to sign the directive no less than one (1) month in advance of the EC meeting.

In all cases, only EC member signatures are permitted on EC directives. Designee signatures are not allowed. To enable publication and announcement of the directive(s) at the EC meeting:

At least seven of the nine EC member signatures have been obtained one month in advance of the EC meeting. The directive may still be issued at the EC meeting without all signatures. The missing signature(s) may be obtained either at the EC meeting or up to two months after the meeting. If the missing signature(s) are still not obtained two months after the EC meeting, the directive will be considered final and the unsigned signature lines will be struck from the document. If less than seven of the nine EC member signatures are obtained one month in advance of the EC meeting, the directive will *not* be issued.

B. POLICY STEERING COMMITTEE (PSC)

The PSC acts as the policy advisors to the EC, accepting items for EC consideration and approval and setting agendas for EC meetings. The PSC translates the restoration vision by setting policy and implementing actions on behalf of the EC. The individual members of the PSC arrange and provide briefings for their EC members. The PSC member that reports to the EC chair will serve as the PSC chair.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Translate the EC direction and provide strategic, actionable and time-bound priorities, tasks, assignments, and deliverables for the goal teams to achieve. Priorities can also reflect topics elevated by the goal teams, and will be determined with consideration of, but not limited to, available and committed resources,

identification of where and how the CBP can add value to existing jurisdictional and federal programs, and the direct connection to the achievement of the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.

- b. Review overall CBP annual budget and prior year's expenditures supplied by the CBPO and recommend funding allocation based on EC direction for the next 12-month period. This annual budget and prior year's expenditures report may be based on the Chesapeake Bay Accountability and Recovery Act (CBARA) annual report, with each reporting partner providing information about their budget / expenditures, and should include a high-level report on projects, programs, and grants within the CBP. Annually, the PSC chair will confer with the CBPO on the level of detail anticipated in the budget and expenditure report prior to the report being provided, but it should be no less than what is required in 33 U.S. Code Section 1267(e)(7).
- c. Promote transparency and coordination by providing information on funding priorities and planned actions in alignment with partnership priorities.
- d. Evaluate available resources and additional resource commitment necessary to achieve goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement* and adjust resource allocation and prioritization as needed to achieve *the Watershed Agreement's* goals and outcomes.
- e. Create, commission, and dissolve goal teams, workgroups, steering committees, and action teams as needed to ensure effective implementation and oversight of management strategies.
- f. Appoint signatory representatives for each goal team and designate and approve leadership positions of goal teams and other positions specified herein.
- g. Solicit and consider the counsel and actionable advice of advisory committees, goal teams, and program support groups.
- h. Direct goal teams and/or program support groups to develop and implement a method for creating, approving, and revising work products developed and published under CBP branding for the purposes of informing and guiding the CBP partnership.
- i. Approve management strategies.
- j. Review and evaluate assessment of progress on current activities and outcomes provided by goal teams and CBPO and make adjustments based on the assessment, as necessary.
- k. With assistance from the CBPO, program support groups, and the advisory committees, direct the development and implementation of an enhanced communication and transparency strategy to further understanding of local and jurisdictional priorities, needs, and challenges.
- l. For transparency, ensure founding documents and decisional items are stored in a logical and accessible online repository.
- m. Prepare the EC signatory members for discussions on key issues with other members of the EC, the public and the media.

- n. Review and recommend actions to the EC related to changes to goals and outcomes in the *Watershed Agreement*. Approve revised or additional outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*, unless they are significant as determined by the PSC, whereupon they are sent to the EC for final approval.
- o. Set agendas for the EC meetings and report to the EC at least once annually on implementation of management strategies pursuant to the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.

2. **Leadership and Membership:**

The PSC chair is a representative of the signatory that is chairing the EC. When the PSC chair is not able to lead the meetings, they will designate another PSC member from their delegation to serve in the chair role. Each member of the PSC has an equal vote, though only one vote per signatory delegation is permitted for decision making purposes and the voting member of the delegation must be identified before the beginning of each meeting. All other delegation members of each Signatory are considered non-voting members. PSC voting members may designate a representative to act on their behalf as long as that representative has the authority to speak and make decisions on behalf of their signatory to ensure alignment of strategic, policy-driven prioritization and decision making. Each jurisdictional EC member shall designate PSC members who are high-ranking officials, including members at the cabinet office, secretary, deputy, director, or commissioner level of environmental, natural resource, agriculture and other relevant agencies. Jurisdictions determine the size of their delegation and may add to or subtract from their delegation at any time. CBC membership consists of the Commission's executive director. For the federal government, EPA's regional administrator for the Mid-Atlantic Regional Office (or designee), will serve as the voting member. Other federal agency PSC non-voting members (or designees) may attend as part of the federal delegation to communicate relevant agency perspectives and provide technical expertise and other federal leadership support. Advisory committee chairs and goal team co-chairs are invited to attend and participate in meetings as non-voting members.

All members should represent their entity in partnership activities, including participating in PSC discussions, engaging in priority project identification, and supporting implementation. Signatory delegations will provide a list of outcomes on a triennial basis that they commit to participate in and implement.

3. **Duration of Membership:**

PSC signatory members are appointed by their respective EC member and will remain on the PSC until either their EC member changes or identifies a new representative.

4. **Operations:**

a. *Ground Rules:*

- o The PSC meetings are coordinated by the PSC chair and their representatives with assistance from the CBPO.
- o At the beginning of each calendar year, the PSC chair will work with PSC members to develop a calendar of meeting dates, with the aim of one PSC meeting per quarter. Dates may be changed and additional meetings may be scheduled as necessity requires.
- o The format, location, and general content of the PSC meetings are to be

determined at least 30 business days in advance of the meeting to avoid unexpected outcomes and provide an effective planning process.

