

APPENDIX: BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS

To Support the Chesapeake Bay Program Governance and Management Framework

Introduction

Effective meetings are pivotal for successful governance and organizational frameworks, helping optimize collaboration, decision-making, and engagement. This appendix provides standardized best practices and guidance to support effective meetings across all levels of the Chesapeake Bay Program's (CBP) organizational structure. These practices are designed to enhance coordination among program units while building trust and aligning goals throughout the partnership. Meetings should balance scientific expertise with practical implementation considerations and ensure comprehensive stakeholder input in decision-making processes to support the implementation and attainment of the goals and outcomes under the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Discussions should be relevant to CBP business.

Purpose

These meeting best practices collectively emphasize purposeful planning, effective time management, comprehensive engagement, transparent documentation, accessibility, and continuous improvement. Their formal incorporation into the Chesapeake Bay Program Governance and Management Framework is intended to strengthen the efficacy of meetings, align with adaptive management goals, and support the well-being and productivity of all participants.

A. Meeting Roles and Responsibilities

Clearly assign and communicate roles for Chairs, Coordinators, Staffers, Members, and Interested Parties, specifying participation rights and decision-making authority. Maintain consistent representation to preserve continuity.

Participative Leadership: Chairs and facilitators are encouraged to adopt diplomatic, facilitative styles, managing contributions and turn-taking to ensure all meeting participants have the opportunity to speak.

Shared Leadership: Delegate meeting tasks, such as facilitation and follow-up assignments, among members to distribute the workload and foster collective ownership. While overall meeting facilitation should be the responsibility of the Chair or Co-chair, specific topics should have designated leads to present materials and facilitate discussion. Clearly articulate the expectations for assignments and verify understanding, rather than assuming they are known and understood. Assign tasks based on members' strengths and skills.

1. **Chairs:** Lead meeting facilitation and agenda management; ensure adherence to meeting objectives and timelines; guide decision-making processes; coordinate with other leadership as needed; may act as voting member.
2. **Vice Chair:** Supports Chair(s); expected to take over as Chair after Chair's term ends; may act as voting member.
3. **Coordinators:** Support meeting logistics, preparation, and facilitation; facilitate communication between meetings; maintain group records and follow-up actions; serve as primary point of contact for group members, but this point of contact role can be delegated to Staffers; manage meeting attendance; may not serve as a voting member.
4. **Staffers:** Provide technical and administrative support; prepare meeting materials and documentation; assist with logistics and platform management; support

follow-up and action item tracking; take meeting attendance minutes or summary notes from meeting; may not serve as a voting member.

5. **Members (Voting):** Participate actively in discussions and decision-making; prepare for meetings by reviewing materials in advance; follow through on assigned action items; represent their organization or jurisdiction's interests and coordinate with their respective Management Board member.
6. **Members (Non-Voting):** Contribute expertise and perspectives to discussions; provide input on relevant topics within their area of knowledge; support implementation of decisions within their capacity.
7. **Interested Parties:** Observe proceedings and provide input when appropriate; contribute specialized knowledge when appropriate.

All signatories that sign up for an outcome are expected to assign representatives and attend all Goal Team and Workgroup meetings related to that outcome, as well as all Management Board, Principals' Staff Committee, and Executive Council meetings. Signatories should send their principal to all meetings (e.g., Governor, Management Board member, workgroup voting member, etc.), except in rare circumstances necessitating a designee.

B. Meeting Planning and Logistics

1. **Agenda Development:** Chairs, Coordinators, Staffers, and members are involved in collaboratively setting agendas, ensuring agendas articulate clear meeting objectives and next steps.
 - **Utilize CBP agenda template with key information:** meeting location/virtual links, purpose, timed discussion points, presenter roles, action and decision items, next steps, breaks and breakout sessions for longer meetings, and hyperlinks to relevant materials.
 - Utilize survey form to poll for agenda topics from group members on a periodic basis. At a minimum, the draft agenda will be shared with members for input. Approval of the final agenda is at the discretion of the Chair/Co-chair.
 - Meetings should generally be held only when there is a task that requires a group effort or need for disseminating information/tools.
 - Focus intent on decisions and actions that advance goal and outcome priorities.
2. **Advance Distribution of Materials:** Circulate agendas and supporting final documents at least 1-2 weeks in advance through the Chesapeake Bay Program Meetings Calendar to allow thorough preparation, enabling efficient, focused discussions.
 - Decisional items must be announced with agendas to ensure appropriate parties are present at meetings. The group must obtain consent from voting members to vote on an item with less than one week's notice.
 - **In-Person Meeting Logistics:** Send RSVP surveys to estimate headcount; provide an 'In-Person Meeting Details' document (e.g., parking, lunch, contact info); post signage outside the meeting room and have an attendance sheet and Wi-Fi info available.
3. **Effective Meeting Size:** Choose meeting size based on purpose (e.g., smaller groups for decision-making, larger for information sharing). Ensure participants reflect expertise needed for discussion

4. **Manage Meeting Load:** Regularly assess and rationalize the number of meetings to avoid unnecessary convenings and reduce participant fatigue, acknowledging the meeting load paradox whereby excessive meetings decrease engagement and creativity.
 - Encourage delegation to reduce participant overload.
 - Partnership groups will strive to prevent scheduling conflicts and help partners overcome participation obstacles using the CBP Meetings Calendar webpage.
 - If a meeting does not add value for its members or seek to address a strategic task, the meeting should be canceled or postponed.

