

Local Leadership Outcome

Management Strategy

2015–2025, v.3



I. Introduction

There are more than 1,800 local governments in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, and many are taking steps to restore and protect their local rivers and streams. The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* acknowledges the critical role local government leaders play and commits to increase their knowledge and capacity on issues related to water resources, with the goal of implementation of economic and policy incentives that will support local conservation actions.

Since 2014, a robust network of local appointed and elected officials, senior local government staff, experts in leadership training and other stakeholders, have provided oversight of and guidance to efforts to meet the Local Leadership Outcome. Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) members, Local Leadership Workgroup (LLWG) members and others have continuously stressed that local leaders are diverse in experience, values and agendas, and that the communities they serve vary in basic watershed knowledge and technical capacity¹. Increasing knowledge about local watershed protection and restoration, the complexities of water resource issues and relating the value of healthy waters to local priorities such as economic development, public health and safety, infrastructure maintenance and

¹ [Environmental Leadership Strategies “Chesapeake Watershed Local Leadership Development Programs” 2015](#)

finance and education², will be important to engaging those who are unaware of the critical role local governments play in the restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. As turnover is significant among local officials and their key staff, it will be important to create and nurture a watershed culture of excellence that showcases and promotes local efforts, applauds local initiatives and provides easy access to action-oriented conservation and restoration models for local officials to adapt and replicate.

Recognizing the need for continuous education on water resource issues was instrumental in the development of this Local Leadership Outcome Management Strategy. It includes partnering with local government trusted sources (municipal leagues, county associations and others) to develop and expand training and leadership opportunities, facilitate peer to peer interactions among local officials, improve the availability and accessibility of informational resources and more.

By working together to engage and inform local officials on critical watershed issues, there is great potential for success in restoring the Bay as well as helping local communities thrive.

II. Goal, Outcome and Baseline

This Management Strategy identifies approaches for achieving the following Goal and Outcome:



Stewardship Goal

Increase the number and the diversity of local stewards and local governments that actively support and carry out the conservation and restoration activities that achieve healthy local streams, rivers and a vibrant Chesapeake Bay.

Local Leadership Outcome

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.

For the purposes of this Management Strategy, the term “local officials” includes elected and appointed officials, as well as senior staff in local governments. The term “capacity” is defined as the technical ability to achieve measurable and sustainable results or access to this technical ability. “Capacity building” refers to enhancing appropriate skills and knowledge to help local officials be more effective in adopting economic and policy incentives that support local conservation action. “Trusted sources” is used to refer to the organizations, people and entities that local officials turn to for information or resources; examples include: municipal leagues, county associations, council of governments, regional planning bodies and more.

Baseline and Current Condition

According to LGAC members and signatory representatives, the knowledge of local officials on watershed issues and their capacity to implement restoration and protection initiatives varies quite dramatically throughout the watershed and both are major barriers to implementation¹.

² [Ecologix Group “Strategic Outreach Education Program for Local Elected Officials in the Chesapeake Bay Watershed” 2017](#)

In 2022, a Local Leadership Baseline Survey was conducted to evaluate the existing knowledge and capacity of local officials and to guide efforts to meet the outcome. The final report summarized the survey's findings and identified key takeaways³:

- Many officials have a solid understanding of watershed basics, but their understanding of environmental regulations is relatively low.
- Almost all respondents reported having access to a knowledgeable person they could go to for technical assistance.
- Stormwater management and comprehensive planning are the top tools that officials would consider utilizing to protect water resources.
- Almost all respondents reported taking actions related to water resources, but only about half reported implementing on the ground projects.
- Officials from smaller communities are considering using fewer water resource tools and took fewer water resource actions. They scored lower on the watershed questions, reported less understanding of regulations and are less likely to know a knowledgeable contact person.
- Officials in office longer report less uncertainty about whether various regulations apply to their communities.

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.

