

Key Findings and Preliminary Recommendations: Evaluation of the Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund's Small Watershed Grants Program

*Prepared for the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
by Blue Earth Consultants, a Division of ERG*



NFWF



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Evaluation and Portfolio
Overview

Changes to Grantee Capacity
Over Time

Partnership and Capacity
Building

NFWF's Role in
Strengthening Capacity

Preliminary Recommendations

EVALUATION AND PORTFOLIO OVERVIEW

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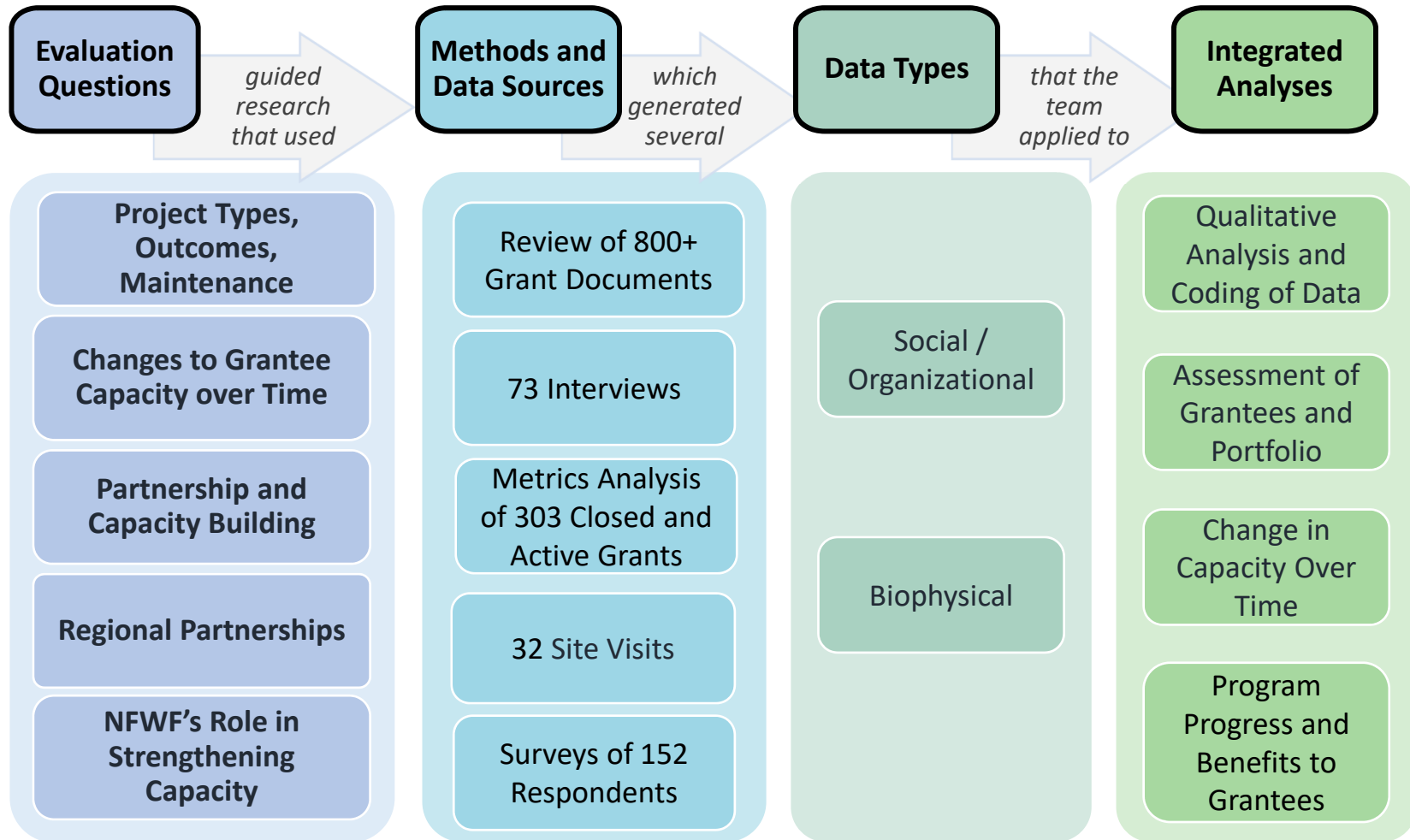
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Evaluation Objectives