C. Documentation and Communication Standards

1. Meeting Documentation:

- **Utilize CBP minutes template** to document and distribute summary minutes with actions and decisions within one week after meeting or two weeks after multi-day meetings.
- Maintain editable documents or running notes accessible to all group members to track deliverables and their status.
- Assign clear owners and due dates to tasks.
- Send reminder emails and conduct periodic check-ins.

2. **Chesapeake Bay Program Meetings Calendar:**

The CBP's Meetings Calendar is the home for public meetings hosted by GITs, Workgroups, Action Teams, and other CBP groups. The Meetings Calendar does **not** contain meetings hosted by CBP partners, or non-public meetings between office staff.

For more guidance, see [A Staffer's Guide to the ChesapeakeBay.net Content Management System \(CMS\)](#).

- Post all meeting information with one to two weeks advance notice.
- **Content for Calendar Events:**
 - **Date and Time:** Event date, start time, and end time.
 - **Event Title:** Always include the event's month and year in the title. The event title directly informs the event page's URL, and including the month and year makes it more likely the URL will be descriptive and unique. Use a hyphen to separate the month and year from the event name (e.g., Management Board Meeting – September 2025). Avoid commas or parentheses.
 - **Purpose:** A short description of your meeting's goals or primary discussion topics should be provided. At a minimum, recurring GIT and Workgroup meetings should include the following statement: "This is the [monthly] [quarterly] [annual] meeting of the [GIT or Workgroup name]."
 - **Event Location:** Select the appropriate meeting room, conference platform, or other location from the Location drop-down menu. Use Location Description to share call-in details or instructions for finding or accessing a building. When including call-in details, use one of the templates below:
 - Template for Microsoft Teams:
Join the meeting via Microsoft Teams.
Meeting ID: | Passcode:

Call: +1 ###-###-#### | Phone Conference ID:

- Template for Zoom:

Join the meeting via Zoom.

Meeting ID: | Passcode:

Call: +1 ###-###-####

- Template for Google Meet:

Join the meeting via Google Meet or call +1 ###-###-#### (PIN: #).

- **Meeting Files:** Documents that support the event. File names should be clear, descriptive, and in PDF format for users to download and view. Files should be uploaded into one of four categories:
 - Agenda
 - Presentations
 - Supporting Documents, or miscellaneous files
 - Meeting Minutes, or the official notes from the event
- **Related Videos:** Webinar recording(s) or other video(s) related to the event. The Video Description field should include a short description of your video, as well as any required credits.
- **Sidebar Tab:** Contains point of contact information for the event, often a staffer or coordinator; meeting host(s), such as GITs or Workgroups.
- **Remove a Calendar Event:** When an event has been canceled, you may choose to 1) add CANCELED: to the meeting title or 2) Remove it from the CMS.

3. Website and Group Information Management:

- Update group page information and membership rosters at least every six months to maintain accurate email distribution lists for group members.

D. Time Management

1. Start and end meetings on time without delay to respect participants' schedules and ensure maximum productivity.
2. Limit off-topic discussions, side conversations, and counterproductive behaviors to maintain meeting focus and achieve objectives efficiently.
3. Aim to keep meetings concise; consider multiple shorter sessions rather than less frequent extended meetings.
 - Schedule appropriate breaks for meetings longer than two hours, with ten-to-fifteen-minute breaks recommended every one to two hours.

E. Meeting Conduct and Participation

1. Preparation and Attendance:

- Members should come to the meeting having reviewed any materials in advance and with necessary information at hand to make informed decisions and/or actively engage in the discussions.
- If the primary (voting) member cannot attend, send an appropriate, informed delegate instead.

2. Foster Supportive Environment:

- Encourage a respectful meeting culture where varied viewpoints are welcomed, and participants feel safe to contribute without fear of dismissal or reprisal.
- Incorporate appropriate humor and trust-building activities to enhance team cohesion and meeting satisfaction.
- Respect the privacy of the discussion, especially if sensitive topics are covered.
- Participants engage in active listening and avoid interrupting others.