³ [Uncommon Insights "Initial Findings from Local Leadership Baseline Survey" 2022](#)

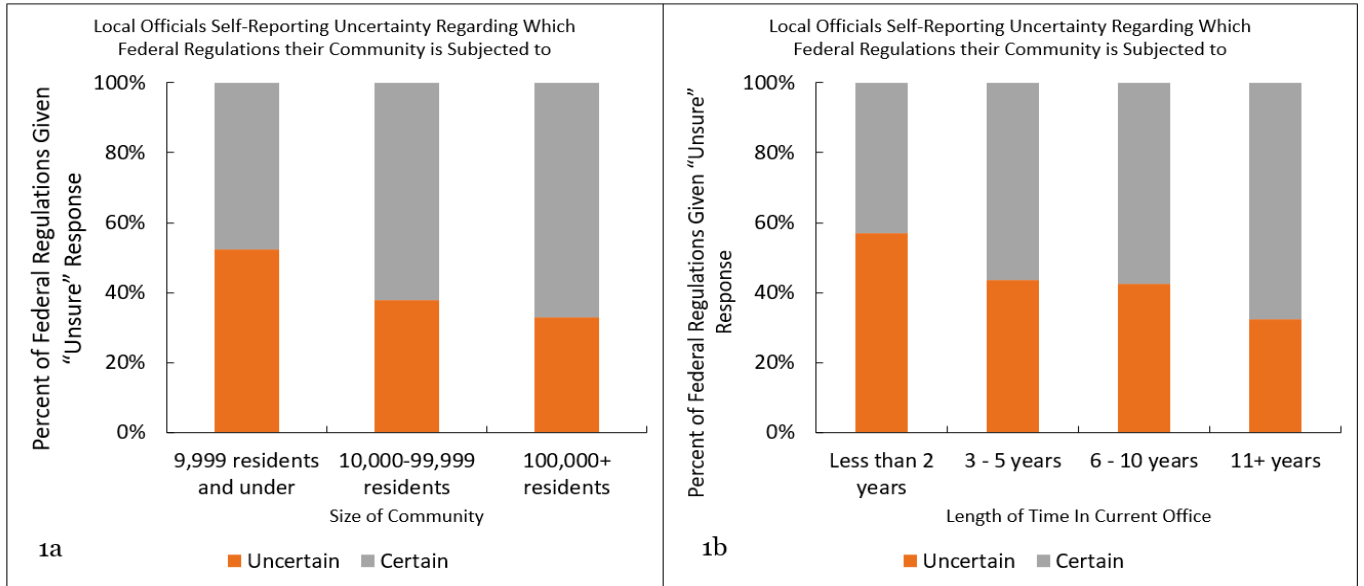


Figure 1. Survey respondents were asked ‘Which of the following rules or regulations is your community subject to? If you are not sure if your community is subject to these rules or regulations please select not sure’. The orange bars show the average percentage of ‘not sure’ answers by community size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

