



Narrative Analysis

LOCAL LEADERSHIP – FEBRUARY 9TH, 2023

The Local Leadership Outcome is to ‘continually increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials on issues related to water resources and in the implementation of economic and policy incentives that will support local conservation actions’. Recent progress on this outcome has been increasing; all actions in the 2021 – 2023 Logic and Action Plan were completed and 31 educational opportunities engaged 1,300+ local officials directly and 9,500+ local officials indirectly, including officials in all watershed jurisdictions. However, the overall outlook for this outcome is uncertain; a newly created baseline indicator will be used to track progress in future years. Partnership with the jurisdictions and trusted sources continues to be essential and will be even more so, as the workgroup accelerates efforts in 2023 and beyond.

1. The Local Leadership outcome does not have a numeric target and instead is focused on ‘continually increasing’ knowledge and capacity, which is measured by the metrics below. As a partnership, our recent progress towards this outcome has been increasing, although our overall outlook is uncertain because a baseline indicator was only just established in 2022.

Over the course of the 2021 – 2023 Local Leadership Logic and Action Plan, the Local Leadership Workgroup (LLWG), under the guidance of the Enhance Partnering, Leadership and Management Goal Implementation Team (GIT 6), completed all management actions and tracked identified metrics. These metrics include (full details can be found here):

- directly engaged 1,300+ local officials through peer-to-peer learning exchanges, roundtable discussions, conference panel sessions etc. and indirectly engaged 9,500+ local officials through newsletters, magazine articles, blogs etc.
- 31 training and education opportunities covering all watershed jurisdictions, including but not limited to peer to peer tours, conference sessions, roundtable discussions, magazine articles, blog articles, webinars and more.
- peer to peer tours had an average post-event rating of 4.8/5 (29 respondents out of 50 attendees) and were conducted in four of the watershed jurisdictions (Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Delaware) and are planned for two additional watershed jurisdictions (West Virginia and New York) in 2023.
- 900+ planners attended webinars and conference sessions, 200+ watched webinar recordings.
- 12+ trusted sources, including Maryland Association of Counties (MACo), Maryland Municipal League (MML), Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors (PSATS), Pennsylvania Municipal League (PML), Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs (PSAB), County

Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania (CCAP), Virginia Association of Counties (VACo), Virginia Municipal League (VML), Delaware League of Local Governments (DLLG), Upper Susquehanna Coalition (USC), Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments (MWCOCG), and the Eastern Panhandle Regional Planning and Development Council (Region 9) are active partners.

Based on the above, LLWG recent progress would suggest an increase in local officials’ knowledge and capacity. To get a better handle on the scope of that implied increase, the workgroup completed a baseline survey of local officials’ knowledge and capacity (access full questions [here](#)). The baseline survey results showed that many, but not all, officials have a solid understanding of watershed basics; however, many officials lack knowledge about water resource regulations, particularly at the federal level. Almost all respondents reported having access to a knowledgeable person they could go to for assistance on water resources issues, but the survey did not delve into who this person is or how they access them. Future surveys hope to ask some of these important follow-up questions. Newly elected officials and officials from smaller communities have the greatest need for increased knowledge and capacity (access full results [here](#)). Because of the periodic turnover of elected officials, engaging newly elected officials remains on going challenge.

The results of the Local Leadership baseline survey were utilized to establish two indicators for the Local Leadership Outcome: knowledge of federal water resources regulations (**Figure 1**) and reported conservation actions (**Figure 2**). When the Local Leadership survey is conducted again, the results will be used to track progress towards these two newly established indicators.