- **Evaluate the changes** to SWG Program performance and grantee capacity changes in response to the 2007 evaluation recommendations
- **Develop recommendations** for opportunities to modify and strengthen the SWG Program
- **Investigate five overarching sets of evaluation questions:**
 1. What types of projects did grantees implement between 2005 and 2017?
 2. How has SWG grantee capacity changed over time?
 3. Have non-grantee partners benefited from collaborating with SWG Program grantees?
 4. To what extent are SWG Program investments contributing to the development of regional scale partnerships and projects?
 5. How have SWG Program investments increased grantees' technical capacity?

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Methodology

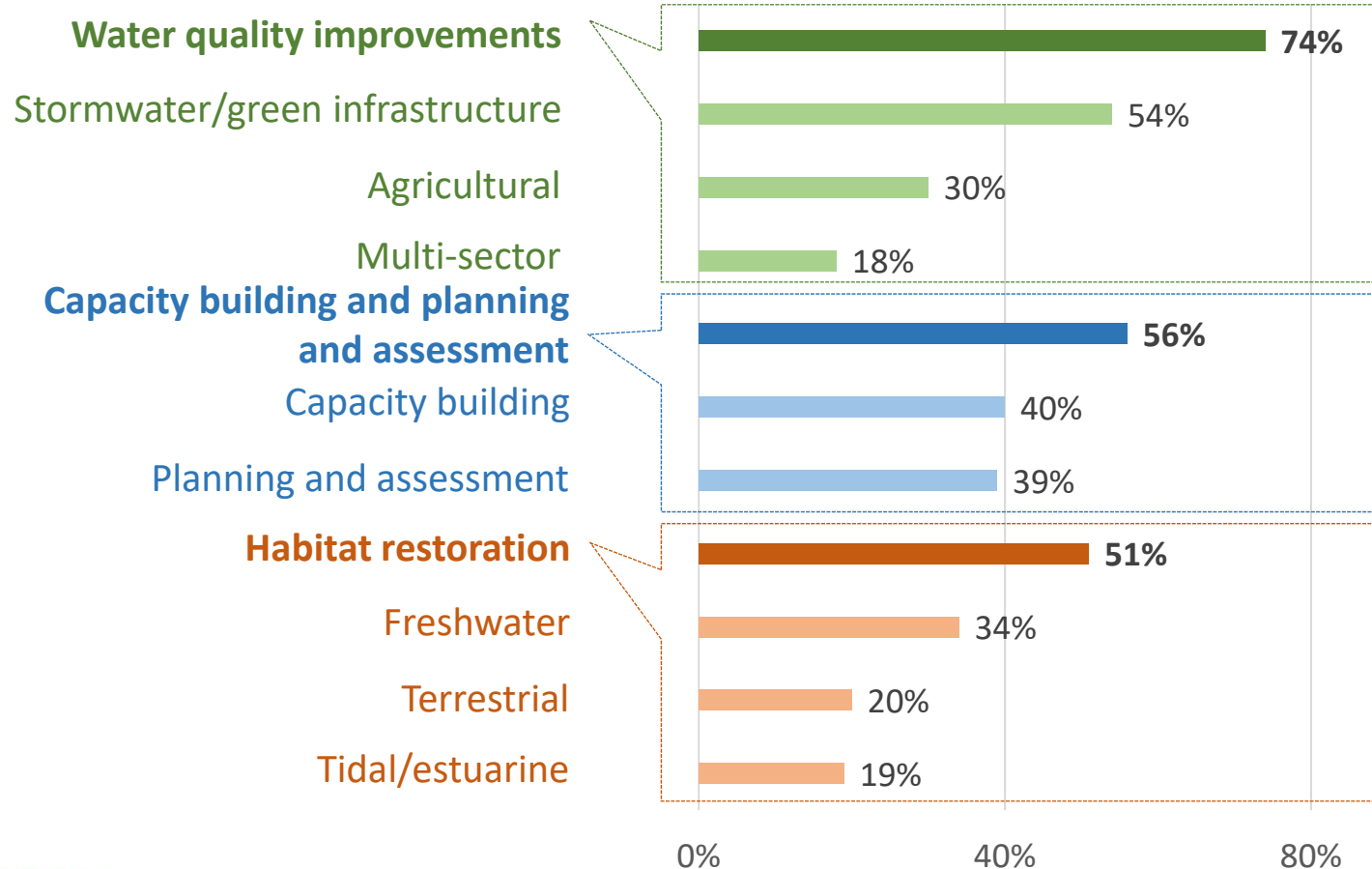


Disclaimer

Blue Earth led an independent evaluation, and NFWF provided guidance throughout the evaluation. Blue Earth's research is drawn from grant documents, interviews, metrics, site visits, and surveys. While we strive to present the most accurate information possible, we cannot always guarantee the accuracy of the information shared as perception by interview respondents or included in grant documents.

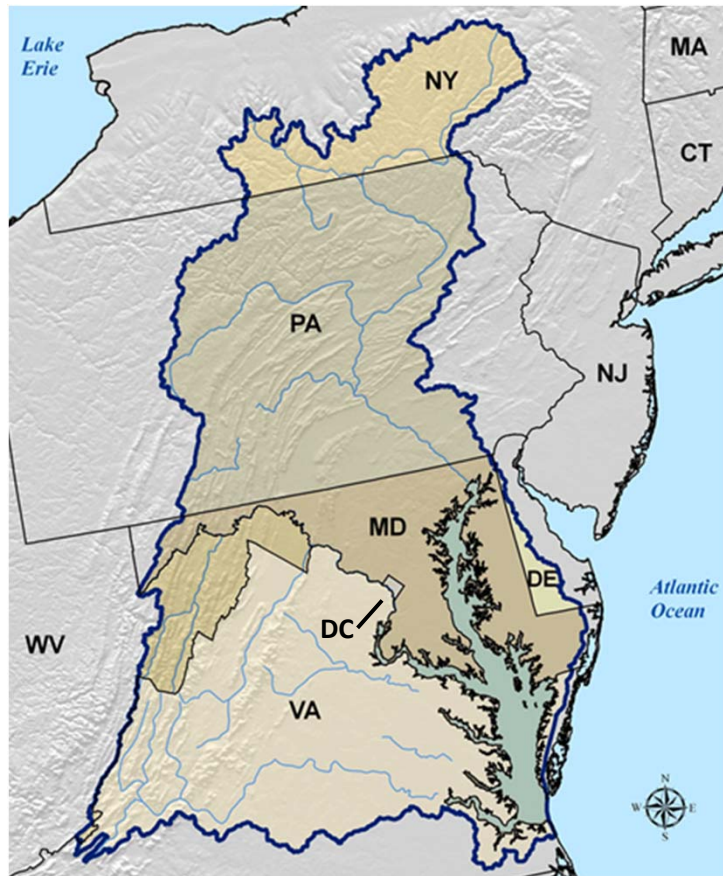
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A Majority of Grants Addressed Water Quality (2005 to 2017)

