

The Chesapeake Bay Program's

# Outreach & Engagement Strategy

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# Why do we need an Outreach & Engagement Strategy?

# Background

- Research completed in 2025
- Major revision planned for 2026 to account for revised Watershed Agreement
- Annual revisions planned for updates

# Research – Interviews

In July–September 2025, the Outreach Specialist conducted interviews with the following CBP groups:

- Adapting to Changing Environmental Conditions Workgroup
- Agriculture Workgroup
- Healthy Watersheds Goal Implementation Team (GIT)
- Forestry Workgroup
- Local Leadership Workgroup
- Scientific, Technical Assessment and Reporting Team (STAR)
- Stewardship GIT
- Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) Workgroup
- Sustainable Fisheries GIT
- Urban Stormwater Workgroup
- Vital Habitats GIT
- Water Quality GIT

# Research – Interviews

- Local Government Advisory Committee
- Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee
- Stakeholders Advisory Committee

# Research – Feedback Form

- All CBP coordinators and staffers were provided with an electronic feedback form and asked to disseminate it among their members.
- Feedback was solicited over two weeks in July 2025
- Received 151 responses.



# Key findings

## Trusted sources

- Directly involves organizations and individuals that audiences already engage with and trust

## Targeted messaging

- Use information that is understandable and free of technical jargon
- Outreach materials should be visually appealing and tell real life stories.
- Focus on the tools, services, funding mechanisms and programs are useful to target audiences
- Understanding audience motivations, challenges and opportunities are key for sustaining long-term change and impact.
- Focus on the local level and frame information around real-world concerns such as flooding, land use, economics and recreation
- Audience-friendly topics, such as blue crabs, land use, oysters and trees, should be utilized more in bringing attention to our work and increasing public understanding of the Bay and its issues.

# Key findings

## Effective engagement approaches

- Peer-to-peer learning, hands-on training sessions and tours provide the greatest opportunities to engage with audiences

## Coordination

- Internal engagement and collaboration across the CBP organizational structure is crucial in achieving external outreach success.
- The most important audiences that GITs and workgroups feel they need to engage with are those that make or influence decisions, including local elected officials, state agencies and CBP leadership.

**CBP's main role in outreach and engagement should be as a convener and content provider. The partnership should support translation, coordination and credibility while empowering trusted sources to deliver services and messages, and bring them back to the CBP. Two-way engagement is critical in building and sustaining trust.**

# Audiences identified by GITs and workgroups

- 1. Internal and external decision makers**
- 2. Local government units**
3. Environmental non-profits
4. Private landowners
5. Media
6. Watershed residents
7. Students and teachers

\*Tribal nations



# 1. Audience – Internal & External Decision Makers

External decision-makers are the federal, state and local government officials charged with making decisions that help progress the goals and outcomes of the *Watershed Agreement*.

- legislators at the local, state and federal levels
- federal and state agency leadership
- regional legislative and governing bodies

# **1. Audience – Internal & External Decision Makers**

Internal decision-makers are members of the CBP leadership, including the Chesapeake Executive Council, Policy Staff Committee and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Chesapeake Bay Program Office (CBPO) leadership.

## 2. Audience – Local government units

Working with local government units was mentioned by every single GIT and workgroup. However, confusion exists over what level of local government should be engaged to progress on certain outcomes.

- Local elected officials.
- Local planners.
- Local government staff.
- Local government associations.

# Actions & Tactics

Continued engagement with GITs and workgroups.

Enhance understanding of the partnership among internal and external audiences.

Build out networks for each priority audience using the network-of-networks approach.

Ensure outreach materials are understandable and presented in ways that resonate with the priority audiences.

Ensure outreach and engagement needs, priorities and requests from GITs and workgroups are not duplicative.



# Continued engagement with GITs and workgroups

- Develop shared materials
  - Update outreach data
  - Refine priority audiences
  - Leverage the Strategic Engagement Team
  - Integrate outreach into Management Strategies
  - Update the Strategy
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# Enhance understanding of the partnership among internal and external audiences

- Identify knowledge gaps
  - Develop a CBP partnership toolkit
  - Support message development
  - Assess messaging adoption
  - Refine partnership branding
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# Build out networks for each priority audience using the network-of-networks approach

- Identify connectors
  - Map existing networks
  - Engage connectors directly
  - Assess information-sharing tools
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# **Ensure outreach materials are understandable and presented in ways that resonate with the priority audiences.**

- Translate GIT and workgroup priorities for priority audiences
  - Incorporate audience feedback
  - Brief leadership on engagement frameworks
  - Provide messaging guidance
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# **Ensure outreach and engagement needs, priorities and requests from GITs and workgroups are not duplicative.**

- Align priorities and audiences
  - Tailor engagement approaches
  - Coordinate leadership involvement
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**Thank you!**



**Questions?**