- An agenda with topics identified, descriptions of those topics, and if the topics are informational / pre-decisional (No Action) or decisional (Action) will be circulated at least 15 business days in advance of the meeting date.
 - Decisional documents will be circulated at least 10 business days prior to the meeting date. If decisional documents are not ready at least 10 business days in advance of the meeting, the decisional item may be tabled until the following quarterly meeting unless an EC directive requires more immediate action.
 - Meetings allow for issues to be presented to the PSC and for decisions to be made that further clarify policies, strategy, and priorities related to goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.
- b. **Decision Making:** The partnership employs a consent-based decision making approach. While consensus (unanimous full support) is the partnership's goal, a consent model enables the groups to gauge voting member positions through polling that captures agreement, disagreement, questions, and reservations (See Figure 2). If some members register a stop or hold, consent is not reached unanimously, and the PSC may use a vote to proceed. Seven out of nine PSC voting members must support a decision for it to be approved.
- For effective and representative decision making at the PSC level, voting and non-voting members are invited to participate in topical discussions and the formation or modification of decision proposals. Formal attempts at consensus are conducted by PSC voting members only.
- c. **Quorum:** Seven out of nine voting members are required to establish a quorum of the PSC. When situations such as a lapse in appropriations refer to guidance held in Section VI(F) - Unavoidable Absence from Meetings.
- d. **Attendance at Meetings:** Meeting attendance may be in-person or hybrid.
- e. **Setting Priorities:** The PSC will establish priorities based on the EC's charge and/or direction, input from the Advisory Committee recommendations, and suggestions from the goal teams. The workload will be shared across the signatory members in accordance with their available resources. The PSC may explicitly direct goal teams to form specific short-term action teams specific to the priority tasks and assignments linked to achievement of the *Watershed Agreement's* goals and outcomes. The PSC will maintain a priority setting framework to identify and elevate priorities within the *Watershed Agreement* that warrant focused PSC attention, as well as addressing emerging issues beyond its scope.
- f. **Budgeted Resources:** Financial support for PSC meetings is provided by the CBPO.
- g. **Staffing and Support:** The PSC is co-coordinated by senior-level CBPO staff and a representative of the signatory that is chairing the EC. A governance and operations workgroup will also be maintained to aid the PSC in long-term planning and operational effectiveness of the CBP (Section V(H)(2)). The CBPO also provides dedicated staff support to the PSC.

5. Process for Changes to the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*:

The signatories recognize that the *Watershed Agreement* should be flexible enough to adapt to changes in scientific, technical, economic, and policy arenas and, therefore, included language in the *Watershed Agreement* allowing for the adoption or modification of goals and outcomes if warranted. The following describes the processes to implement such changes. Any adoption or modification of the original goals or outcomes should only be made with the utmost respect for maintaining the integrity of the *Watershed Agreement* and should never be made lightly.

- a. *Goals*: The goals articulate the desired high-level aspects of the Bay Program partners' Vision in the *Watershed Agreement*. The EC makes the decision to approve revised or added goals to the *Watershed Agreement*. Changes or additions to the goals will be open for public input before being finalized. Final changes or additions are publicly posted to the CBP website.
- b. *Outcomes and Targets*: Many outcomes and/or targets related to each goal are specific, time-bound, and measurable. The lead goal team or PSC may propose "retirement" (for existing outcomes and/or targets that have passed their due date without completion but for which no further effort is recommended), "completion" (for existing outcomes and/or targets that have been met), "modification" of existing outcomes and/or targets, or creation of "new" outcomes and/or targets to the PSC. Accompanying the recommendation should be a brief, written description providing justification and background, data to support the recommendation, proposed wording, partner and resource implications and (in the case of "modified" or "new" outcomes and/or targets) proposed baseline measures and lead goal team.
 - The PSC may choose to:
 - Reject the recommendation
 - Refer the recommendation back to the goal team for further revision, or
 - Accept the recommendation.
 - The PSC will receive public input while considering the recommendation.
 - The PSC must then decide if the revised/new outcome and/or target is a change, significant enough to warrant forwarding to the EC for final approval, or if the PSC is comfortable approving the revised/new outcome and/or target as final and informing the EC of their decision.

C. GOAL TEAMS

Goal Teams are groups of cross-sector government leaders, subject matter experts, and key stakeholders who coordinate and steer the implementation of work to achieve goals, outcomes, and targets under the *Watershed Agreement*. They provide guidance, direction and in some cases, decision making for the work under the goal. The goal teams receive direction from and report directly to the PSC. They serve as a bridge connecting and translating high-level policy decisions into measurable on-the-ground action. The four goal teams endeavor to support: Clean Water, Engaged Communities, Healthy Landscapes Thriving Habitat, Fisheries and Wildlife.

The following are governance rules and procedures that remain consistent across all goal teams. Where more specific rules are needed, each goal team has the discretion to develop their own charters, as long as they are consistent with this section.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Coordinate, review, and approve management strategies, for PSC approval, that support attainment of goals, outcomes and targets of the *Watershed Agreement*.
- b. Coordinate, review, and approve workplans that drive the implementation of management strategies.
- c. Through the management strategies and the adaptive management framework, identify and, where possible, assign resources to support implementation, document gaps in resources, and pursue opportunities to align resources for outcomes and targets.
- d. Communicate with the PSC on policy and implementation issues that are beyond the goal team's ability or authority to address and therefore require PSC leadership, guidance and / or decision making.
- e. Identify areas of alignment across outcomes and workgroups where goal teams can support collaborative efforts.
- f. Frame issues and ensure that critical data, information, options and analyses are performed to support effective decisions by the PSC and EC.
- g. Approve workgroup leadership nominees (chairs, co-chairs, and / or vice-chairs).
- h. Create and commission new workgroups and/or action teams for specific actions under the purview of their goal teams as needed and in consultation with the PSC and the CBPO's leadership to provide staffing and coordination.
- i. Identify needs for monitoring, modeling, indicator and metric development, and information management for the science and analytical support team and other communications or operations and management support from other program support groups, as necessary.
- j. Seek opportunities to engage Advisory Committees.
- k. Nominate goal team co-chairs for designation by the PSC.
- l. Review membership biennially to ensure active engagement and adequate representation.

2. Leadership:

Goal Teams are led by two co-chairs nominated by goal team members and are approved by the PSC. Co-chairs should have subject matter expertise and, when possible, have authority within their respective agencies to direct policy, budgetary, or resource decision-making to support implementation of the goals, outcomes and targets under the *Watershed Agreement*. Co-chairs can be state or federal employees, and may be from other entities when there is appropriate justification. Co-chairs are non-voting members of the PSC who serve as intermediaries between the organizational components of program implementation and program leadership. They facilitate the goal team decision-

making process while fostering cross-Outcome communication. The co-chairs are responsible for maintaining a clear sense of purpose across goal teams' workgroups, and reporting on implementation progress to the PSC. The co-chairs are responsible for providing regular updates to the PSC on progress and roadblocks encountered through the adaptive management process. The PSC works closely with the goal teams' co-chairs while also empowering them to have the greatest discretion possible over short-term adjustments to execution of strategic plans to allow quick adaptations to changing internal and external circumstances.

Co-chairs serve two-year terms which can be renewed at the recommendation of the goal team with concurrence from the PSC. At the end of the two-year term, the goal teams collectively discusses the renewal or change of the co-chairs leadership terms. It is preferable that one of the co-chairs remains in place and a new co-chair is brought in at either the one-year or three-year point in time in order to stagger leadership transition and offer consistency for the team.

3. Membership:

Goal teams maintain a membership that appropriately represents the signatories to the *Watershed Agreement* and allows participation from Advisory Committees, workgroup leadership, and other select at-large members with expertise in the field and significant stake in the implementation and attainment of goals and outcomes. Goal teams consist of voting and non-voting members as described below:

Voting members:

- One representative from each signatory appointed by the signatory's PSC representative for each goal team. Non-EPA federal agencies may represent the federal government on individual goal teams.
- At-large members (up to six with option to identify an alternate)

Non-Voting members, may include:

- Workgroup chairs under each respective goal.
- One advisor from each CBP Advisory Committee.
- Additional representatives from state and federal agencies.