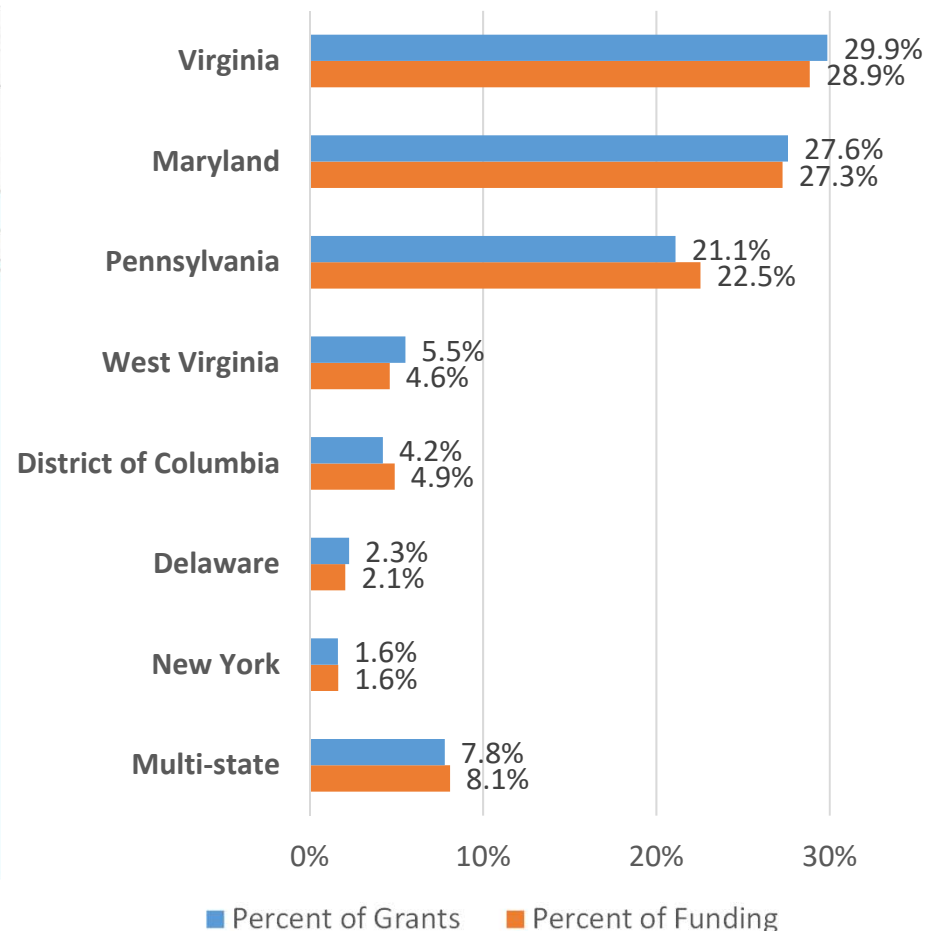


Source: Grantee and partner surveys (n=152)

A Majority of SWG Grants Were Located and Funded in Virginia and Maryland (2007 to 2017)



Source: Natural Resources Conservation Service



Source: Metrics (n=303)

Grants Reduced Sediment Load and Benefited Fish and Wildlife (2007 to 2017)

574,416 pounds of nitrogen reduced annually*

38,159 pounds of phosphorus reduced annually*

61,448,825 pounds of sediment reduced annually*

2,714 acres of wildlife habitat restored

524 stream and riparian miles of habitat restored

69 grantees reported specific wildlife species benefited from grant activities

* Estimated cumulative annual reductions of grants undertaken during 2007 to 2017

Source: Metrics (n=223)

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The SWG Program Supported Organizations Across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

Awarded
\$50.9 million to
532 restoration
grants, a majority
of which are still
maintained

Awarded nearly \$4.9
million to
90 technical assistance
grants across 81
watershed organizations

