

**DRAFT**  
**BACKGROUNDER**  
**NFWF/LGAC Local Government Forum**  
**Developing Collaborative Watershed Partnerships**  
**June 3, 2021**

*This document is intended to provide participants in the Local Government Forum with foundational information and an understanding of the preliminary recommendations for addressing the problem identified below. We ask that all participants review this information in advance and that you come to the meeting prepared to contribute to the development of specific actionable recommendations.*

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### **Meeting Goal**

By the end of the day, we expect to have specific recommendations to provide to the Chesapeake Bay Program leadership (Chesapeake Executive Council, Principals' Staff Committee and Management Board) for their consideration and action. These recommendations will identify innovative, varying, and unique community partnership opportunities and address barriers to local government-led or facilitated collaboratives that enhance and accelerate watershed restoration efforts.

### **Introduction and Problem Statement**

Local elected officials serve the public good and represent the interests of all citizens in their community. They are tasked with identifying community needs and determining priorities. To support these tasks, information is gathered from interacting with citizens through committees, commissions, and boards as well as community and council meetings. These conversations offer an opportunity for partnerships and collaborations.

#### ***Problem Statement:***

***As communities face increasing challenges that exacerbate competing priorities, issues related to watershed health (habitat, storm-, waste-, and drinking water) heighten the need for local decision-makers to enhance capacity and coordination with regional and local partners to enable collaborative approaches that foster support and action.***

### **Background**

The Chesapeake Bay Program's Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC)'s mission is to share the views and insights of local elected officials with state and federal decision-makers and to enhance the flow of information among local governments about the health and restoration of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. The overarching goal is to engage, empower and facilitate local government participation in the design, development and implementation of programs that protect and restore the watershed. This is achieved in many ways including designing strategies for the following:

- Recognize the unique characteristics of local governments including authority, size, scope of responsibility etc. and there is no one perfect strategy for all local governments,
- Encourage engagement and supportive actions by local governments to watershed restoration efforts,
- Encourage constructive cross-jurisdiction and regional efforts, as appropriate,
- Facilitate dissemination of information about effective process and program models.

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Social science frameworks, including ones that enhance collaboration, inform efforts towards successful implementation that reduces pollution and restores the Chesapeake Bay. The importance of humans and behavioral change is essential to the Bay's restoration and protection effort. Investments in social capital build the support and capacity necessary to increase our effectiveness, to learn and adapt as things change, and to build community resilience as future threats emerge.

The 2014 Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement articulated specific social science related commitments in the vision, principles, goals and outcomes. Specifically, in the Agreement Principles, it states "we commit to exploring using social science to better understand and measure how human behavior can drive natural resource use, management and decision-making." This language has inspired and stimulated significant interest within CBP goal teams, workgroups, and advisory committees to apply social science frameworks to our work.

The significance of increasing local governments' utilization of social science frameworks and tools that enhance collaboration, as explored through this Forum, are directly tied to the Bay Agreement strategy that aims to build social science capacity within the partnership and around the watershed. By addressing the complexities of influencing human behavior, our solutions will be more successful, effective and long lasting. Funding organizations, like the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, have already incorporated funding strategies that advance collaborative work through its grant awards.

### **Assumptions**

The Forum Planning Team helped LGAC identify the key barriers to building local restoration-minded partnerships. We developed a set of assumptions to guide and focus the day, since this is a broad topic that involves many partners and varying local demand and supply.

The following are the guiding set of assumptions:

- Regional partnerships and collaborations do occur and are effective.
- Creating a collaborative as part of the planning process may save time and funds and may help to reduce potential conflicts.
- Collaborative local government planning will result in a more efficient, actionable, robust and comprehensive effort.
- Promoting effective communication, collaboration and cooperation for environmental planning and financing across the watershed will aid in these efforts.
- Local economies and budgets continue to be challenged now and in the foreseeable future.
- There is a tendency to focus on immediate mitigation needs, but longer-term green infrastructure/nature based implementation requires a plan, energy, time and funding.
- Changing the culture for this work is key, essentially having a plan ahead of seeking funding, and will result in building and developing the local constituents as a network of implementers.
- Successful and sustainable collaborative partnerships require more time to develop than a "project" and are founded on building trust and relationship with participants.
- Successful collaboratives share some attributes that are scalable from small, rural communities to larger, metropolitan ones, and unique needs for environmental health and resilience may vary from locality to locality.

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- Pursuing projects that provide environmental adaptation and/or mitigation and also provide water quality, recreational, educational, and natural resource benefits are a priority for efficient use of limited resources and tying these multiple benefits together are an important for leveraging and heightening local support
- There are challenges with local capacity and adequate resources to address problems related to resilience.
- State policies and funding/technical assistance vary across the watershed. Frequently these policies and grant programs are not communicated well, so they may be unknown, or complicated to understand, so local governments are not willing to apply/or have the capacity to do so.
- Partnerships are critical in helping many local governments to effectively address local watershed priorities by improving funding, capacity, coordination, and public support.
- Resources from the federal American Rescue Plan Act offer a unique opportunity to invest in infrastructure.

The barriers identified by the Forum Planning Team include the challenges below. These barriers present obstacles for local governments and local partnerships to overcome. Developing recommendations to surmount these barriers are expected to result in collaborative partnership opportunities.

- Staff Capacity
- Technical Assistance and Resources
- Equitable Collaboration & Community Engagement
- Political Will
- Innovative Approaches
- Water Quality Mitigation and Restoration Funding
- Needed Startup Time