



## LOCAL LEADERSHIP OUTCOME GIT 6 | LOCAL LEADERSHIP WORKGROUP

### 2014 WATERSHED AGREEMENT: GOAL & OUTCOME LANGUAGE

**LOCAL LEADERSHIP OUTCOME:** Continually increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials on issues related to water resources and in the implementation of economic and policy incentives that will support local conservation actions.

**STEWARDSHIP GOAL:** Increase the number and diversity of local stewards and local governments that actively support and carry out the conservation and restoration activities that achieve healthy local streams, rivers and a vibrant Chesapeake Bay.

### OUTCOME DISPOSITION ADVICE TO MANAGEMENT BOARD:

**UPDATE**

#### Recommendation

The Local Leadership Outcome should be **updated** to better support local governments in their critical role as implementers of projects and policies that support local needs and meet watershed goals. Updates to the language should focus the Partnership's work to empower local governments to take actions that benefit their environment and economy. Revisions should position the outcome in a way that it can support state partners and all GITs and Workgroups in effectively engaging with local officials. These efforts are continuous, so milestones could be used to create quantifiable targets.

#### Local Leaders Are Essential to Meeting Our Clean Water and Living Resource Goals

The Partnership identified a principle of the [2014 Agreement](#) to “*Acknowledge, support and embrace local governments and other local entities in watershed restoration and protection activities,*”<sup>1</sup> which underscores that achieving the ambitious goals of the Agreement requires the active participation and leadership of local entities. Local leaders are uniquely positioned to drive meaningful change within their communities and a [2017 Chesapeake Bay Program report](#) corroborated this, noting that “*increasing the ability of local leaders to take those actions is critical to achieving success in the Bay watershed restoration.*”<sup>2</sup> [ERG's report](#) specifically recommended that the program “*direct more resources to working with communities at the local and regional level,*”<sup>3</sup> recognizing how targeted support and resources can mitigate the constraints and capacity challenges that local governments face. The [Beyond 2025 Clean Water small group](#) also recommended expanding “*support for local government capacity*”<sup>4</sup> and connecting and empowering “*local governments and communities to address the pollution in their backyards, which will ultimately lead to improvements in the Chesapeake Bay.*”<sup>5</sup> This recommendation will ensure that efforts are both sustainable and impactful. Overall, translating complex science and initiatives into information that local governments can understand and act upon will be essential to meeting the goals and outcomes of the updated Agreement.

#### Engaging Local Officials Through Trusted Networks Has Proven to Be Successful

Working through local government networks, the outcome has provided a platform for collaboration and knowledge-sharing enabling local leaders to learn from successful initiatives in other communities increasing the likelihood of success for local projects. In partnership with those networks, engagements have provided resources and expertise that empower local leaders to make decisions, implement policies, and take on projects that create local improvements and have watershed impacts. The importance of convening a network of networks as a space for resource and best practices sharing was identified as a key strategy moving beyond 2025. The [Beyond 2025 Steering Committee](#) noted the value

of enhancing “*capacity building and administrative/technical assistance through local networks.*”<sup>6</sup> As the Partnership works towards elevating conservation as a key pillar of the program, it is critical that collaboration with local leaders is done to factor in local land use and development pressures. The outcome’s coordination with local government networks will help achieve that and meet the recommendation of “*enhancing the local benefits of Chesapeake restoration and conservation by improving alignment of regional, state and local, plans and priorities.*”<sup>7</sup>

## Key Accomplishments

Since 2019, the Local Leadership Outcome has led to direct engagement with over 2,800 local officials through training and education opportunities, peer-to-peer learning exchange tours, conference panels, and roundtable discussions. Through newsletters, magazine articles, and blogs and work with local government associations, the workgroup has indirectly engaged over 20,000 further demonstrating the broad reach of the outcome. To continue expanding engagement, the Protect Local Waterways website was launched in 2023 to serve as a guide for local officials around watershed key issues. Over 4,100 unique visitors have engaged with the site since its launch and over 600 resources and fact sheets have been downloaded, amplifying the demand for knowledge and capacity building resources for local officials.

## What Have We Learned

Several key challenges have been identified in our ability to increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials on issues related to water resources. First, local officials are often forced to navigate a wide array of competing interests that demand their attention and strain local government resources. Many officials also grapple with limited scientific and technical capacity, as they often lack the necessary training or access to knowledgeable personnel with technical expertise. To address this, the outcome is inventorying existing technical assistance providers to provide recommendations to fill gaps for the local governments that need it most. Varying regional needs arising from the complexity of watersheds and overlapping jurisdictions require tailored approaches and solutions to address distinct challenges effectively. Geographically strategic roundtable discussions and workshops are hosted to provide community specific information and resources. All of these issues are exacerbated by routine turnover among elected and appointed officials, creating a continuous need for orientation and capacity building. Ongoing emphasis to understand regional needs would allow the group to reach the Beyond 2025 Science small group recommendation to “*ensure resources are targeted in areas to accelerate progress...prioritizing areas where knowledge gaps exist.*”<sup>8</sup> These key challenges all highlight the importance of these efforts being continuous.

## Summary

Local officials are integrally linked to the success of the next Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement. Building their knowledge and capacity on water resources helps them overcome challenges and make decisions that support their local environment, economy, and environment while creating those same benefits outside jurisdictional boundaries. Coordination with local officials through established networks has and will continue to help connect the nearly 1,900 local governments of the watershed to create a holistic approach to protecting the Chesapeake Bay watershed through local actions.

1 [2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement](#)

2 [2017 EcoLogix Group Report](#)

3 [ERG Report Chesapeake Bay Program Evaluation](#)

4,5,8 [Beyond 2025 Small Group Findings and Considerations](#)

6, 7 [A Critical Path Forward for the Chesapeake Bay Program Beyond 2025](#)