Leveraged
\$79.2 million in
local matching
funds

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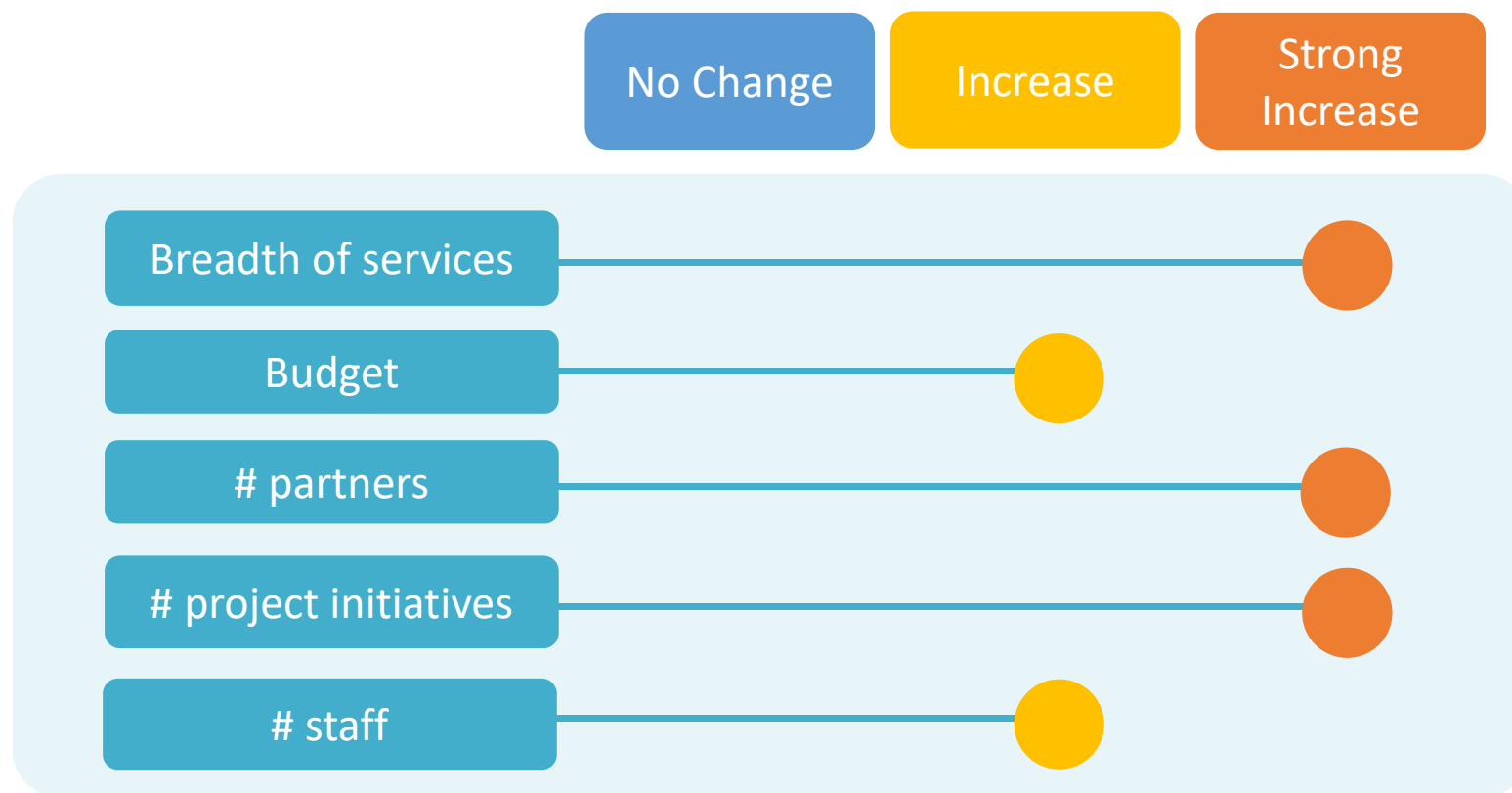
KEY FINDINGS

Changes to Grantee Capacity Over Time

Key Findings

- Grantees' **operational and technical capacity** increased across multiple dimensions.
- Changes in **project complexity** over time showed no clear trends.
- **Organizational factors** were critical to changes in capacity.

Grantee Organizational Capacity Increased Over Time



Sources: Document review (n=106); grantee and partner interviews (n=50); metrics (n=38); grantee and partner surveys (n=91)

Increases in Organizational Capacity – Respondent Testimony

"[Since] the first NFWF SWG funds...[we had a] a big jump [in project budget] from \$250,000, to one million." – Technical assistance grant beneficiary

"We used to have one grant and seven people. Now we have 15 to 20 grants and 25 people." – Grantee

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Changes in Project Complexity Showed No Clear Trends

No Clear
Trends

No Change

Increase

Strong
Increase

BMP difficulty

Impact

Scale

Size

Sources: Document review (n=106); grantee and partner interviews (n=50); metrics (n=38); grantee and partner surveys (n=91)

Grantees Perceived Organizational Factors as Critical to Capacity Change That Occurred

