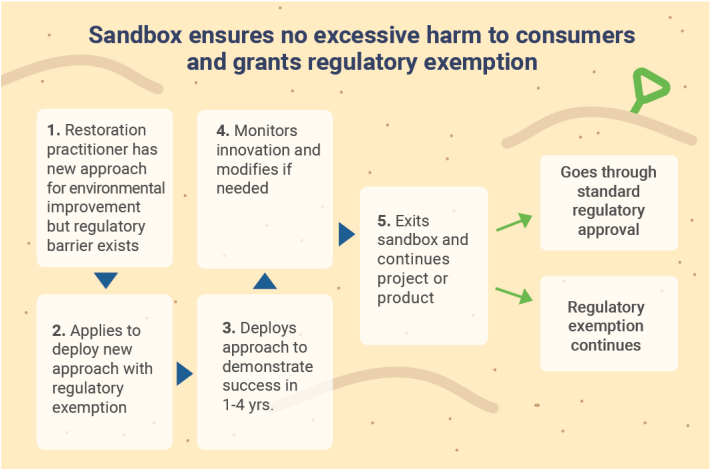
Policy Sandboxes

Using creative approaches to learn how to accelerate nature-based solutions delivery in Maryland

What is sandboxing?

A regulatory sandbox is a carve-out from existing government rules around permitting, licensing or approvals that encourages testing of new, potentially-better solutions while also helping regulators and legislators learn about these solutions. Specific features make sandboxes effective at encouraging innovation while protecting public interests:

- Require projects to apply and be accepted into a cohort
- Limit the time and/or scale of the projects
- Have a clear offramp for future projects to be incorporated into existing regulations, as appropriate



Why do we need one?

"Program change, innovation, and experimentation are needed. Institutional innovation could be facilitated by considering ideas such as sandboxing." - Chesapeake Bay Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response (CESR)

Dozens of sandboxes exist

Over 20 countries have adopted some form of a formal, legislatively-created sandbox. So have states from Arizona to Vermont. These examples are overwhelmingly focused on finance and energy. Although not formally called a sandbox, NOAA's exempted fishing permits operate a lot like a sandbox. Under it, research teams that include fishermen can apply to be allowed to test alternative fishing gear that can prevent bycatch within a two-year timeframe.

Potential applications for nature-focused sandboxes:

- **Removal of crumbling infrastructure:** Abandoned dams and hardened shorelines are constantly eroding, potentially causing real harm to people and ecosystems, but can be difficult to get a permit to address these hazards. Since these are slowly being ruined over time without intervention, a sandbox could allow customized and simpler permitting for small projects to test newer restoration methods (e.g. living shorelines) to replace them.
- **Natural carbon sequestration:** New carbon sequestration techniques urgently need to be tested. Ones involving living ecosystems rarely involve significant risk but are more likely to be stuck in regulations designed for gray infrastructure.
- **Restoration of keystone species:** Beavers and oysters once served as the region's greatest ecosystem engineers. After centuries of decimating their populations, excessive permits are now required to build the same kinds of structures that they created naturally for millenia; a sandbox could significantly streamline restorations that mimic natural engineering.

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