Goal Implementation Team (GIT) Funding Proposal

Title: Beyond Bean Counting: Assessment of BMP Tracking and Accounting Procedures for More Wholistic Restoration Goals

Brief description of project, including key tasks:

Coming out of the Beyond 2025 efforts, the Clean Water Subgroup will be advancing several recommendations focused on the Accountability Framework. The overall aims are to allow partners the flexibility to innovate, while addressing key information/knowledge gaps and re-structuring how state and local water quality efforts can be better integrated with objectives around living resources, human well-being, and climate resilience. This project would support a detailed, third-party evaluation of BMP tracking and reporting under the Chesapeake Bay TMDL framework. The evaluation would identify opportunities to reduce process inefficiencies, strive to better integrate multiple outcomes into progress assessments, and seek ways to improve engagement with external partners and stakeholders to ensure the Bay Program is working with the best available information. The project would be limited in scope to the stormwater sector, but could serve as a pilot that would be replicable in other sectors.

The project would involve the following tasks:

- CBP Stakeholder Interviews – At a minimum, this task would involve a series of interview with each jurisdiction, the Chesapeake Bay Program CAST team, EPA, MS4 program staff (Phase 1 & Phase 2), large scale implementation funders (NFWF, CBT), and community-based organizations/NGO implementers.
- Review of existing QAPPs for BMP reporting and verification
- Review of existing tracking and reporting tools outside of the WQGIT (e.g. Healthy Watersheds Assessment 2.0, Habitat Tracker, etc.)
- Evaluation of a subset of asset management systems and internal data management processes
- Identification of barriers to more wholistic progress accounting – available datasets, capacity for outreach to planners/implementation partners, etc.
- Presentation to the USWG and WQGIT and Healthy Watersheds GIT and/or Habitat GIT on interview and evaluation findings
- Development of final report and recommendations

Targeted audience / user base

The most direct audience would be jurisdictional partners involved in the collection of BMP implementation data, implementation partners responsible for collecting and reporting implementation data, and CBP staff responsible for the assessment of progress toward TMDL outcomes. However, this assessment could ultimately benefit a wide range of other partners if the findings result in an accountability framework that allows for better accounting of non-nutrient and sediment outcomes.

GIT priorities that will be addressed through project funding and implementation

One of the core functions of the WQGIT is to promote consistent, uniform, and transparent processes to model, track, report, and verify water quality restoration efforts.

The following Factors and Actions were identified in the WQGIT's 2023-24 Logic and Action Plan that would be addressed through this project:

- Reduce burdens to implementing, tracking, reporting, and verifying practices; collective conversations to enhance cost-effectiveness and reduce administrative hurdles
- After the BMPVAHAT's efforts, it may be necessary for the partnership to seek an independent 3rd party assessment of the verification framework's strengths and weaknesses
- Increase and encourage implementation by aligning benefits for multiple outcomes beyond water quality: characterization of benefits beyond water quality improvements associated with existing BMPs to expand funding opportunities and increase implementation

The following actions are identified in the Healthy Watersheds Logic and Action plan that would be addressed through this efforts:

- Continue to work with the Chesapeake Bay Program and partners to quantify and incorporate conservation practices into the Chesapeake watershed modeling efforts and to explore how land use protections might be used to quantify future pollutant load reduction incentives for land conservation
- Cross-management strategy coordination, alignment for multiple benefits, analysis and data products at a Watershed-wide scale, and access to/connection to federal agencies

The following actions are identified in the Climate Resilience Logic and Action plan that would be addressed through this efforts:

- Support efforts in identifying strategies to track progress in enhancing resiliency of the Bay and aquatic ecosystems from climate change impacts and support discussions on setting goals for Chesapeake Bay beyond 2025.

Identification of (any) cross-GIT application(s)

The direct outcomes of the project would benefit the WQGIT by providing the ability to better account for aligning the benefits of multiple outcomes, allowing for cross-GIT collaboration with the Habitat and Healthy Watersheds GITs. STAR and the Climate Resilience Workgroups would also be potential beneficiaries.

Intended results

The ultimate goal for this work would be to help provide a bridge to a better framework for more wholistic accounting of the benefits of different resource allocation strategies and management actions, including links to living resource, climate resilience, and human-focused outcomes. Simultaneously, the project could help to provide more confidence in water quality monitoring and modeling outcomes and provide ideas for enhancing the cost-effectiveness and reducing administrative hurdles associated with BMP data tracking and reporting.

Projected budget

$75,000 - $100,000

What other funding sources have been pursued for the project

Funding has not been pursued from other sources. However, USWG considered the topic for a STAC Workshop before determining a third-party evaluation would be more beneficial.