Financial Resources

- SWG Program grants helped grantees leverage additional funding to support future projects

Ability to Demonstrate Project Success

- Successes stemming from their SWG projects helped grantees scale future partnerships
- Project success also increased community support for and awareness of conservation and restoration activities

Project Management and Planning Expertise

- Aspects such as project planning and implementation helped grantees address projects at a larger scale
- Project partners also provided complementary capacity
- Grantees emphasized that increased “soft skills” in this area could be critical in the future

Sources: Grantee and partner interviews (n=38) and grantee surveys (n=92)

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Partnership and Capacity Building

Key Findings

- Non-grantee partners **increased capacity** through collaboration with grantees.
- Grantees used **diverse modes of knowledge transfer** to build non-grantee partners' capacity.
- Non-grantee partners experienced **operational growth** across multiple dimensions.
- NFWF funding helped grantees **develop partnerships** with others in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Non-Grantee Partners Experienced Capacity Increases

Most Popular
Response



Least Popular
Response

Provided increased operational capacity

Provided increased technical capacity for non-grantee partners

Helped non-grantee partners learn new skills and knowledge

Helped non-grantee partners build new relationships/partnerships

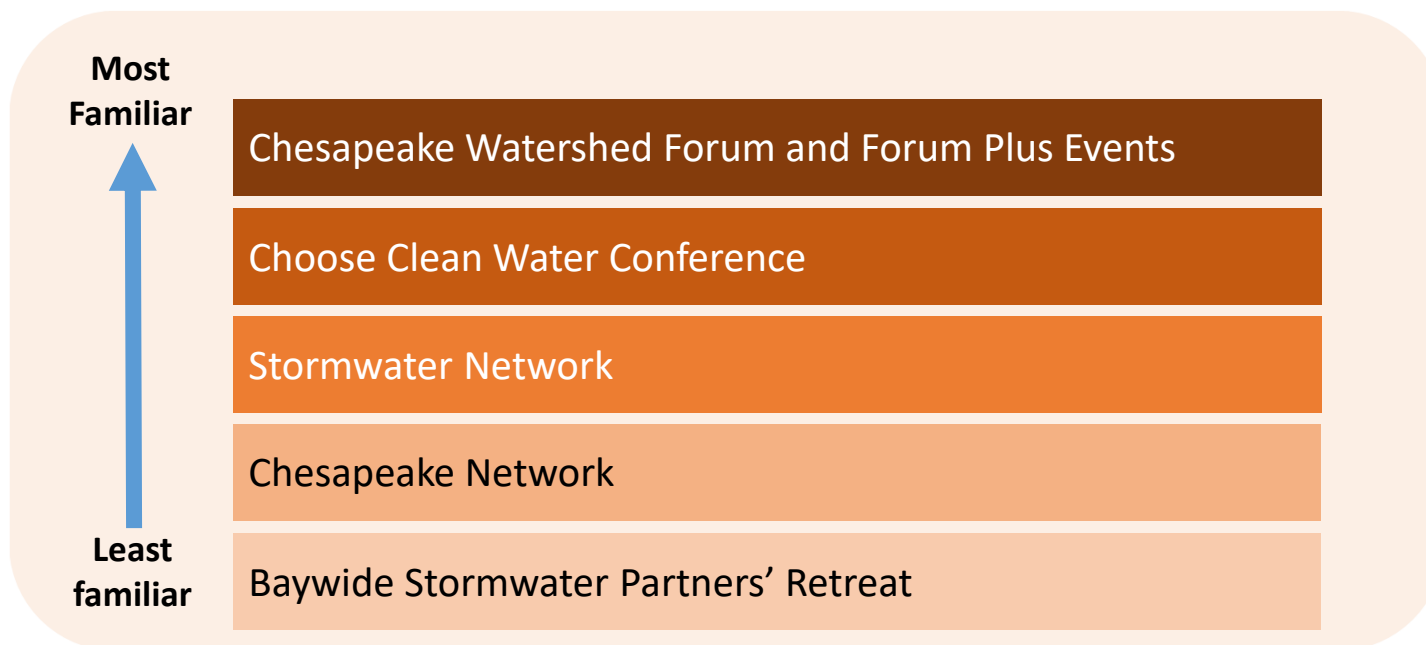
Helped non-grantee partners build credibility/leverage funds