Non-voting members can be nominated by PSC members, Advisory Committees, goal team members or co-chairs, or be self-nominated. They must be approved by the goal team. A roster that clearly denotes voting and non-voting members will be maintained on the CBP webpage for each goal team.

Each signatory should appoint a representative to serve as a voting member of a goal team if the signatory plans to participate in the achievement of any outcomes or targets under that goal. By doing so, signatory members commit to being actively engaged and/or informed in goal team discussions and activities that advance outcome achievement for the outcomes that their PSC member has committed to.

Goal team co-chairs and workgroup chairs may also serve as a signatory's designated voting member. To empower non-signatory partners in the decision-making process, priority for at-large membership will be reserved for NGOs, quasi-governmental organizations, academic institutions, federal agencies, and other local practitioners. At-

large members will be confirmed by the goal team through the established decision-making process of the goal team.

Selection Guidelines: When selecting members, each goal team should consider the following guidelines:

- Authority and leadership (e.g., voting members should be individuals representing partner organizations with significant authority in that goal team's topic area and those individuals should be at a management level or leaders within their organization).
- Level of commitment (e.g., ability to attend meetings, willingness to participate in activities related to implementation of management strategies).
- Skills and perspectives (e.g., geographic diversity, expertise).

Individual members:

- Communicate with and coordinate action on behalf of their entire signatory, federal agencies, or organization that affect implementation of goals, outcomes and targets.
- Make decisions at goal team meetings when needed on behalf of their signatory, federal agency, or organization.
- Ensure goal team and workgroup/action team operations and activities are consistent with approved management strategies, aligned with PSC strategic direction, and following established governance and structure protocols

4. Duration of Membership:

Goal team members from signatories serve indefinite terms. Other members (workgroup chairs, at-large, etc), should serve 2-year terms renewable at the discretion of the goal team.

5. Operations:

- a. **Ground Rules:** Meetings are generally held on a quarterly basis to enable preparation for PSC meetings. Co-chairs, with input from the goal teams, reserve the right to hold meetings more or less frequently. An agenda and any decisional documents are circulated at least five business days before the meeting. Members may not be expected to make decisions on topics where materials were not provided within the five-business day timeframe. The agenda should spell out specific goals for meeting with time limits for each item.
- b. **Decision-Making:** The partnership employs a consent-based decision-making approach. While consensus (unanimous full support) is the partnership's goal, a consent model enables the groups to gauge member positions through polling that captures agreement, disagreement, questions and reservations (See Figure 2). If some members register a stop or hold, consent is not reached unanimously, and the goal team may use a vote to proceed. Two thirds of the goal team voting members must support a decision for it to be approved. See Section VI(D)(3) for guidance on elevating decisions to the PSC.
- c. **Quorum:** A quorum of a goal team is established when two thirds of voting members are present. When situations arise such as a lapse in appropriations, refer to guidance held in Section VI(F) - Unavoidable Absence from Meetings.

- d. Reporting, Accountability and Performance Metrics: The co-chairs are responsible for maintaining a clear sense of purpose and adhering to the CBP's accountability and adaptive management framework described in Section VIII.
- e. Staffing and Support: Pending a decision by the co-chairs and the CBPO director, at least one coordinator and staffer will be available to each of the goal teams and are responsible for providing administrative support in the areas of facilities, administrative office tasks and meeting planning.

D. WORKGROUPS

Workgroups provide technical and programmatic expertise to focus and drive implementation to achieve progress for outcomes and associated targets.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Draft and implement management strategies and associated workplans for their respective outcomes and targets.
- b. Identify existing resources, gaps in resources, and opportunities to align resources for outcomes and targets.
- c. Play a primary role in the adaptive management for their outcomes and targets, regularly reporting on progress.
- d. Ensure timely vertical coordination and communication with respective goal team.
- e. Work with the goal team to identify approaches for maintaining or accelerating progress on outcomes, highlight approaches that have been particularly effective, and assist in determining resources needed to support progress.
- f. Nominate workgroup leadership for goal team approval.

2. Leadership and Membership:

Workgroups should maintain a membership that appropriately represents the signatories and organizations who have a stake in the associated outcome (i.e. are contributing resources, providing data for related indicators, conducting outreach, programing, etc.). Workgroup members will be recruited by workgroup chairs and coordinators. Members may also be self-nominated or recommended by participating agencies and organizations. Members are approved by workgroup chairs in consultation with goal team chairs. Workgroup members should have subject matter expertise to ensure forward movement on associated targets and outcomes. Workgroup members serve as a liaison between their signatory delegation or organization and the workgroup. A signatory commits to being actively engaged and/or informed, consistent with the expectations outlined for goal teams. If an entity is unable to maintain engagement at the work group level, it relinquishes its decision-making role at this level.

Workgroups are led by a chair or co-chairs who represent agencies and organizations with significant authority or expertise in that workgroup's topic area. Nominees for chair positions shall be approved by the goal team and nominees do not need to be federal or state employees. Workgroup chairs serve two-year terms which can be renewed at the recommendation of the workgroup with concurrence from the goal team. Non-

management level candidates are eligible for chair, but to the extent possible should be management level or leaders within their organization.

Workgroups should designate up to 15 voting members who cast votes in instances where unanimous consent cannot be reached. Voting members will be approved by the goal team.

3. Operations:

- a. **Ground Rules:** Workgroups meet on an as-needed basis to ensure adequate progress is being made towards achieving outcomes and targets. Meeting frequency is at the discretion of the workgroup chairs in consultation with goal team chairs and can range from monthly to semi-annually.
- b. **Decision Making:** The partnership employs a consent-based decision-making approach. While consensus (unanimous full support) is the partnership's goal, a consent model enables the groups to gauge member positions through polling that captures agreement, disagreement, questions, and reservations (See Figure 2). If some members register a stop or hold, consent is not reached unanimously, and the workgroup may use a vote to proceed. Two thirds of the workgroup voting members must support a decision for it to be approved. See Section VI(D)(3) for guidance on elevating decisions to the goal team.
- c. **Quorum:** A quorum of a workgroup is established when two thirds of voting members are present. When situations arise such as a lapse in appropriations, refer to guidance held in Section VI(F) - Unavoidable Absence from Meetings.
- d. **Reporting, Accountability and Performance Metrics:** (Co-) chairs are responsible for maintaining a clear sense of purpose and adhering to the CBP's accountability and adaptive management framework (Section VII).