3. Meeting Structure and Engagement:

- Participants should respect the agenda but are free to ask questions about the process and ground rules.
- Meeting discussions should be reserved for members only, unless broader input is invited at the direction of the Chair(s).
- Members bear individual responsibility for contributing actively to a constructive group process.
- Promote active participation using structured facilitation to enable collaborative dialogue, preventing dominance by few and disengagement by many. This involves planning clear agendas, using engagement tools (e.g., breakout groups, interactive platforms, polls), assigning roles, employing turn-taking techniques, encouraging various perspectives, and gathering feedback after meetings.
- During virtual or hybrid meetings, use the 'Raise Hand' function to signal your intention to share a comment.
- During virtual or hybrid meetings, use the meeting chat function to share relevant information, resources, and links that support the discussion topics, provide brief feedback without interrupting the flow of the meeting, and/or document key decisions and actions that arise during the meeting.
- Limit the use of phones, laptops, etc. to minimize distractions unless they are necessary for the meeting.
- Keep discussion on topic, focused, and professional.
- Refrain from discussion of ideas until all ideas are heard and clarifying questions answered.

4. Post-Meeting Responsibilities:

- Clearly define tasks and responsibilities, ensuring everyone knows what is expected post-meeting.
- Participants are responsible for taking personal notes and following up with Coordinator and/or Staffer for more information, if needed.
- If you commit to a task, ensure that it is completed.

F. Decision-Making Processes

1. Allow adequate time for discussion and consideration of different perspectives.
2. Participants show a willingness to reach consensus on decision issues.
3. During informal discussions and unofficial decision-making, silence will be considered agreement unless a participant explicitly states otherwise.
4. Use unanimous or consensus-based decision-making following the CBP's governance protocols.

G. Technology and Security Guidelines

1. **Meeting Platforms:** If meetings are hosted at the EPA CBP office, the host must use Microsoft Teams.
 - CBP IT staff are only trained to provide support for Microsoft Teams. This platform is recommended for effective integration with conference rooms at the CBP office.
 - If necessary, use Zoom or Google Meet as alternatives.
2. **File Sharing:** Microsoft Teams/SharePoint or Google Drive for collaborative document management.
3. **Engagement Tools:** Mentimeter for real-time polling and feedback; Miro Board for collaborative brainstorming and visualization; Google Forms for structured input collection.
4. **Accessibility Measures:** Plan and conduct meetings to accommodate participants' accessibility needs, including disability accommodations, multilingual support where feasible, and attention to time zones. See Accessibility Best Practices, pages 21 to 24.
5. **Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use:** Establish clear guidance on AI use during meetings; ensure AI tools enhance rather than replace human collaboration; maintain transparency about AI assistance in meeting processes.
 - No AI note takers are permitted at CBP meetings.
 - AI use should follow individual agency or organization policy, if applicable.
6. **Security:** All meeting attendees are responsible for ensuring the digital security of materials, meeting attendance, and follow-up messages. Suggested measures include:
 - Change the meeting ID for each meeting, replacing the use of your Personal Meeting ID within Zoom.
 - Enable the meeting's waiting room and review potential participants before admittance.
 - Familiarize yourself with the meeting platform's security features, particularly how to remove a participant, suspend participant activities, and enable a waiting room.
 - Disable any meeting features that are not needed to prevent the sharing of malicious material.
 - Ask participants to identify themselves at the start of the meeting.

In the event that a malicious actor or bot does join a meeting, utilize the platform's security features to:

- Remove the participant without the ability to rejoin the meeting.
- Suspend participant activities.
- Report the incident to meeting platform and IT services.
- Once the meeting restarts, restrict presentations to meeting hosts/organizers.

H. Training and Continuous Improvement

The Enhance Partnering, Leadership and Management Goal Team (GIT 6) will assume responsibility for and support the following activities:

1. **Regular Assessment:** Periodically evaluate meeting effectiveness and participant satisfaction; gather feedback informally or through surveys on meeting practices and adjust as needed.

2. **Skills Development:** Provide ongoing training for meeting leaders and participants on facilitation, consensus-building, conflict management, cultural competence, and technology use, as resources allow.

Reference to Governance Framework Integration

These best practices are intended to complement and reinforce existing governance structures, decision-making processes, and adaptive management cycles outlined in the Chesapeake Bay Program Governance and Management Framework. Implementation of this guidance is expected to enhance transparency, accountability, and collaborative effectiveness across all partnership meetings. Guidance is not intended to, nor does it overrule any federal, state, or local law or policy.

These best practices shall be implemented immediately across all Chesapeake Bay Program meeting structures, with regular review and updates to the Chesapeake Bay Program Governance and Management Framework as the program evolves beyond 2025. Partnership groups should adapt these guidelines to their specific needs while maintaining consistency with overall program objectives. Groups are encouraged to explore innovative approaches and collaborate with their leadership and members to potentially broaden and improve our shared understanding of best practices.

This appendix serves as a living resource to be updated regularly as the Chesapeake Bay Program continues to evolve its governance and meeting practices. Regular feedback and refinement will ensure these practices remain effective and relevant to program needs. See Meeting Facilitation Support page for additional reference materials.