

Governance and Accountability Recommendations

prepared by the Governance and Accountability Team; September 22nd, 2025

In 2024, the Eastern Research Group, Inc. (ERG) for the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Beyond 2025 Steering Committee¹ performed a program evaluation looking at its organization structure, adaptive management framework, and its work with decision-makers and stakeholders. In performing this evaluation, ERG met with the signatory jurisdictions, advisory committee members, Goal Implementation Teams, Scientific, Technical Assessment & Reporting team, Strategic Engagement Team, the federal agencies, Beyond 2025 Steering Committee members, Federally recognized Tribes, and other stakeholders. ERG produced a concise report outlining challenges of the program and recommendations for addressing the challenges². These challenges were highlighted during the public feedback period for the Beyond 2025 report³, incorporated into the final Beyond 2025 Steering Committee report⁴, as well as included in feedback received during the Revised 2014 Bay Agreement public feedback period⁵. The following challenges and recommendations for consideration drafted by the ad hoc Governance and Accountability Team (GAT) are put forward to strengthen and streamline the partnership moving forward.

Though they are separated into challenges and recommendations, they are inherently reflected across roles, program structure, decision making authority, resource allocation, etc. The reader is encouraged to take in all of the challenges and recommendations as a body of work rather than separate points, despite some of the recommendations being discrete. We propose these recommendations assuming no change to the current Chesapeake Bay Program structure. We understand that the Management Board (MB) is working on changes to the vertical structure of the CBP. It is anticipated that these recommendations will be reflected in redlines to the Governance Document.

¹ The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee was formed to develop recommendations for next steps on “meeting the Goals and Outcomes of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement lead up to and beyond 2025” as well as “prepare recommendations that continue to address new advances in science and restoration, along with a focus on our partnership for going beyond 2025.” Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, [A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025](#) (Oct. 24, 2024), at 2.

² Eastern Research Group, Inc., [Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Evaluation](#) (June 18, 2024).

³ [Beyond 2025 Report Public Comments](#) (Aug. 2024) (“The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee recommends strengthening the Chesapeake Bay Program by identifying ways to simplify and streamline the partnership’s structure and process, including potential changes to the Governance and Management Framework for the Chesapeake Bay Program to ensure that partner commitments can be met.”).

⁴ Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, [A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025](#) (Oct. 24, 2024).

⁵ [Feedback on the Revised Chesapeake Bay Water Agreement \(7/01 – 8/20\)](#); [Feedback on the Revised Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement \(8/21 –9/01\)](#).

Considering the schedule for providing recommendations at the December 2025 EC Meeting, the GAT has prioritized developing recommendations for its top two identified challenges (“Priority Setting and Decision Making”, and “Roles and Responsibilities”). The team has also developed initial considerations for the remaining four challenges: “Complexity and Structure”, “Transparency”, “Accountability and Adaptive Management”, and “Communication and Coordination”, but are they are still in a deliberative stage and thus not presented in this document.

ACRONYMS:

ACs – Advisory Committees

CBWA – Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement

CBP – Chesapeake Bay Program

ERG – Eastern Research Group

GAT – Governance and Accountability Team

GIT – Goal Implementation Team

FOD – Federal Office Directors

FLC – Federal Leadership Committee

FLC-D – Federal Leadership Committee-Designees

MB – Management Board

PSC – Principals’ Staff Committee

EC – Chesapeake Executive Council

Challenge 1: Priority Setting and Decision Making

The Chesapeake Executive Council (EC) Charge in October 2022 directed the Principals' Staff Committee (PSC) to “assess the overall partnership to determine whether [it ... has] systems of evaluation and decision-making to enable meaningful action and allocation of partnership resources.”⁶ To date, this still needs to be addressed⁷.

Recommendations

- 1) **The PSC should provide strategic direction for the partnership by establishing and implementing a collaborative priority setting framework that incorporates:**
 - Respective priorities and projected financial resources from individual jurisdictional and federal agencies.
 - Descriptions of the availability and allocation of resources towards a specific priority (budget).
 - Goal Implementation Team (GIT) priorities with respect to existing implementation, gaps (staffing or technical needs) that will significantly impact Goal and Outcome attainment.
 - Robust engagement with the Advisory Committees (ACs) and key stakeholder communities.
- 2) **Improved decision-making authority and expertise are recommended to enhance operations between the PSC, MB, and GITs**, particularly when considering how best to streamline outcome implementation actions and delegate decision-making.
- 3) **Federal membership and coordination of business practices, operations, and logistics should be clearly defined at each level of the governing structure, inclusive of the Federal Office Directors (FOD), Federal Leadership Committee-Designees (FLC-D), and Federal Leadership Committee (FLC).**
 - The GAT is working on a recommendation to present to the FOD addressing these issues. The FOD shall present a document to the MB that clearly outlines the above within the next six months. The intent of this document is for it to be published on the CBP website after it is finalized.