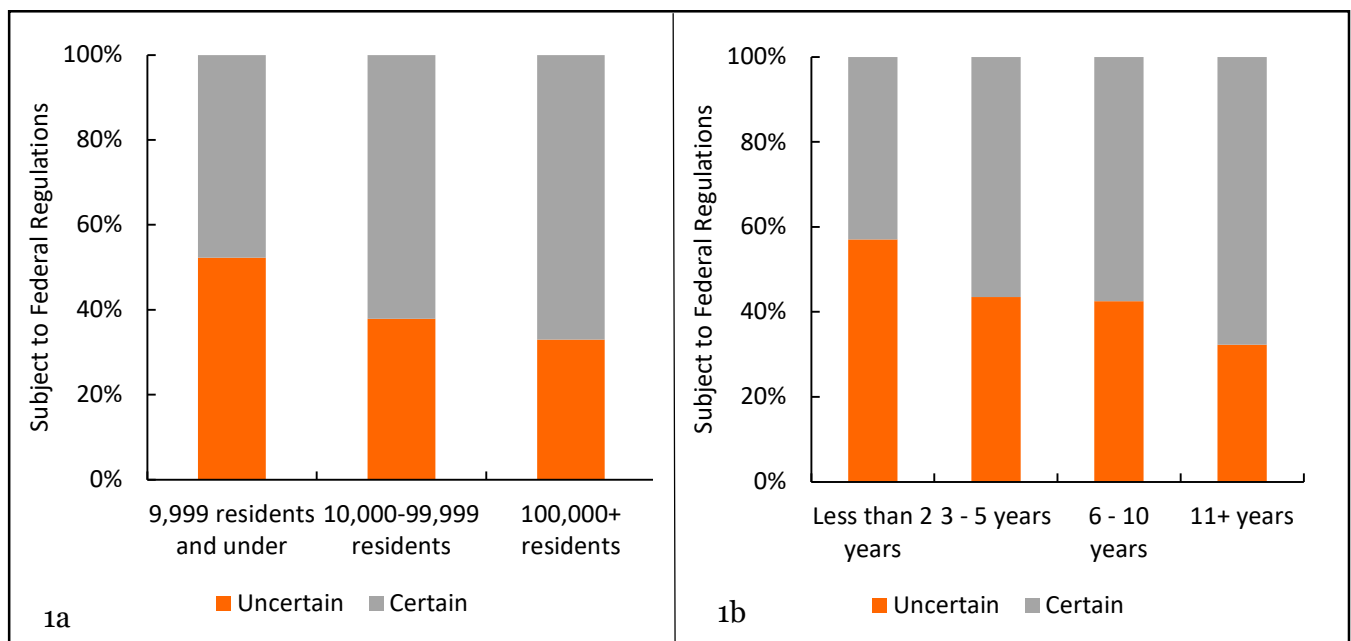


Figure 1. Survey respondents were asked ‘Which of the following rules or regulations is your community subject to? If you are not sure if your community is subject to these rules or regulations please select not sure’. The orange bars show the average percentage of ‘not sure’ answers by community size (a) and tenure (b). Gray bars show the combined ‘sure’

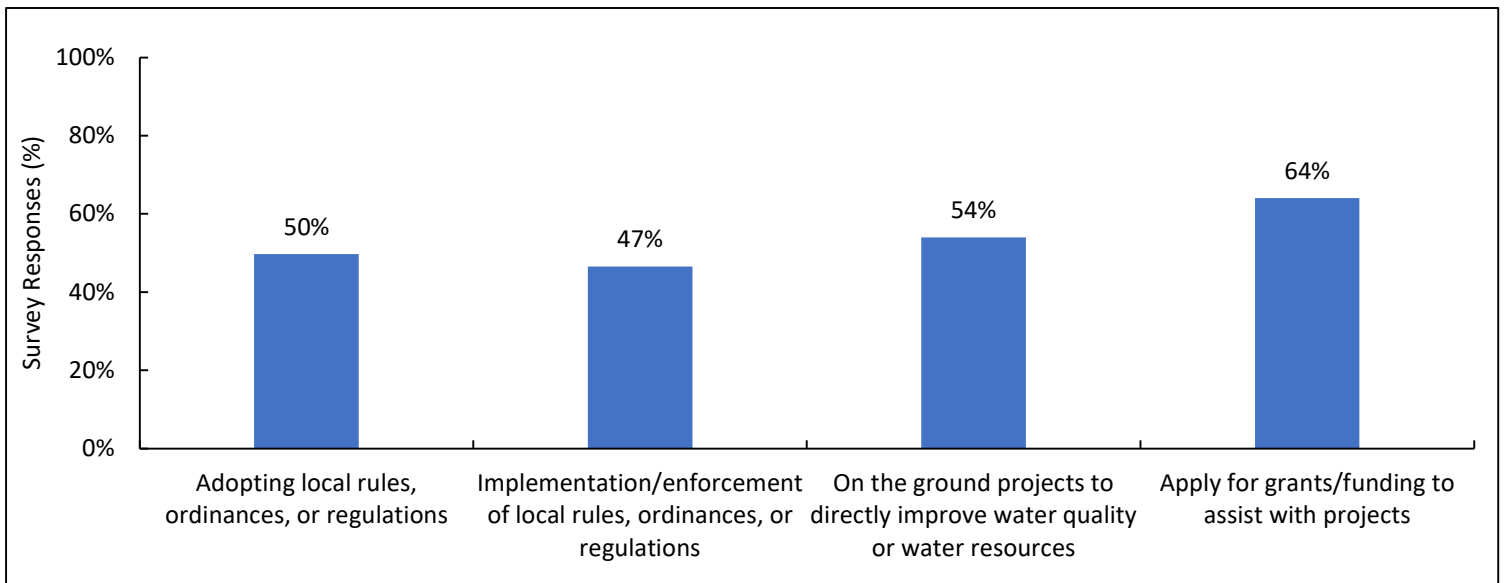


Figure 2. Survey respondents were asked ‘In the last three years, which of the following has your community undertaken related to water quality or water resources? Please check all that apply.’ Blue bars show the percentage of survey respondents that reported taking that action.

