

Governance and Management Framework Frequently Asked Questions

This document responds to questions raised during the July 28, 2026, Partnership Wide Webinar: GMF 101 and subsequent questions received. The Governance and Operations Workgroup (GO Team) encourages everyone to read the [Governance and Management Framework \(GMF\)](#) in its entirety, as language addressing a question may be found in more than one section of the document. While the GO Team is tasked with providing and maintaining guidance for the GMF as well as developing updates, the GO Team is not directed to enforce rules. Instead, the GO Team will observe the execution of the GMF across the Chesapeake Bay Program and advance new considerations related to policies and guidance to the Policy Steering Committee (PSC). The GO Team will provide guidance on issues that are addressed in the GMF but require clarification. Where the GMF is silent on an issue, the GO suggests that answers to questions be decided at the goal team level and communicated throughout the team for consistent implementation. The GO Team is available to answer questions and provide guidance at any time. Please contact the GO Team by sending an email to governanceandoperations@chesapeakebay.net.

Question 1

Regarding decision-making via email, can decisions never be made solely by email?

Answer

The decision-making process outlined in the GMF is meant to be collaborative and to encourage dialogue and refinement based on feedback. The procedural steps were deliberately designed to be inclusive, participatory, cooperative, results-driven, egalitarian and equitable, while staying aware of time and resource limitations. The GMF anticipates and provides guidance on collecting positions and confirming decisions by email after a meeting at which the proposal was discussed, formed, and modified (pages 30-31). The GMF does not provide guidance on decisions conducted solely by email, with no in-meeting discussion, or when positions are collected in advance of the meeting at which the decision will be discussed. In keeping with the GMF's general guidance for decision making on page 28, when decisions are made outside of the process outlined in the GMF, goal team leaders and members should consider how key components of collaborative decision-making, like transparency and equity, have been met to ensure confidence in the validity of the decision. Any procedures established for decision-making by the goal team should be documented and communicated to all relevant parties prior to being implemented.

Question 2

Nonvoting members are designated and approved, and participate in the consent process, but "interested party" does not appear in the GMF. Should chairs prevent people who are not nonvoting members from voicing stops and holds when seeking unanimous consent?

Answer

The GMF sets the expectation that appropriately identified group members, both voting and non-voting, will be included in the consent-based decision-making process used by the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP). Unanimous consent is reached if no member registers a dissenting position of "stop" or "hold." The GMF further clarifies on page 28 that, with limited exceptions, "all CBP meetings where regular business is conducted or decisions are made will be open to the public for observation" and in keeping with CBP's

Partnership principles, “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).” While interested parties, as members of the public, may, at the chair’s discretion, share their concerns regarding a proposed decision as part of the group’s discussion, their feedback would not prevent the group’s members from reaching unanimous consent.

Question 3

If an NGO (rather than a jurisdiction) is serving as a workgroup chair, do they get a "vote" in the group? Or do they need to be designated as an at-large member AND chair in order to get a vote?

Answer

The GMF intentionally avoids defining goal team and workgroup chairs as voting members of their respective groups. These two distinct roles are appointed in different ways. Both roles may be filled by the same designee, but that is left to the discretion of the appointing entities. The GMF anticipates that co-chairs will often be state and federal employees of signatory partners and therefore clarifies that “goal team co-chairs and workgroup chairs may also serve as a signatory’s designated voting member” (page 17) if the signatory chooses to appoint them. But chairs may also be from other entities, and there is nothing in the GMF that prevents the goal team from confirming these individuals to also serve as at-large voting members.

Question 4

Page 20 of the GMF says "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." which is counter to what was presented about Workgroups. Please clarify?

Answer

The slide deck for the webinar will be updated to correctly state that potential workgroup members may be recruited by workgroup chairs and coordinators, self-nominated, or recommended by participating agencies and organizations. From these individuals, members are chosen by the workgroup chairs in consultation with goal team chairs. Of the members, 15 voting members will be designated by the workgroup and approved by the goal team.

Question 5

Page 16 of the GMF says that “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.” [of the GMF] There’s no path or requirement stated beyond that, but is there an expectation that the GO Team, Policy Steering Committee (PSC), or somebody reviews a goal team charter for consistency?

Answer

The GMF does not require PSC or GO Team review and approval of goal team charters, so it remains the goal team’s responsibility to ensure that their charter is consistent with the GMF. However, in keeping with the GO Team’s responsibility to provide and maintain guidance for the CBP’s GMF, the GO Team can be called upon by goal teams to offer guidance during the charter-drafting process.

Question 6

If at-large voting members are nominated for a subsequent term, do they vote for themselves during the process of the goal team membership approval? Or recuse?