⁶ Chesapeake Bay Program Partnership [Executive Council Charge to the Principals' Staff Committee: Charting a Course to 2025 and Beyond](#) (Oct. 11, 2022).

⁷ See, e.g., Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, [A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025](#) (Oct. 24, 2024), at 9, 10, 13.

- 4) **Consensus-based decision making should be re-evaluated** to determine whether alternative methods could be more effective at differing-levels of the partnership, acknowledging the necessary balance between efficiency and egalitarianism.

Continuing Considerations

- There is shared understanding that the decision-making authority should be clarified for jurisdictions and signatories who choose not to be involved in implementing a CBWA Outcome.

Challenge 2: Roles & Responsibilities

While the partnership is functional and collaborative, its work often happens in separate silos and does not have broad recognition of the interconnectedness of all Goals and Outcomes.⁸

Recommendations

- 1) **Minor updates to the roles and responsibilities of the EC are recommended to emphasize the EC's function** and delineate specific roles and responsibilities across the governing bodies of the CBP.
 - Functions emphasized would include pledging overarching commitment to achieve the CBWA, establishing and adhering to the Vision of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement (CBWA), and serving as the public face of the CBP.
 - Amendments to the roles and responsibilities that highlight “policy direction” and delegates the management of CBWA Outcomes to the PSC.
- 2) **Major updates to the roles, responsibilities, and operations of the PSC are recommended to strengthen its functions** as a body of politically appointed or organizational executives. This recommendation results in a major shift in the focus of the PSC function to include strategic direction and priority setting, while focusing less on approval of earlier MB decisions.
 - Strengthen functions related to strategic direction, priority setting and accountability, executive-level decision making, and resource mobilization (staff, funding).
 - Decisions made at successive levels of leadership would be reported to the PSC in an agreed to format (i.e. memo, consent agenda list).
 - The primary operational update would include an annual priority setting framework, which would consider communication expectations across the CBP governing structure and its technical expertise, advisory committees, and public interests.
 - A succession plan should be established to transition leadership positions on the PSC in order to maintain priority commitment and knowledge continuity.

⁸ Eastern Research Group, Inc., [Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Evaluation](#) (June 18, 2024), at ES-2 (“The Program operates in a set of silos and these silos decrease the ability of the Program to operate effectively as a partnership.” The recommendation was “plac[e] an emphasis on eliminating a siloed approach to Program design.”); Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, [A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025](#) (Oct. 24, 2024), at 13 (“The partnership should also seek to simplify its complexity [] and should consider cross-program coordination, cooperation and transparency to streamline logistics, increase knowledge sharing and eliminate silos.”).

- The PSC should understand and leverage each AC's membership and expertise by communicating the CBP priorities and allowing for AC alignment. ACs would reserve the right to propose support based upon volunteer member capacity.

3) Major updates related to the membership, roles, responsibilities, and operations, and strengthening workflow of the MB are recommended to emphasize the MB's function and delineate specific roles and responsibilities across the governing bodies of the CBP.

- Strengthen the workflow between the MB, GIT and workgroup Chairs, and/or Action Team leads to focus on implementing activities with clearly defined scopes of work, which directly contribute to Outcomes, avoids duplication, and enhances integration across the partnership.
- Functions emphasized would be related to oversight and execution of the PSC's priorities, operational and implementation-related decision making, and staff coordination. It is also suggested to rename the Management Board to be the "Implementation Board".
- Ensure the MB has appropriate representation from across the partnership, so it has the expertise and decision-making ability for the implementation and adaptive management of all Outcomes and associated Targets of the CBWA.
- Expand succession planning and consider a rotating cycle for chair and vice chair roles.

4) Minor updates to the roles and operations of the ACs are recommended to target their engagement across the CBP, while working collaboratively amongst the ACs.

Major updates to how the partnership relies upon the ACs.

- The AC leaderships are encouraged to delegate members to participate on GITs and workgroups where there is expertise, interests, priority alignment, and capacity. Liaisons to GITs and workgroups will regularly report to their AC membership.
- Provided funding availability, the ACs are encouraged to jointly convene at least every two years to hear and discuss CBP priorities set by the PSC and explore collaboration across ACs.
- When requests are made of ACs, the request should not only be within the scope of the AC's responsibilities, but also include level of effort, schedule (ad hoc or ongoing), and expertise needed.
- ACs should periodically review activity prioritization, volunteer member capacity, implications and alignment of program changes. Should the membership,

appointment protocol, or expertise needs deviate from the current bylaws, changes should be acted upon.

Continuing Considerations

- The GAT has focused on recommendations specific to the EC, PSC, and MB, but anticipates that important recommendations within this challenge are also required for GITs and workgroups.