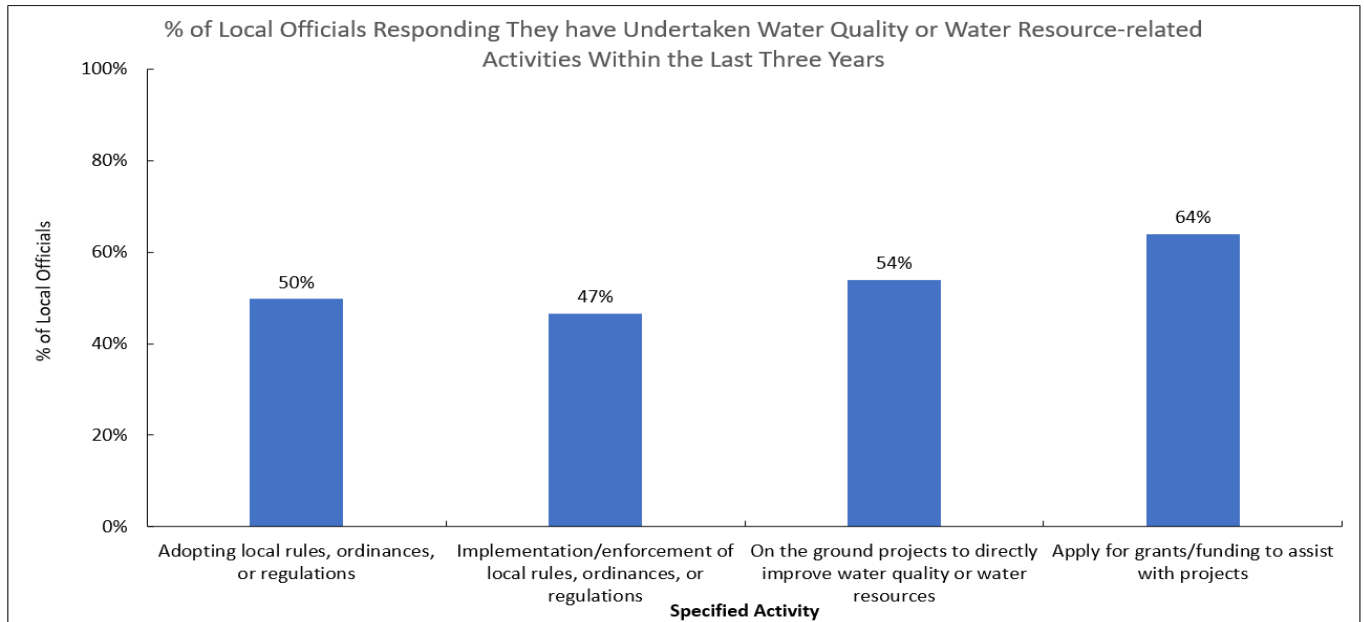


Figure 2. Survey respondents were asked ‘In the last three years, which of the following has your community undertaken related to water quality or water resources? Please check all that apply.’ Blue bars show the percentage of survey respondents that reported taking that action.

III. Participating Partners

Team Lead: Enhance Partnering, Leadership and Management Goal Implementation Team (GIT 6)

The following partners have participated in the development of this strategy. A two-year workplan accompanies the update to this Management Strategy. It identifies specific partner commitments for the implementation of this Management Strategy.

Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement Signatories and Advisory Committees Participating in Strategy Development

- State of Maryland
- Commonwealth of Virginia
- District of Columbia
- Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
- State of Delaware
- State of West Virginia
- State of New York
- Chesapeake Bay Commission
- US Environmental Protection Agency
- Local Government Advisory Committee
- Local Leadership Workgroup

Local Official Engagement

A key factor in the success of Chesapeake Bay restoration efforts relies on the ability to increase the knowledge and capacity of local leaders. During the last several decades, federal and state regulations were significant in guiding Chesapeake Bay Program efforts. Continued progress in the watershed will depend on voluntary, informed actions by local officials and their local county or municipality.

This Outcome relates to the building of knowledge and capacity of local officials; hence there is a specific, critical role for local government officials and associated local leaders in advising the Enhancing, Partnering and Leadership Goal Implementation Team (GIT 6) on the development of this Management Strategy. Additionally, local government trusted sources, such as municipal leagues, county associations and regional planning bodies play critical roles in reaching local officials to build their knowledge and capacity for conservation action. Representatives from organizations such as Maryland Municipal League, Maryland Association of Counties, Virginia Municipal League, Virginia Association of Counties, Pennsylvania Municipal League, County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors and others serve on the Local Leadership Workgroup and provided valuable feedback and direction.

During the implementation of this Management Strategy, the involvement of both local officials-via LGAC, and trusted sources-via the Local Leadership Workgroup, will be crucial to achieving this Outcome. Offering advice on workplan development, including identifying adjustments over time is critical to its success, along with participation in training and peer-to-peer activities, both as leaders and as learners, will contribute to the success of this Outcome.

IV. Factors Influencing Success

The Chesapeake Bay watershed is vast, its geology complex and its population diverse.

Turnover rates among elected and appointed officials are unpredictable, complicating the return on investment from training on watershed issues. Availability of resources - defined as expertise, time, staff and funds - vary widely. Some local officials are technically sophisticated; others are not. Environmental issues are often not routinely addressed in capital planning and annual budgets.

Some local officials are already committed stewards of local water resources and the Bay. Others will become committed if they recognize the correlation between local waters, a healthy Bay and individualized local priorities such as economic development, public health and safety, infrastructure maintenance and finance and education².