2. In the last two or more years, there have been several scientific, fiscal, and policy developments that impacted our progress and will continue to influence our work over the next two years. These include, but are not limited to:
 - COVID-19 – local governments are still recovering from the lingering impacts of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has led to ongoing supply chain challenges, rising costs, significant labor shortages and a transition to hybrid/virtual work.
 - Climate change – the impacts of extreme weather events, particularly flooding, are now throughout the watershed. Current infrastructure was not designed to handle current conditions (much less projected future conditions) and local governments are struggling to adapt.
 - New federal funding – a large infusion of federal dollars via the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) means that local governments have more potential funding available than ever before. Although, many continue to lack the capacity to access these new funds.
 - Turnover – there has always been significant turnover of local elected officials, appointed officials and senior staff. The COVID-19 pandemic which created unprecedented stress for local leaders accelerated turnover rates in many communities.

The above developments have emphasized the need to expand our work to increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials. Local technical capacity continues to be a substantial barrier, especially for small communities. Finding ways to build capacity, especially around new federal funding and particularly for disadvantaged communities, will need to be a major focus of the next logic and action plan.

3. Over the course of the 2021 – 2023 Local Leadership Logic and Action Plan, the workgroup completed all management actions.

What worked:

- Peer to peer learning exchange tours continue to be highly successful
- A suite of engagement opportunities (conference panels, regional meetings, publications, webinars etc.) is needed to reach a diversity of local elected officials
- Newly created editable educational modules allowed for state or regional customization that was very popular
- Engagement with trusted sources continues to be essential
- Working in smaller groups in between larger quarterly meetings
- Making water issues relevant to local officials via a lens of public health and safety, infrastructure maintenance and finance, economic development and education

What didn't work:

- The process of preparing the Local Leadership baseline survey was delayed by more than 3 years because approval was needed from the Office of Management and Budget.
- The survey results provided insight into local officials' knowledge and capacity, however because of budget constraints the methodology included a convenience sample, which has limited statistical value. The results are likely not representative of local governments in the watershed.
- Turning the baseline survey results into an indicator has proved to be time-consuming and challenging.

Additional factors to consider:

- New federal funding has the potential to be transformative for local governments, but many are unaware of new funding opportunities and/or lack the staff capacity to access these funds.
- Peer to peer learning exchanges and other educational programming have costs beyond those provided to the LLWG. Seeking external funding has been a focus for staff, but can be difficult to secure.
- Virtual engagement over the last two years allowed the LLWG to expand the quantity of local officials reached, but at some cost to the quality of that engagement.

Filled gaps:

- The newly created '*A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay*' fills a key gap for 'tailored educational materials' need to reach local officials
- Engagement with planners has activated a network of 'teachers' for local elected officials
- Baseline survey and newly created indicators have to expand our understanding of local officials' knowledge and capacity

4. Over the next two years, we need to accelerate efforts to increase local officials' knowledge and capacity around water resource issues. Key changes to our work will include:

- Continuing to expand the networks through which we engage local officials by either partnering with additional 'trusted sources' or deepen existing partnerships via a broader array of educational opportunities (conference panels, peer to peer tours, magazine articles, podcasts, web-based resources etc.)

- Incorporate educational programming into local elected officials training/certification programs
- Expand capacity building, particularly around accessing new federal funding
- Focus engagement on local officials from smaller communities and those who are newly elected. The baseline survey identified these officials as having the greatest knowledge and capacity needs.
- Balance engagement activities between virtual and in-person to maximize the value of both.

Strong engagement from the jurisdictions was instrumental in the workgroup's success over the last two years and continued support from management board will remain essential. Using the 'SUPRR' model, this action breaks down to:

- Specific and actionable – engagement in the workgroup including in peer to peer learning exchange tours (as funding is available), conference panels, trusted source publications etc.
 - Programmatic partner – jurisdiction representatives, who continue to be highly engaged
 - Urgency – ongoing need to engage with local officials, significant commitment from jurisdictions in the last year demonstrates how essential this is to meeting the rest of the watershed agreement
 - Risk – not meeting the outcomes because of a lack of knowledge/capacity at the local scale
 - Resources – staff time on par with commitment over the last two years
5. In May 2021, the Local Leadership Workgroup had an entire meeting focused on diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. [Recommendations from that meeting](#) highlight several key actions to ensure our work is equitably distributed and/or focused in geographic areas that communities that have been underserved in the past. Two key recommendations were to 1) expand regional and/or county-level chapter or association educational opportunities and 2) identify/build strategic partnerships with 3+ trusted sources for underserved communities and invite them to join the Local Leadership Workgroup.

Additionally, the newly created *A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay*, includes DEIJ call-out boxes to highlight the connections with water resources issues. Future work will focus on engaging officials serving small, rural and/or otherwise lower capacity communities because the baseline survey identified those communities as having the greatest needs around knowledge and capacity.