

Guidance for retiring, modifying, or creating new goal and outcome statements

When drafting goals and outcomes they should reflect intentions that support both the **need for program accountability** and **effective adaptive management** of program actions. While the program has an evident desire to have aspirational goal statements and outcome statements that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timed, there are three important considerations:

1. First, the state of the science provides inconsistent support for specific numeric targets for many of the outcomes. Evidence of thresholds in system condition or performance at specific levels of system components is frequently weak or non-existent and so there is a strong science-based rationale for avoidance of numeric targets that can suggest a definitive end point for management efforts. Instead, an approach of continual assessment of conditions can inform management decisions and provide more realistic expectations for stakeholders. This implies outcome statements that seek “continual improvement” in some ecosystem function.
2. Second, the two principal drivers of Chesapeake Bay system conditions, human use and climate, are constantly changing. As a result, management goals, outcomes, and strategies will need to evolve in response. In the face of this reality, and given the inherent uncertainty in the performance of most of our management efforts, targeting sustained improvement in critical conditions is a more attainable and realistic objective than arbitrary fixed targets. This approach has the benefit of making accountability for effectiveness and continuous improvement a constant program focus instead of a periodic concern.
3. Third, the undeniable links between monitoring, accountability, and adaptive management call for a commitment to a science-based process of designing a monitoring program. This goes beyond the commitment of dollars, and recognizes the significant potential benefits of such a program: the ability to “decide by doing” with an attendant increase in flexibility of solution application, assistance in drawing the line between study and action, more success stories and feedback about what works, and a reduction in risk of potential and necessary changes in course of action.

The recommendations are based on an objective of having goal statement that are aspirational in terms of system capacity for sustaining benefits, and **outcome statements that reflect desired changes in system condition**, where the system is understood to include both human and natural elements. This means outcomes generally are changes in the structure, quality, or performance of the system, or they are changes in the knowledge, skills, abilities, or motivation of the humans in the system.