APPENDIX: BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE MEETINGS
To Support the <u>Chesapeake Bay Program Governance and Management Framework</u>

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 Planning and Logistics**
   1. **Agenda Development:** Chairs/Co-Chairs/Vice Chairs, Coordinators, Staffers, and members are involved in collaboratively setting agendas, ensuring agendas articulate clear meeting objectives.
      - **Utilize <u>CBP agenda template</u> 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.
      - Focus intent on decisions and actions that advance goal and outcome priorities, as well as those actions and priorities reflected in the management strategies or directed by the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) and Management Board (MB).
      - Meetings should generally be held when there are decisions to be made, tasks that requires a group effort, or need for disseminating information/tools. Pre-scheduled meetings may be canceled if it is determined that such conditions are not met.
      - When including call-in details, use one of the templates below:
        - Template for Microsoft Teams:
          <u>Join the meeting via Microsoft Teams.</u>
          Meeting ID: | Passcode:
          Call: +1 ###-###-#### | Phone Conference ID:
        - Template for Zoom:
          <u>Join the meeting via Zoom.</u>
          Meeting ID: | Passcode:
          Call: +1 ###-###-####

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

2. **Advance Distribution of Materials:** Circulate agendas and supporting final documents at least one to two weeks in advance through the <u>Chesapeake Bay Program Meetings Calendar</u> and members/interested parties email lists to allow thorough preparation, enabling efficient, focused discussions.
   - Decisional items should be announced with agendas to ensure appropriate parties are present at meetings. Documents supporting decisional items shall be circulated at least two weeks in advance of the meeting; otherwise, the decision(s) may be deferred until the next scheduled meeting.
     - 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. **Manage Meeting Load:** It is the duty of the Chair(s), in coordination with the associated membership, to determine the frequency of meetings. Partnership groups and meeting organizers will strive to prevent scheduling conflicts and help partners overcome participation obstacles by using the CBP Meetings Calendar webpage.
   - Consider quarterly meetings for decision-making and shorter bi-monthly meetings for information sharing and brainstorming.
   - Coordinate long-term meeting schedules to allow for flow of information and adequate preparation time and materials production between meetings (e.g., workgroups meet two weeks before GITs, GITs meet three weeks before Managment Board, etc.).

B. **Documentation and Communication Standards**
   1. **Meeting Documentation:**
      - **Utilize <u>CBP minutes template</u>** to document and distribute summary minutes with actions and decisions on Chesapeake Bay Program Meetings Calendar within one week after meeting or two weeks after multi-day meetings. Additional time may be necessary to produce more detailed minutes.
      - Ensure that all published meeting documentation is accessible to group members to support tracking deliverables.
      - Assign clear owners and due dates to tasks and action items.
      - Capture important tangential topics for follow-up in a "parking lot" to revisit at future meetings.
      - Send reminder emails and conduct periodic check-ins.
   2. **<u>Chesapeake Bay Program Meetings Calendar:</u>**
      The CBP's Meetings Calendar is the home for public meetings hosted by the PSC, MB, Advisory Committees, 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).

- **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. Explicitly highlight decisional agenda items.
    - 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]."
  - **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.

C. Time Management

1. Start and end meetings on time without delay to respect members' schedules and ensure maximum productivity.

2. Limit off-topic discussions and side conversations during the meeting to maintain meeting focus and achieve objectives efficiently.
3. Aim to keep meetings concise, and schedule appropriate breaks for meetings longer than two hours, with ten-to-fifteen-minute breaks recommended every two hours.

D. Meeting Conduct and Participation
1. **Preparation and Attendance:**
   - Members should come to the meeting having reviewed any relevant materials in advance and with necessary information at hand to make informed decisions and/or actively engage in the discussions.
2. **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 voting and non-voting members only, unless broader input is invited at the direction of the Chair(s). Time may be allotted for open feedback from non-members at the end of the meeting.
   - During virtual or hybrid meetings, use the 'Raise Hand' function to signal your intention to verbally 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 on immediate meeting topics, and/or document key decisions and actions that arise during the meeting.
3. **Post-Meeting Responsibilities:**
   - Clearly define tasks and responsibilities, ensuring everyone knows what is expected post-meeting.
   - Members are responsible for taking personal notes during meetings and should follow up with the Coordinator and/or Staffer for additional information not included in the posted actions and decisions, if needed.
   - If you commit to a task, ensure that it is completed.

E. Decision-Making Processes
1. Use consensus-based decision-making (with supermajority voting allowed for the Management Board, Principals' Staff Committee, and the Executive Council) following the governance protocols in the CBP Governance and Management Framework.
2. The Chair(s) should solicit a decision from each voting member either during the meeting or before in the event that the member cannot be in attendance during the decisional meeting.

F. 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. **Security:** All meeting attendees are responsible for ensuring the digital security of materials, meeting attendance, and follow-up messages. Familiarize yourself with the meeting platform's security features, particularly how to remove a participant, suspend participant activities, and enable a waiting room.
   - No AI note takers are permitted at CBP meetings.

   For more information, see the Guidance for Virtual Meeting Security appendix.

G. Training and Continuous Improvement
In the current partnership structure, 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 from partnership groups; gather feedback informally or through surveys on meeting practices and adjust standard practices 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.

H. Additional Considerations for Running Effective Meetings
1. 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.
2. Encourage a respectful meeting culture where varied viewpoints are welcomed, and members and other participants feel safe to contribute without fear of dismissal or reprisal.
3. Incorporate appropriate humor and trust-building activities to enhance team cohesion and meeting satisfaction.
4. Respect the privacy of the discussion, especially if sensitive topics are covered.
5. Members engage in active listening and avoid interrupting others.
6. Members bear individual responsibility for contributing actively to a constructive group process.
7. 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, encouraging various perspectives, and gathering feedback after meetings.

8. Keep discussion on topic, focused, and professional.
9. Refrain from discussion of ideas until all ideas are heard and clarifying questions answered.
10. Allow adequate time for discussion and consideration of different perspectives.

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. 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 <u>*Meeting Facilitation Support*</u> *page for additional reference materials.*