E. ACTION TEAMS

Action teams may be established by the PSC or goal teams as needed to meet explicit and short-term needs. Generally, an action team is also appropriate for an issue that does not reside within the context of a particular goal team, or that requires special expertise and/or is subject to special time pressure such that existing goal teams are not the best mechanism for addressing it.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

- a. Assemble a team of individuals with expertise relevant to the issue the action team is to address.
- b. Adopt/adapt operating procedures (i.e., meetings, subgroups) to meet the objectives (deliverables and timetable) for action on the problem.
- c. Conduct analysis of the problem.
- d. Report to the PSC and/or goal team with recommendations or options for resolving issues.
- e. Disband after reporting results.

2. Leadership and Membership:

Leadership of the action team will be determined by the group that created the action team. The leadership of the action team will determine the membership in consultation with the group that created the action team and will be guided by the skill sets required to address the issue the action team is to address. Members will be drawn from volunteers as well as from targeted invitations at the discretion of the leader.

3. Operations:

Operating procedures for the action teams follow those found under the workgroups section of this document (Section V(D)(3)). Additionally:

- a. They are charged with a specific mission and strategic priorities.
- b. Staffing will be dependent on the mission.
- c. Action teams present their work products and findings to the group that created the action team.
- d. Action teams dissolve when the mission is accomplished.

F. FEDERAL COORDINATION

The federal agencies are actively engaged as members at all levels of the partnership including the Executive Council, Policy Steering Committee, Goal Teams, work groups and action teams. Their participation is guided by a federal coordination document which details how the federal government coordinates within the leadership and goal structure of the partnership to shape policymaking, set priorities and support decision-making.

G. CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM SUPPORT

Section 117 of the Clean Water Act (33 U.S. Code § 1267(b)(2)(A)), authorizes the administrator of the EPA to maintain the CBPO to provide support to the EC. The office, located in Annapolis, Maryland, is part of EPA's Region 3, serving the mid-Atlantic states. As described in the Clean Water Act, the CBPO provides support, which includes implementing and coordinating science, research, modeling, and information technology; making information available pertaining to the environmental quality and living resources of the Bay; assisting the signatories in carrying out their responsibilities to meet the objectives of the *Watershed Agreement*; coordinating with federal, state, and local authorities to develop strategies to improve the water quality and living resources of the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, and implementing outreach programs to foster stewardship of the resources of the Chesapeake Bay.

EPA works in collaboration with a wide range of partners: including federal and state agencies, nonprofit organizations and academic institutions to provide the staffing, resources, and expertise necessary to fulfill the coordination and implementation responsibilities of the CBPO. As a result, staff under the umbrella of CBPO may be EPA employees, federal partners, or colleagues that are supported through cooperative agreements, contracts, and interagency agreements administered by EPA. Together, they provide holistic support for all formal groups within the CBP organizational structure, including the EC, PSC, goal teams, workgroups and advisory committees.

Additional support functions that the partnership wishes to maintain are detailed below.

1. Leadership Support for the Executive Council and Policy Steering Committee:

To aid the EC and PSC in the long-term planning and operational effectiveness of the CBP, a governance and operations workgroup will be maintained.

a. Roles and Responsibilities:

- i. Provide and maintain guidance for the CBP's Governance and Management Framework and develop updates for PSC review and approval, as necessary.
- ii. Provide and maintain guidance for the CBP's priority setting framework and develop updates for PSC review and approval, as necessary.
- iii. Make recommendations and maintain guidance on the CBP's accountability practices (see Section VII(A)) and develop updates for PSC review and approval, as necessary.
- iv. Assist in the implementation and execution of CBP's adaptive management practices (see Section VII(B)), including program-wide reviews and evaluations, at the direction of the PSC, and in consultation with goal teams and workgroups.
- v. Develop, revise and/or maintain other program-wide policies, guidance, and/or best practices, at the direction of the PSC, and in consultation with goal teams and workgroups.

b. Leadership and Membership:

The governance and operations workgroup will be led by two co-chairs. One co-chair position will be held by CBPO's Deputy Director. The other co-chair will be a signatory representative selected by the PSC and may serve renewable two-year terms. Each signatory member of the PSC may appoint a representative to serve as a voting member of the governance and operations workgroup. Up to six at-large voting members may also be nominated by the governance and operations workgroup and approved by the PSC to serve two-year terms. At-large members may be renominated at the conclusion of their terms. Additionally, each Advisory Committees may appoint a representative to serve as a non-voting member.

c. Operations:

- i. The governance and operations workgroup will hold at least two public meetings per year to fulfil its responsibilities.
- ii. The governance and operations workgroup will convene with goal team co-chairs and coordinators annually to address any standing issues related to governance and accountability, and advance new considerations related to policies and guidance to the PSC.
- iii. When necessary to fulfil the governance and operations workgroup's responsibilities outlined above, decision making will be conducted under the rules for the workgroups identified in Section VI and will be subject to review and approval by the PSC as necessary.
- iv. CBPO will provide resources to support coordination activities.

2. Implementation Support for Goal Teams and Workgroups:

To support goal teams, workgroups, and action teams, in using science and engagement to advance all *Agreement* goals and outcomes, two technical support teams will be maintained.

a. A science and analytical support team:

i. Roles and Responsibilities:

- Facilitate coordination and collaboration amongst CBP physical and social science providers for goal teams and workgroups and support teams, and where possible, provide monitoring, data management, modeling and technical analysis.
- Synthesize and communicate scientific results and ecosystem conditions and changes to aid in science-informed management decisions.
- Engage with the Science and Technical Advisory Committee and its recommendations for enhancing CBP science and implementation.
- Provide support for other science, technical and analytical issues that are outside the responsibility of a single goal team or workgroup but benefit the partnership at large, such as addressing and accounting for changing environmental conditions.

ii. Leadership and Membership: This support team will be led by two co-chairs. One co-chair will be the chief of the EPA CBPO's Science, Analysis, and Implementation Branch or his/her representative, while the other co-chair position will be maintained by a representative from the United States Geological Survey. Due to the technical nature of this support team, membership will be flexible to meet the science and skills needs of CPB but will largely draw from federal and jurisdiction agencies, universities, and NGOs. An active and publicly accessible roster of membership will be maintained by the team.

iii. Operations:

- The science support team will meet at the cadence and frequency necessary to carry out its roles and responsibilities. At least six public meetings will be held per year to ensure public transparency and engagement.
- The science support team will coordinate with goal teams and workgroups to support their science needs. The co-chairs of the science support team will ensure coordination and that any requests for assistance are within the capacity of the support team and in furtherance of the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*, and EC and PSC priorities. For priority assistance requests that cannot be supported with existing CBPO resources, provide suggestions for securing outside resources to address these priorities.
- CBPO will provide resources to support coordination activities.

a. An outreach and engagement support team will:

i. Roles and Responsibilities:

- Provide goal team and workgroups guidance and assistance when developing and/or implementing actions and activities that advance their outcomes utilizing elements of communications, outreach, stewardship, local engagement and social science.
 - In coordination with the CBPO, enhance CBP's ability to communicate through media outreach, web- and print-based products, multimedia, outreach, social media and engagement with stakeholders around the watershed, including internally within the partnership.
 - In coordination with CBPO, enhance CBP web services and digital products in support of educational, coordination and accountability needs of the CBP.
 - Maintain a set of standard operating procedures to facilitate meaningful engagement when public feedback is sought by the Program (see Section VI(A)).
- ii. **Leadership & Membership:** This support team will be led by two co-chairs, preferably with expertise in science communications or social science. One co-chair will be the Chief of the EPA CBPO's Partnership and Accountability Branch or his/her representative. The other co-chair will be nominated by the support team's members and approved by the PSC. Due to the technical nature of this support team, membership will be flexible to meet the science and skills needs of CBP but will largely draw from federal and jurisdiction agencies, universities and NGOs. An active and publicly accessible roster of membership will be maintained by the team.
- iii. *Operations:*
- The outreach support team will meet at the cadence and frequency necessary to carry out its roles and responsibilities. At least four public meetings will be held per year to ensure public transparency and engagement.
 - The outreach support team will coordinate with goal teams and workgroups to support their communications, outreach, stewardship, local engagement and social science needs. The co-chairs of the outreach support team will ensure that any requests for assistance are within the capacity of the support team and in furtherance of the *Watershed Agreement's* goals and outcomes and EC and PSC priorities.
 - CBPO will provide resources to support coordination activities.

H. CHESAPEAKE BAY PROGRAM ADVISORY COMMITTEES

The four advisory committees provide independent, informed recommendations to the EC and PSC and may actively engage with the goal teams throughout the year to provide advice in their areas of expertise and help support implementation of the CBP directives and strategic priorities identified by the EC and the PSC, as time allows. Membership of the advisory committees should be as broad and inclusive as possible. The advisory committees serve a unique role as sounding boards within the partnership while being key contributors to accountability by participating in evaluations of progress and advising on alignment of funding priorities.

- **The Stakeholders' Advisory Committee (Stakeholders' Committee)** is charged with advising the leadership of the CBP by representing a sample of residents and stakeholders in the Chesapeake Bay watershed. Since 1984, this group has provided a non-governmental perspective on the Bay effort and on how CBP policies and programs affect watershed residents. In this role, the Stakeholders' Committee has been a strong advocate for increased transparency and accountability, community engagement and education and independent evaluation of the restoration work of the partnership. When appropriate and applicable, the Stakeholders' Committee shares information about the watershed restoration efforts with those groups with whom individual members may be affiliated. The membership is broad-based with representatives from agricultural and homebuilding industries, business, conservation, environmental foundations, law and civic groups.
- **The Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC)** provides scientific and technical guidance to the CBP on measures to protect and restore the Chesapeake Bay. Since its creation in December 1984, STAC has worked to enhance scientific communication and outreach throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed and beyond. STAC provides independent scientific and technical advice in various ways, including (1) technical reports and position papers, (2) discussion groups, (3) assistance in organizing merit reviews of CBP programs and projects, (4) technical workshops and (5) interaction between STAC members and the CBP. STAC serves as a liaison between the region's scientific community and the CBP. Through professional and academic contacts and organizational networks of its members, STAC ensures close cooperation between the various research institutions and management agencies represented in the Bay watershed.
- **The Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC)** was created by the EC through the 1987 *Chesapeake Bay Agreement*. The purpose of LGAC is to advise the EC on how to effectively implement projects and engage the support of local governments to achieve the goals of the *Watershed Agreement*. LGAC's mission is to share the views and insights of local elected officials with state and federal decision-makers and to enhance the flow of information among local governments about the protection and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed.
- **The Agricultural Advisory Committee (AAC)** was created by the EC through a directive (no. 24-1) signed on December 10, 2024. The committee advises the EC and PSC on strategies and opportunities for agricultural operations to more effectively meet the Chesapeake Bay watershed's restoration and conservation goals. Consisting of farmers, urban farmers, agribusiness representatives and technical professionals who help farmers fund and implement conservation practices, the AAC is a voice for producers and industry. The AAC focuses on high-level policy issues, ensuring its scope complements and informs, but does not overlap, the technical work conducted by other groups within the CBP partnership.

1. Roles and Responsibilities:

Certain functions and responsibilities are common to all four of the CBP advisory committees:

- a. Make independent recommendations to the EC, PSC and engage with goal teams in moving forward strategic priorities and actions as well as other areas specific to their expertise.

- b. Advisory committees will use established CBP distribution lists to disseminate annual recommendations, letters, and reports as well as other community channels.
- c. Advisory committees may serve in a communication function to share feedback on the activities and achievements of the goal teams, based on their independent stakeholder role.
- d. Utilize their networks to share information with goal teams and the PSC, and vice-versa.
- e. Participate in the EC, PSC, and goal teams as advisors, as time and resources permit.
- f. Participate in the development and support the implementation of the management strategies developed as part of the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*, as appropriate.
- g. Engage with local constituents, where appropriate, to assist in understanding CBP work products, priorities, and deliverables associated with the *Watershed Agreement* goals, outcomes and targets.
- h. Establish annual priorities that include support of the CBP strategic priorities and highlight emerging issues relevant to the *Watershed Agreement* and the ACs' expertise.
- i. Share progress on priorities and AC activities with the PSC.
- j. Advise the goal teams, as time and resources permit.
- k. Advise the program support groups, as time and resources permit.
- l. Work with the staff provided by a grant, cooperative agreement with the CBPO, or other means, for necessary logistical, coordination, and programmatic support to each AC to ensure representation and engagement of these sectors in the CBPs partnership's restoration, protection and conservation efforts,
- m. Provide advice to the EC and the PSC on annual funding priorities.

2. **Membership:**

The four advisory committees are made up of appointed and / or elected volunteer members who provide independent perspectives from critical partners and interested parties and strengthen the natural and social science basis for Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration, conservation and protection activities. In recognition of the partnership's commitment to diversity, membership of the advisory committees should be as broad and inclusive as possible, in recognition of the commitments referenced in Section III.

VI. PUBLIC MEETING PROCEDURES

A. GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR MEETING PARTICIPATION

Official meetings of the CBP are conducted in a hybrid fashion, unless otherwise specified, with in-person or virtual attendance acceptable. In line with the *Watershed Agreement's* "Partnership" Principles (Section II) of advancing transparency and accountability, all CBP meetings where regular business is conducted or decisions are made will be open to the public for observation. Public notification will be provided in advance, at a minimum, through the CBP website (www.chesapeakebay.net) including date, time, location, agenda and materials. While meetings are open to the public, there may be space, phone-line or bandwidth limitations.

