



# Chesapeake Decisions User Research Report

May 13, 2016

# About

This User Research Report is delivered by the SRA UX Strategy team at the conclusion of the Research phase for the **Chesapeake Decisions** project, in partnership with the Environmental Protection Agency, Chesapeake Bay Program, and the ChesapeakeStat Team.

The intent of this project was to define the need for a decision-making tool, with the goal of improving decision-making and supporting progress toward the Program's goals and outcomes.

This report summarizes the methodologies, findings, and recommendations of the UX Research phase of Chesapeake Decisions.

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## **Attachments:**

- Appendix C: Final Analysis, Focus Groups**
- Appendix D: Final Analysis, Phone Interviews**
- Appendix E: Final Analysis, Personality Pairs**
- Appendix F: Artifacts by Group**

# Executive Summary

## Background

The Chesapeake Bay Program<sup>1</sup>, is a partnership working toward a common goal of restoration and protection of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The work of the Program is broken into ten goal areas and 31 outcomes, and their teams work toward achieving these goals and outcomes using a science-based decision-making model known as Adaptive Management.

Adaptive Management is based on a cycle<sup>2</sup> of goal setting and assessing progress, which allows groups to adjust their approach at regular intervals based on findings, projections, and risk factors.

### Business Need

Chesapeake Decisions was conceptualized as a tool to support decision-making in the context of Adaptive Management. The direction and concept we recommend will be further defined in the next phase, Conceptual

Design, based on the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

### Research Goals of the Project

- How can we help the Program and the teams within work toward their goals and outcomes, anticipating and pro-actively approaching their decisions?
- How can we help Leadership to identify issues and track the work being done across the Program, allowing them to better understand and support their needs?
- How can we facilitate connections between groups, to improve their awareness when making decisions?
- How can we help groups document their decisions and reasoning? How might that process improve their decision-making?

## Findings

### Internal Communication & Awareness

- Leadership and Program members voiced a need for increased awareness on both of their parts of real-time issues, and members expressed that they have no system to document and address challenges affecting their outcomes.
- The Program's structure does not allow for effective communication across groups. Members feel opportunities to align their work for mutual benefit go unused.
- The qualitative aspects of decisions are not addressed sufficiently.

### Adaptive Management

- Members see benefits of the model, but the real-world implications and workflow required to use it successfully are not yet concrete to most.
- Some groups have set goals that undermine the principles of Adaptive Management, due to an absence of a baseline or data.

## Findings (continued)

### Internal Processes

- Members will not be able to make decisions using an objective system unless addressed with tangible requirements from leadership.
- A focus on polishing deliverables and an absence of purely internal tools stifles progress toward the outcomes.
- Groups have not yet determined how or when they will evaluate their progress.

### External Dependencies

- Members feel pressure to meet a quantitative indicator of success on tight timelines. They stress that a qualitative approach is critical for long-term success, but don't have a system for accounting for qualitative reasoning.
- Securing external buy-in is a necessary aspect of their work, but is a challenge. There is a defensive mentality around meeting external expectations and juggling priorities. The outputs to these groups have too much influence over the workflow currently.

## Recommendations

### **Implement** processes that guide the workflow.

Groups need a tangible roadmap for Adaptive Management that is focused on their internal working needs, not on external deliverables.

### **Improve** awareness and support from Leadership.

Leadership needs to establish more concrete expectations around decision-making processes to improve adoption of Adaptive Management with increased oversight and assistance in removing roadblocks.

### **Deliver** compounded rewards.

Allow groups across the Program to connect through their mutual use of a system, improving decision-making through awareness, communication, and alignment.

### **Focus** on tools that evolve with the Program, and help it to evolve.

Solutions for a problem as complex as decision-making need to be flexible and adapt to changing needs. Explore tools that can help usher in these inevitable changes.

## Conclusion

The Chesapeake Bay Program needs to establish and consistently use a workflow-centric decision-making process, one that is more detailed than what is outlined in public-facing documents like the Watershed Agreement, and one that is more concrete than the existing Adaptive Management Framework.

**Therefore, our solution will focus on establishing an environment to create these consistent processes and observe decision-making across the Program, with an emphasis on improved awareness, strategic planning, alignment, and communication.**

### Next Steps

As we begin the Conceptual Design Phase, we will work with program stakeholders to address requirements and policy questions that affect the concept for Chesapeake Decisions.