



Agriculture Workgroup

Scoping Document – Exploring AgWG Roles in Technical Assistance & Implementation

Background Context: On August 7th, 2018 the Chesapeake Bay Program's (CBP) Chesapeake Executive Council called for the CBP's Principals' Staff Committee to engage in five specific commitments to further efforts to maintain and increase technical assistance (TA) and conservation practice implementation. This scoping document is a list of possible roles and actions that the AgWG is considering in supporting those commitments. With the new 2018 Farm Bill and the final state Watershed Implementation Plans (WIPs) the AgWG will further refine this list of ideas into specific actions necessary to address challenges to TA. The AgWG will share these actions with the Water Quality Goal Implementation Team in early 2020.

CONSISTENCY in TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

KEY: Dependable Baseline Funding & Flexible Funding Dispersal

Common Themes in AgWG feedback:

- Efficient and effective use of state-directed block grants indicated in 2018 Farm Bill
- Seek common ground among CBP partners at all levels based on 2014 Watershed Agreement Goals & Outcomes
- Cross-train all TA providers in technical and program/financial areas to a minimum standard, ensuring consistent messaging across all providers
 - Do trainings on TA and financial assistance programming already exist?
 - If so, who is the audience, and can the audience be expanded?

Next Steps: AgWG develop synthesis/aggregation of common TA needs across watershed in fall of 2019, based on TA gaps and needs identified in the final Phase III Watershed Implementation Plans.

Proposal: Each jurisdiction provide brief fact sheet based on common template (1-2 page) outlining TA gaps in Phase III WIPs for November 21, 2019 AgWG meeting.

Follow-up: Synthesize/aggregate responses. Facilitate discussion within the AgWG on how partnership can assist the states in addressing these gaps. Timeline: Early 2020.

ENHANCING NETWORK of TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

KEY: Private Sector Engagement

Common Themes in AgWG feedback:

- Certification authority for private providers
 - Conservation plans
 - Implementation of plans
 - Verification of plans and practices
 - QA for private providers- Who would be responsible?
- Quality Assurance:
 - Private providers- who is responsible?
 - NRCS- can current process be streamlined?
 - Approve QA process for non-USDA funded practices
- USDA-NRCS Regional Conservation Partnership Program
 - Strategic approach to obtaining funding
- Increase *farmer* collaboration with soil and water conservation districts (SWCD), Technical Service Providers (TSP) and other consultants, such as certified crop advisors (CCAs), USDA-NRCS, Land Grant University Extension Programs, and non-governmental organizations.
 - Improve education and outreach
- Increase collaboration *among* soil and water conservation districts (SWCD), Technical Service Providers (TSP) and other consultants, such as certified crop advisors (CCAs), USDA-NRCS, Land Grant University Extension Programs, and non-governmental organizations.
 - Improve education and outreach
- More focused training for NGOs with specialized staff, civil and engineering firms, SWCDs
 - Conservation planning
 - Ag conservation practices (Structural and non-structural)
 - Engineering practices and principles
- USDA-NRCS TSP
 - Identify TSP categories that can address gaps (TSP program overview)
 - Work with private providers to increase TSPs in specific priority categories
 - Regular trainings within Chesapeake Bay Watershed
 - Improve accessibility (e.g. AgLearn security barriers)

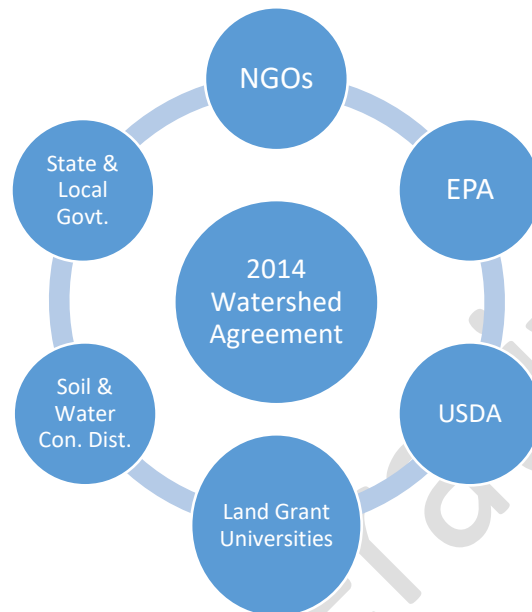
Next Steps: Continue conversation about training technicians in the field to seek solutions fit for jurisdictional needs within the CBP AgWG

Proposal: AgWG inventory of existing training opportunities. Timeline: 2019-Early 2020.