Answer

While the GMF provides no additional guidance on the at-large voting member confirmation process, nominees should recuse themselves from voting. The GO Team chairs encourage goal teams to consider the CBP partnership principles, including a commitment to “operate with transparency in program decisions, policies, actions and reporting on progress to strengthen public trust and confidence in our efforts,” as well as the general guidance for decision making provided on page 28.

Question 7

Are workgroup/goal team meetings still intended to be public meetings?

Answer

The GMF provides on page 28 that, with limited exceptions, “all CBP meetings where regular business is conducted, or decisions are made will be open to the public for observation.”

Question 8

Is there a limit on how many non-voting members a workgroup can have?

Answer

The GMF does not specify a limit on the number of non-voting members a workgroup may have. Members are approved by the workgroup chairs in consultation with goal team chairs.

Question 9

How do we document decisions made by email? (Presumably decisions made in meetings are captured in the minutes which are posted)

Answer

While the GMF requires that decisions finalized by email be communicated to the group, it does not specify how. This remains at the discretion of the group. Further guidance will be provided on how the “Actions and Decisions” function of the CBP website will operate.

Question 10

Page 19 regarding workgroup membership says that “if an entity is unable to maintain engagement at the work group level, it relinquishes its decision-making role at this level.” Will the best practices or GO team provide guidance on what's reasonable or expected level of “engagement” for members? Or is that up to goal teams and/or workgroups themselves to articulate? E.g., number of consecutive absences or frequency of absences within a certain time period.

Answer

The GO Team will not define a reasonable or expected level of engagement. If an issue regarding participation arises, goal teams should determine what is needed to maintain engagement. That decision should be communicated to all workgroups.

Question 11

Does the actions/decisions document or page exist currently on the CBP website? Workgroups and goal teams will likely be making decisions in meetings either currently or in the near future.

Answer

Such a page does not currently exist on the CBP website. Further guidance will be provided on how the “Actions and Decisions” function of the CBP website will operate.

Question 12

When the GMF leaves room for interpretation, how much advance notice would you like from us before we make an internal determination on one of those ambiguous items?

Answer

The GO Team's responsibility regarding the GMF is to provide and maintain guidance for the GMF and develop updates for PSC review and approval, as necessary. Where a group is exercising its best judgment over decisions and policies not specified by the GMF, there is no requirement for GO Team review and approval. However, if a group would like GO Team guidance, please provide enough time to provide you with quality feedback. The amount of time needed will depend on the degree of feedback needed, so feel free to reach out to the GO Team co-chairs to discuss.

Question 13

Regarding coordination across goal teams: on page 30 the GMF notes that items affecting multiple teams should be "elevated and coordinated." The Public Access Workgroup plans to work closely with Protected Lands Workgroup, and we want to ensure we set a clear precedent for tracking collaborative discussions, especially those that cannot take place during workgroup meetings. We plan to document these conversations in our meeting minutes, but is there another method you recommend for tracking them? While these discussions are not decisional, should they be captured in the decisions database CBPO is developing? And do you have a specific interpretation of what "elevated" means in this context?

Answer

Non-decisional discussions are not meant to be captured in the Actions and Decisions database that will be available on the CBP website. GO Team chairs encourage groups to document collaborative discussions in meeting minutes that are made available to all groups involved. Elevating discussions that will impact or inform the work of two or more workgroups within the same goal team or different goal teams is meant to ensure transparency and support from all signatories. The GO Team chairs suggest the relevant workgroup and goal team chairs discuss what next steps would be appropriate, including whether notification of the goal team is enough for awareness.

Question 14

We've received a request from a federal agency to serve as a voting member in Engaged Communities. We understand the GMF allows this but want to make sure we're applying consensus appropriately if two federal representatives are present. Should one representative serve as the Federal Office Directors (FOD) representative and the other represent their agency independently? How should multiple federal perspectives be factored into consensus?

Answer

The appointment process for signatory representatives and at-large members differs, so groups will want to distinguish each voting member's role to ensure the proper appointment/confirmation process has been followed. Moreover, individual members are responsible for communicating and coordinating actions as well as making decisions when needed on behalf of their signatory, federal agency, or organization. The federal signatory representative will be responsible for meeting these responsibilities on behalf of the federal government. The at-large member will be responsible for meeting these responsibilities on behalf of their federal agency. The presence of two federal agency employees serving as voting members should not impact consent-based decision making, but the GO Team chairs encourage the federal agencies to communicate internally and strive for clarity with their Bay Program partners whenever differences arise.

Question 15

Should quorum be established before all goal team and workgroup votes, including consent votes?

Answer

A quorum should be established before initiating any decision-making process. If a quorum is not present, issues may be discussed, but no decision will be made.