

STAC Response

**Management Board Response to the Science and Technical Advisory Committee Recommendations**

Dr. Larry Sanford  
645 Contees Wharf Road  
Edgewater, MD 21037

Dear Chair Sanford:

On behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Program's Executive Council and as Chair of the Management Board, I want to thank you and the Science and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) for your recommendations (dated September 23, 2023) to the Executive Council at its October 19, 2023, annual meeting. These recommendations reflect the critical role of STAC in supporting the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) partnership and advancing its goals and outcomes toward greater Chesapeake Bay watershed restoration. We very much appreciate the opportunity to respond to these recommendations and look forward to continuing the conversation with STAC and the CBP partnership on their implementation.

The Management Board would like to thank STAC for all their hard work, especially the publication, *"Achieving Water Quality Goals in the Chesapeake Bay: A Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response"* (CESR). We appreciate the time and dedication to complete this report and look forward to our continued work with STAC on the issues facing us. This informative report will help guide needed conversations for how the Partnership moves toward and beyond 2025.

This year STAC has made three recommendations to the CBP partnership. Each of these is important and we are happy to have STAC's continued engagement as the partnership moves forward. We believe that there are opportunities for STAC to be an active participant in the recommendations that were made.

Please find as follows, the Management Board's responses to each of STAC's recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** Consult with a wide array of stakeholders to refine program goals, objectives, and implementation strategies; to identify tractable, equitable solutions; and to build willingness to support the Bay Program's initiatives. Exploring the potential to increase the impacts of water quality and restoration investments on living resources will likely result in refocusing attention on the parts of the watershed and estuary that matter most to people as well, including the rivers, streams, and associated wetlands of the watershed and the shallow nearshore waters and shores of the estuary. 2025 represents a key opportunity to engage stakeholders and to reconsider the meaning of restoration beyond achieving Total Daily Maximum Load (TMDL) targets.

**Response:** We have some opportunities in motion already and look forward to exploring others: The Management Board, through the formation and charge to the Beyond 2025 Steering Committee, is actively working to fulfill the 2022 Executive Council charge to develop a post 2025 partnership plan. We invite STAC to be a resource to this work. The Beyond 2025 Steering Committee is conducting small group discussions on thematic topics and will invite STAC members to provide insight during these and other discussions, as those groups form recommendations for our collective future activities.

**Recommendation 2:** Continue development of incentive programs that focus on achievement of pollutant reduction outcomes rather than on best management practice (BMP) implementation.

Improving effectiveness will require innovation in policy as well as pollution control. These innovations can be developed and tested with minimal disruption to the larger program through local sandboxing, which allows targeted experimentation before any major programmatic changes. More effective and systematic approaches to addressing nutrient mass imbalance issues also offer opportunities for substantial, sustained reductions in nonpoint source nutrient loads.

**Response:** We appreciate the recommendation and look forward to working through options across the partnership. We would appreciate STAC's assistance with helping us define measurable outcomes that are not nutrient/dissolved oxygen focused, to include a meaningful way to measure success. We appreciate the concept of sandboxing and look forward to working with STAC to help identify possible options where this concept can be employed. Following up with sandboxing opportunities is also a priority for the Local Government Advisory Committee.

**Recommendation 3:** Recognize that effective adaptive decision-making embraces opportunities to revisit and refine program goals, objectives, and implementation strategies, in addition to improving practice implementation. Restoring the Bay is primarily a problem of decision-making in the face of multiple objectives, uncertainties, and limited resources, requiring accelerated innovation and an approach of learning while doing. Robust methods exist for optimizing decisions based on available information while using appropriate logic frameworks.

**Response:** STAC was instrumental in setting up our current Strategy Review System (SRS) process and we look forward to your assistance in future evaluation and adaptation of that process, as part of the Beyond 2025 efforts. We invite and encourage STAC to bring forward more information to the partnership regarding decision science and how we may be able to employ that.

Thank you again for your commitment to both the partnership and restoring the Chesapeake Bay and its local waterways. The Management Board looks forward to working with you and STAC on implementing these recommendations.