Exceptions to this general rule should be limited to situations where highly deliberative or sensitive negotiations require candid conversations, such as:

- The annual EC meeting, which has two components: a private meeting of the signatory members which is closed to the public, and a public press conference during which EC members will relate actions and decisions from the closed meeting to the public and answer questions from the press.
- As-needed gatherings of groups or combinations of group members and staff to plan for future meetings or engage in highly deliberative technical issues. Examples include private conversations between signatory delegations, group chairs and supporting staff setting agendas or discussing deliverables, and instances where data, studies, or survey results are not yet available to the public (e.g., BMP Expert Panels). While discussion of CBP-related topics may take place in these meetings for the purpose of coordination, final actions will not be made at such meetings. Final actions will be discussed and undergo the CBP's decision-making process (Section VI(D)) at a public meeting.

In line with the *Watershed Agreement's* "Partnership" Principles (Section II) to meaningfully engage the public and welcome public participation in the CBP, during public meetings, opportunity for members of the public to participate in discussions with and provide feedback to program members will be provided at the discretion of the chair(s). Given that the public holds the EC accountable for the *Watershed Agreement* goals (as stated under Section VII(A)), the partnership highly values public participation and follows operating standards that allow for accessible and robust engagement. The Outreach and Engagement Support Team shall create and maintain a set of standard operating procedures to be employed in instances where feedback from the public is solicited as part of a meeting agenda. This may include:

- Guidance for notifying the public of feedback opportunities, such as considerations of appropriate periods of feedback length, scheduling such periods to maximize accessibility for the public, and wide and effective circulation of notification announcements in advance of meetings.
- Use of "plain language" as applicable.
- Consideration of public participation during meeting times most conducive to meaningful engagement (e.g. at the beginning of meetings, particularly for decisional items), including time to review any work products in question.
- Mechanisms to collect questions and comments from the public in advance of CBP meetings to be considered during meetings.
- Designation of appropriate follow-up actions based on feedback.

The chat function of the virtual meeting serves as a tool to help facilitate discussion and provide

resources but should not be considered a substitute for live conversation. CBP participants may use the chat to participate in the discussion if technical difficulties prohibit video or audio interactions, to express a simple reaction to a speaker (e.g. agreement or disagreement) without interrupting the verbal discussion, or to share relevant information and resources with all attendees (e.g. introducing oneself if sitting in for an absent member, or sharing a document that was referenced in the conversation). At the discretion of the chair(s), the chat may also be used for observers to pose questions that are relevant to the discussion at hand. The chat function should be monitored by a designee of the chair(s) during each agenda item, and to the best of their ability and as time permits, the chair(s) should strive to review and address any outstanding issues in the chat before closing an agenda item.

To ensure that all participants and observers agree on what took place during the meeting, a summary of actions and decisions from the day's discussions will be compiled during the meeting by a designee of the chair and will be reviewed verbally before adjournment. This document will be made available via email for one week, and then published to the CBP website following the meeting. Should members have modifications to suggest during the review, changes are best made to the document before the meeting is adjourned, although subsequent clarification may be sought and resolved prior to or at the beginning of the next meeting. Meeting minutes, if taken, may provide more details of the group's discussion and will be vetted with membership for accuracy before posting online to the repository of actions and decisions.

B. GENERAL GUIDANCE FOR DECISION MAKING

Over the 40-plus-year history of the CBP, the partners have approved multiple agreements and numerous directives, resolutions, adoption statements and other documents that create cooperative action to protect and restore the Bay watershed. These collective decisions commit the partnership, and / or a partner, to a course of action, allocates authority, resources or responsibility, or establishes direction, policy, priorities or expectations to advance the implementation of the *Watershed Agreement*. These commitments rely on collaborative decision making, that is:

- Inclusive, of as many members and communities as possible by fostering a culture of respect and mutual learning.
- Participatory, by actively soliciting the input and participation of all, including deliberate discussions between members informed by feedback from the public as appropriate.
- Cooperative, by striving to reach the best decision for all rather than the majority.
- Aware of time and resource limitations, by identifying and advocating in a manner that is efficient and meaningfully advances efforts to successfully meet the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.
- Results driven, and respectful of the partnership and our shared responsibilities and accountability under the *Watershed Agreement*.
- Egalitarian and equitable, with all afforded equal opportunities for input into the process, solution-oriented, emphasizing common agreement over differences and reaching effective decisions using compromise to resolve mutually-exclusive positions.

C. DECISION RULES

The partnership employs a consent-based decision-making approach. While consensus (unanimous full support) is the partnership's goal, a consent model enables the groups to gauge member positions through polling that captures agreement, disagreement, questions and reservations. This process encourages dialogue and allows members to refine proposals based on feedback.

A consent-based decision is adopted when all members indicate full support, general support or a willingness to stand aside (See Figure 2). If some members register a stop or hold, consent is not reached unanimously, and the decision-making body may use a vote to proceed (see appropriate group for specific voting threshold).

1. DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

1. Pre-Decision:

- a. The group leadership ((co-)chair(s) and coordinator team), with input from all voting and non-voting members, determines when a decision is needed.
- b. The decision topic is formally identified on the meeting agenda and posted, along with the supporting materials, on the meeting page with the required advance notice.

2. Decision Making in Meeting:

- a. Quorum: Ensure the appropriate quorum of the decision-making body exists before beginning the decision-making process.
- b. Discussion of the item: All members of the group discuss the topic to surface relevant information, perspectives and considerations. This discussion helps identify the general direction of the group and potential proposals for action, with input from both members and non-members.
- c. Formation of a proposal: Based on the discussion a formal decision proposal is developed and presented to the group by the presenter in coordination with the (co-) chair(s) or vice-chair. If a member sees immediate fundamental issues with a proposal, the chair should document a stop
- d. Call for consent-position: The co-chairs (or their designees) poll voting and non-voting members for their positions. For PSC consent-positions, only voting members will be polled, representing their delegation. For visual representation of positions during the decision-making process, see Figure 2.
- e. Identification and addressing of concerns: If consent is not reached unanimously, dissenting members articulate their concerns. This may prompt additional discussion to clarify or address those concerns. Dissenting members are expected to propose alternatives, suggest maintaining the status quo, or outline a process for developing an alternative so that concerns can be constructively addressed. If needed, the decision may be deferred to a subsequent meeting of the PSC, goal team, or workgroup to allow time for resolution.
- f. Modification of the proposal: The proposal may be revised to address identified concerns. The process then returns to the call for decision.

- g. Voting: If consent cannot be reached unanimously after several iterations, the voting members will vote using the appropriate threshold for their group. The co-chairs calls for a support/oppose/stand aside and each member states their position. A stand-aside vote is treated as supporting the decision.