Follow-up: Facilitate discussion within the AgWG on how partnership can assist the states in addressing these gaps in early 2020.

BUILDING CAPACITY THROUGH PARTNERSHIP

KEY: Collaboration



- Seek common ground in partner priorities based on 2014 Watershed Agreement Goals & Outcomes
- NRCS partnerships
 - RCPP
 - New opportunities?
- Increase state-level funding to support partnership initiatives
 - State legislative action

Next Steps: Increase collaboration between AgWG, NFWF, and other partner organizations providing TA and FA throughout the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

Follow-up: AgWG leadership and coordinator will strive to invite more partner organizations to the discussion table to better foster collaboration. Timeline: on-going.

CONSERVATION PROGRAM ENHANCEMENT & EXPANSION

KEY: Flexibility

- Communication within the AgWG:
 - Lessons from the field: Chesapeake Bay Watershed jurisdictions incentivizing implementation?
 - What works?
 - What doesn't?
- Efficient and EFFECTIVE use of funding:
 - Focus on practices to maximum nutrient and sediment reductions (i.e. focus on priority practices determined in state Phase III WIPs.
 - Practices with economic benefit to farmers
 - Can funding be streamlined to accelerate implementation?
 - WIP III Connection: Target funding → priority practices → priority areas (geographic/sector?)
- Flexibility: Request commitment from USDA to be responsive to state requests for flexibility.
 - CRP/CREP buffer programs
 - Upcoming comment period for CREP rules

Next Steps: Continue conversation and communication in the AgWG related to federal and state strategies for providing assistance.

Proposal: AgWG sponsored workshop/discussion: Opportunities & approaches for fed/state/private funding. Timeline: 2020; Coordinator/staffer reach out to stakeholders and report back on successes and failure in conservation implementation. Timeline: on-going.

Follow-up: Recruit volunteers from AgWG for adhoc group to steer development of workshop focused on opportunities & approaches for fed/state/private funding in 2020; Initiate a regular "Lessons from the Field" component to AgWG meetings to encourage improved information sharing across the watershed.

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

KEY: Workforce Incentives & Training

- State initiatives to broaden the reach of training opportunities.
 - What is available?
 - Tuition assistance/forgiveness programs for conservation professionals
- Can the job market absorb newly trained conservation professionals (i.e. the need exists, but does the money?)
- Land Grant Universities and two-year colleges
 - Two-years certification programs in conservation planning/policy

Next Steps: Continue conversation and invite states to talk to the AgWG about what they are currently initiating to provide technical training for the growing job market.

Proposal: Invite a series of presenters from educational institutions across the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to speak about current programing and future possibilities. Timeline: Early 2020.

Follow-up: AgWG inventory of existing programing options and compare with identified TA gaps.

CONCURRENT TO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CHALLENGES

Tracking, Reporting, & Verification

- Provide flexibility in documentation required for reporting of BMP implementation
 - Beyond Resource Improvement (RI) BMPs?
- Resource Balance
 - Does improved tracking and verification = better allocation of limited funds?
 - Does improved tracking and verification significantly tie-up funds for implementation?
 - Can tracking, verification, and implementation be streamlined within TA framework?
- Potential for federal-state partnerships to streamline reporting of best management practices (BMPs) and remove under- and over-reporting concerns.

Next Steps: Request state input on impacts of tracking, reporting & verification on technical assistance capacity.

- Follow-up: Re-visit RI BMPs at future AgWG meeting; Invite representatives from relevant state agencies and SWCDs to discuss streamlining TA with tracking, reporting, & verification. Timeline: Late 2019-Eary 2020