Unsure

Did not increase capacity

Sources: Grantee, partner, and regional informant interviews

Grantees Could Have Greater Awareness of NFWF-Funded Events and Platforms



Sources: Grantee, partner, and regional expert interviews (n=64)



Grantees Suggested NFWF Fund Scalable Approaches

Future Role

- Fund holistic, scalable conservation approaches that take an ecosystem approach and address multiple, complementary goals
- Support expanding and broadening participation in existing forums

Sources: Grantee, partner, and regional expert interviews



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NFWF's Role in Strengthening Capacity

Key Findings

- NFWF's responses to the 2007 evaluation **benefited grantees and the watershed.**
- The SWG program was **critical for increasing the capacity** of organizations in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Alec Lambert/PG

NFWF's Actions Benefited Grantees and the Watershed

2007 Evaluation Recommendations	Benefits
1. Expand community conservation and approach to capacity building	Funded more grants with approaches that emphasized local efforts , supported 81 Technical Assistance grants, and encouraged grantees to use social marketing approaches.
2. Planning	Included project planning and design as eligible activities for funding, resulting in 43% of grantees reviewed indicating planning and assessment as one of their project goals.
3. Types of grants	Developed evaluation criteria that helped grantees consider project impact; supported cross-watershed learning that helped grantees form connections with their colleagues; and focused on coordination between SWG and Innovative Nutrient and Sediment Reduction program grants.
4. Continuation of improved grant making	Implemented EasyGrants and FieldDoc systems and contracted field liaisons , which grantees found useful in project development and implementation.

Case Study: The Road to Larger Grants

Best Practice

ShoreRivers and Oyster Recovery Partnership used NFWF SWG Program grants to:

- Scale their technical and operational capacity
- Prepare the organizations for future success and grant funding

Outcomes

The SWG Program grants allowed ShoreRivers and the Oyster Recovery Partnership to:

- Grow their internal operational and fundraising capacity
- Build larger, more sustainable programs
- Win higher-value grants, including Innovative Nutrient Sediment Reduction grants

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PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

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Continue to Build Grantees' Organizational Capacity

Key Findings

- Organizational capacity **enabled grantees to achieve** project outcomes, though respondents noted that it would be useful to support **strengthening grantees' "soft" skills** to enhance outcome achievement.

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Recommendation 1

- Leverage technical assistance funding and training to strengthen and maximize grantees' organizational capacity.

Strengthen Multi-City and County Partnerships

Key Findings

- Findings demonstrated a **lack of regional** (i.e., multi-city/county) partnerships.
- Respondents emphasized that it would be useful to **strengthen planning for and implementation and financing** of sustainable regional partnerships.

Strengthen Multi-City and County Partnerships

Key Findings

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Recommendation 2

- Invest in strengthening multi city/county partnerships and planning to enable improved regional outcomes.

Continue to Strengthen SWG Program Investments

Key Findings

- NFWF is making **good progress** toward the 2007 evaluation recommendations, though there is room to continue strengthening the SWG Program.

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Recommendation 3

- Continue and adaptatively manage NFWF-funded events, and determine strategies to increase their effectiveness and accessibility.

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Key Findings

- NFWF is making **good progress** toward the 2007 evaluation recommendations, though there is room to continue strengthening the SWG Program.

Recommendation 3

- Continue and adaptatively manage NFWF-funded events, and determine strategies to increase their effectiveness and accessibility.

Recommendation 4

- Increase visibility and strategic deployment of field liaisons to strengthen linking grantees to key partners and technical resources.

Continue to Strengthen Site Maintenance

Key Findings

- A **majority of SWG projects have some form of maintenance**, though respondents emphasized that it would be helpful for NFWF to **continue supporting and encouraging grantees to maintain sites**.

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Recommendation 5

- Continue support of grantee efforts toward long-term maintenance.



Thank you!

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