3. Elevating Decisions:

If a decision-making body does not achieve support for a decision after consent and voting, or if certain other criteria listed below exist, the decision may require notification, review and approval by the next highest organizational group. Decision results that should be elevated, along with a summary of the decision-making process and any votes or member polls taken may include:

- Recommendations for nominees to serve as chairs, co-chairs, or vice-chairs.
- Issues delegated by a higher-level organizational group for discussion, recommendation, and decision making.
- Decisions proposing or recommending changes to current management strategies, workplans, resource allocations and programmatic policy.
- Decisions where consent cannot be reached unanimously or by vote, and where the group has not tabled the issue for the time being.
- Decisions that will ultimately impact or inform the work of two or more workgroups within the same goal team, or two or more workgroups that cross goal teams, must be elevated and coordinated across goal teams to ensure transparency and support from all signatories.
- Workgroup decisions that have budgetary, programming, or jurisdiction- or watershed-wide policy-related impacts must be elevated to the goal team for consideration and decision making.

Decision making results that do not need to be elevated:

- Decisions to implement or execute current management strategies and workplans, resource allocations and programmatic policy.
- Decisions to table an issue indefinitely until the group feels that further reconsideration or discussion is warranted

4. Decision Making via Email:

If, after the discussion, formation and modification of a proposal, members need additional time to obtain their organization's position, decision positions may be collected via email to finalize the decision. Upon transmission of the proposal, a clear and reasonable deadline should be communicated to members. All decisions finalized through email will be communicated to the group, publicly documented in the "Actions and Decisions" document on the CBP website.

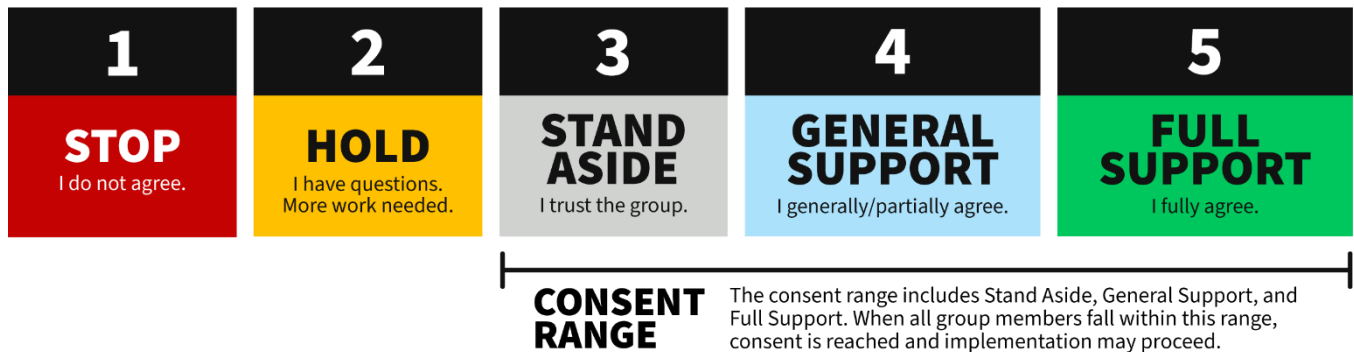
5. Documenting Decisions:

The CBPO is responsible for coordinating with each decision-making body to clearly document all decisions, including the decision rules applied and, when appropriate, the range of positions expressed.

The CBPO will actively maintain a publicly accessible database that tracks both the

decision-making process and the final outcome of each decision, including the method used. Any dissenting views or reservations will be documented, as appropriate.

Figure 2. Chesapeake Bay Program’s Decision-Making Continuum. Based on the University of Maryland’s Center for Leadership and Organizational Change Consensus Continuum.



2. MODIFICATION OR REVERSAL OF PREVIOUS CONSENSUS DECISIONS

In keeping with the principles of adaptive management, the partnership remains open to modifying or reversing prior decisions and resulting policies as new information emerges or conditions change. However, any standing decision or policy may only be modified or reversed through a subsequent decision by the same organizational group (or its successor) that made the original decision, or by a higher-level organizational group. As a result:

- The burden of achieving consent or decision through a vote rests with those proposing a change to the prior decision, not on those seeking to maintain it.
- The question presented to the group should be worded as, “Should we change the previous decision?”, not “Should we keep the previous consensus decision?”.

3. UNAVOIDABLE ABSENCE FROM MEETINGS

Should a lapse in appropriation, state of emergency or other extraordinary circumstance beyond a member organization’s control as approved by that decision body’s (co-)chair(s) prohibit a voting representative of the member organization from participating in a previously scheduled meeting, the meeting may still occur for the purposes of updating attending members; however, any decisional items must be deferred if at least one representative of each relevant signatory delegation cannot be present. In the event of a prolonged absence, the PSC has the authority—following the decision rules identified above—to continue decisional meetings if they determine such action is necessary to maintain progress in meeting goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.

VII. ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

A. ACCOUNTABILITY

The CBP creates a culture of accountability through the following practices: clear identification and assignment of objectives, transparency of results, reviewing of implementation progress and revising its strategies for continuous improvement. At multiple levels of the CBP, objectives are defined and assigned in the form of goals, outcomes and targets and documented through the *Watershed Agreement*, management strategies and workplans. The CBP governance is set up in such a way to enable programmatic accountability between: the EC and PSC for implementation of the *Watershed Agreement*; the PSC and goal teams for management strategy implementation; and goal teams and outcome leads for workplan implementation. Transparency of results is approached in numerous ways, including, but not limited to: public accessibility of CBP decision making and materials (i.e., governing, strategic and meeting documents), specific and annual progress reports towards implementation of the *Watershed Agreement*, and technical information to support the scientific integrity of the CBP's activities. Progress review and strategy revision are coupled together to prompt proactive and corrective actions, prevent backsliding, occur in three different cycles and are aligned with the CBP's adaptive management framework (Section VII(B)). In 2040, the partnership will come together to formally assess its progress and amend the *Watershed Agreement* to ensure work reflects its shared vision.

1. **Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement** – The EC is ultimately responsible for implementing the *Watershed Agreement* and is accountable to the public. Implementation progress is communicated, to the degree possible, to the public and interested stakeholder groups at the annual EC meeting. The PSC is responsible for tracking quarterly implementation progress and ensuring that information related to implementation progress is publicly available.
2. **Management Strategies** – Management strategies “outline the means for accomplishing each outcome and its targets as well as monitoring, assessing, and reporting progress and coordinating actions among partners and stakeholders as necessary” (the *Watershed Agreement*). Goal teams are responsible for developing and implementing their respective management strategies components and are held accountable by the PSC. Management strategies will be implemented in six-year periods. At the end of each six-year cycle, the CBP will re-evaluate and update strategies as necessary, and stakeholder input will be incorporated in the development and reevaluation of each of the strategies.
3. **Workplans** – Outcome leads, such as workgroups or action teams, are responsible for the development and implementation of three-year workplans and are held accountable by the goal team. Workplans are planning documents, developed by outcome leads and are derived from the programs' management strategies. Workplans should establish collaborative activities that advance outcome implementation and set clear expectations for success. Goal teams ensure that the required capacity outlined in each workplan is reasonable and aligns with PSC and EC direction.

B. ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

For the purposes of the CBP, “adaptive management” means a framework for strategic planning, action, and evaluation leading to knowledge acquisition and continuous

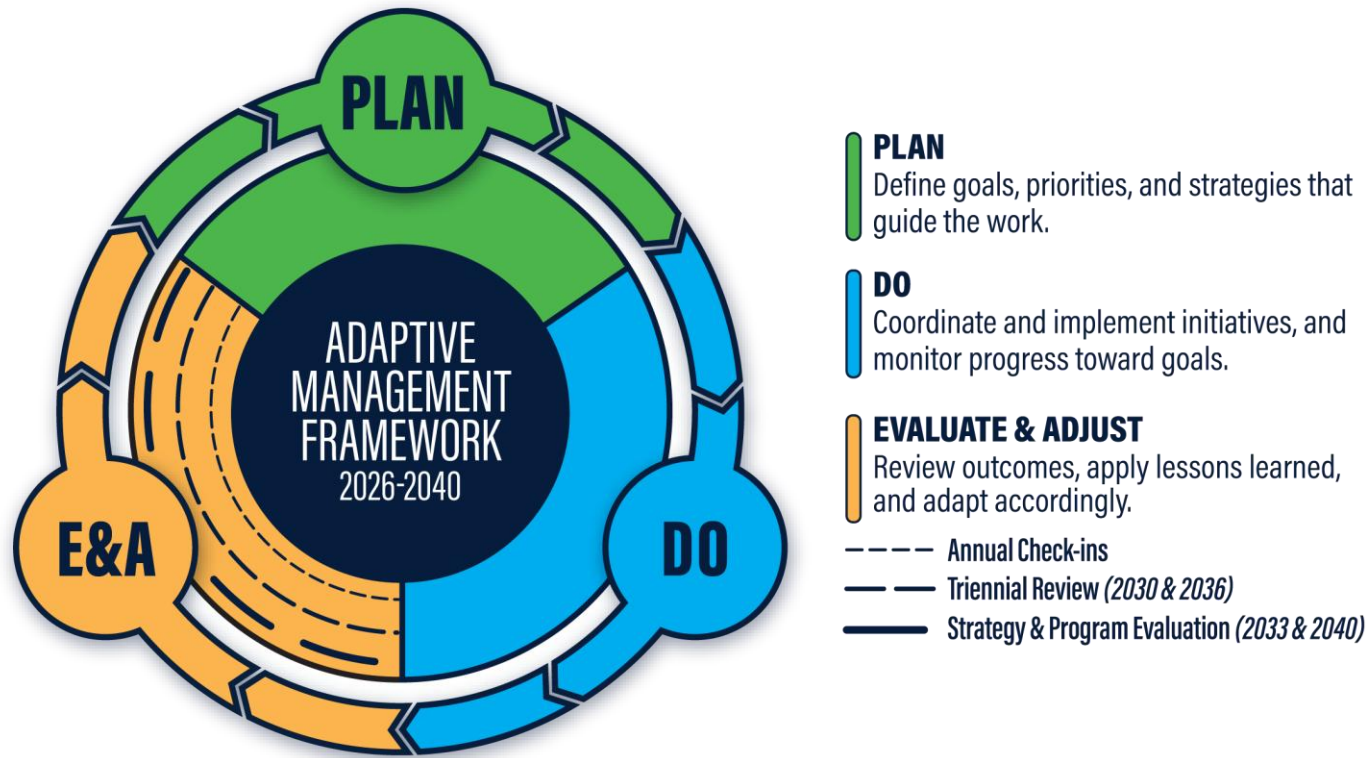
improvement in the management of the CBP and collaborative efforts towards the achievement of goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*. Components of the adaptive management framework are aligned with accountability mechanisms as depicted in Figure 3. Individual goal teams and Outcome leads are encouraged to consider if adaptive management, as detailed by the U.S. Department of the Interior⁴, can be applied to specific natural resources management questions.

As described in VII(A), management strategies and workplans serve as strategic planning documents for the CBP. Management strategies are developed by goal teams on a six-year timeline and the associated workplans are put in place every three-year time by Outcome leads. To support the effectiveness of these plans, three types of evaluations will be conducted.

1. **Annual Check In** - Annual check ins are extended meetings convened by the PSC and provide an opportunity for elements of the program to collectively, and publicly, communicate status of implementation progress and funding (Section V(B)(1)(b-d)), seek advice from CBP advisory committees (Section V(B)(1)(g)), and address and prioritize implementation needs (Section V(B)(1)(a)). Support for meeting execution is provided by the current PSC chair and the CBPO.
2. **Triennial Reviews** - At the end of every three-year workplan cycle, the CBP will conduct a synchronized cross-program review to document implementation success and challenges and initiate new workplans. These reviews will be administered by each goal team with outcome leads responsible for reporting on the status of activities outlined in their respective workplan. The triennial review will culminate in a CBP-wide symposium supported by the governance and operations workgroup, with logistical support provided by CBPO.
3. **Strategy and Program Evaluation** - At the end of every six-year management strategy cycle, Strategy and Program Evaluations are conducted by an independent third party, steered by the PSC, and supported by the governance and operations workgroup. Strategy and Program Reviews are meant to assess the current progress towards achieving the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*, evaluate the efficacy of existing management strategies and identify opportunities for improvement, alignment to the *Watershed Agreement's* principles, and assess the current functioning of CBP governance, structure, operations and practices. In 2040, the partnership will come together to formally assess its progress and amend the *Watershed Agreement* to ensure work reflects its shared vision. Goal teams and outcome leads will also be responsible for supporting the review activities. A report will be prepared by the third party and presented to the PSC. CBPO will provide funding for conducting and preparing the program evaluation.

⁴Williams, B. K., R. C. Szaro, and C. D. Shapiro. 2009. Adaptive Management: The U.S. Department of the Interior Technical Guide. Adaptive Management Working Group, U.S. Department of the Interior, Washington, DC.

Figure 3. Chesapeake Bay Program Adaptive Management Framework.



APPENDIX A – LIST OF SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIALS

The following materials such as program-wide policies, guidance, and/or best practices are maintained externally to the Governance and Management Framework and may be updated asynchronously.

1. PSC Priority Setting Framework (*in draft*)
2. Federal Coordination document (*in draft*)
3. [Meeting Facilitation Support](#)
 - a. [Meeting Best Practices](#) [Version 1; September 2025]
 - b. [Meeting Agenda Template](#) [Version 1; September 2025]
 - c. [Meeting Minutes Template](#) [Version 1; September 2025]
4. [Management Strategy Template and Guidance](#) [Version 3; 04.16.2026]
5. [Workplan Template and Guidance](#) [Version 3; 04.16.2026]