The following have been identified as key factors influencing the ability to achieve the Local Leadership Outcome. The most critical factor is listed first:

- Competing interests: local officials face a broad spectrum of important and urgent issues that are constantly vying for their attention and local government resources.
- Limited scientific and technical capacity: many local officials do not have scientific or technical training or access to a knowledge person with technical capacity
- Routine turnover: there is a constant stream of newly elected and appointed officials.
- Regional needs: the complexity of the watershed and myriad of jurisdictions creates distinct regional needs

V. Current Efforts and Gaps

Multiple jurisdictions, organizations and groups of local governments are working to increase the knowledge and capacity of local officials. In many cases these efforts need to be enhanced, expanded and shared as models with others in the watershed. Previous efforts from 2014 - 2023 include:

- FY2014 GIT Funded Project "[Chesapeake Watershed Local Leadership Development Programs](#)" by Environmental Leadership Strategies identified knowledge and capacity as key barriers to implementation of local conservation actions.¹
- FY2015 GIT Funded Project "[Strategic Outreach Education Program](#)" by EcoLogix recommended using local priorities as portals for discussion with local elected officials.²
- FY2017 GIT Funded Project "[Implementation Support for Local Official Watershed Education and Capacity Building](#)" by the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay built partnerships with key trusted sources while piloting a myriad of engagement strategies.⁴
- FY2019 GIT Funding Project "[Cross Outcome Watershed Educational Materials for Local Governments](#)" by Green Fin Studio resulted in the creation of a seven modules series that covers key watershed topics through the lens of local priorities.⁵

⁴ Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay "[Implementation Support for Local Official Watershed Education and Capacity Building](#)" 2022

⁵ Green Fin Studios "[Cross Outcome Watershed Educational Materials for Local Governments](#)" 2021

- The Chesapeake Bay Program’s [Local Engagement Strategy](#) outlined a plan for delivering ‘translated’ content via trusted sources⁶.

Current and ongoing efforts include:

- [FY2020 GIT Funding Project “Planning for Clean Water: Local Governments Workshops”](#): Currently being led by ERG, this project is working to build the capacity of local government planners as valuable technical partners for local elected officials.
- [FY2021 GIT Funding Project “A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay: Phase II”](#): Currently being led by Green Fin Studio to create 4 additional educational modules, create an online repository for housing the modules and lead a train-the-trainer session on how to use the materials.
- [Local Government Advisory Committee activities](#): LGAC’s annual Local Government Forum and Watershed Currents newsletter. Occasional LGAC organized webinars on key topics.
- [Engagement with Local Officials via Trusted Sources](#): State-by-state conference panels, webinars, blog/magazine articles, roundtables, regional meetings and other training and educational opportunities via municipal organizations, county associations and other trusted sources.
- [Peer-to-peer learning exchanges](#): tours in partnership with LGAC, state jurisdictions and local government trusted sources that foster dialogue and experiential learning.

Gaps

Information sharing, engagement and capacity building are necessary to increase the number of local officials committed to responsible natural resource management. In reviewing current efforts, the following gaps were identified:

- Expanding the set of educational materials and increasing their accessibility.
- Scaling up and diversifying engagement strategies (conference panels, webinars, blog/magazine articles, roundtables, regional meetings etc.)
- Educational materials need to be tailored to regional needs.
- Few opportunities exist for elected officials to share information and learn from one another.
- Educational and training opportunities need to be offered on an ongoing basis and incorporated into newly elected officials’ training, local official certification programs, and other continuing education opportunities.
- A baseline level of the knowledge of local officials in regard to watershed issues and the capacity to implement watershed restoration and protection initiatives is known, but how these change over time is unknown.

VI. Management Approaches

In developing the Local Leadership Management Strategy, several approaches were identified as critical to expanding the knowledge and capacity of local officials. These approaches were developed by signatory representatives, local official trusted sources and other members of the Local Leadership

⁶ [Chesapeake Bay Program Local Engagement Strategy 2019](#)

Workgroup. Local officials continue to be engaged in the consideration of specific actions outlined in the workplan, which accompanies this Management Strategy.

The following management approaches set a framework for the Bay Program to identify existing knowledge and capacity building resources, as well as opportunities to engage local officials via trusted sources. These management actions should be considered on a state-by-state and region-by-region basis, given the variety of local needs, priorities and approaches to resource management and should be conducted in close coordination with signatory jurisdictions, local government trusted sources and other key partners.

1. Measure progress towards increasing the knowledge and capacity of local officials

Regularly measuring and tracking progress towards the knowledge and capacity of local officials is an essential step to ensuring that partnership efforts are sufficient for meeting the Local Leadership Outcome. Steps to achieve this action may include:

- Monitor local officials' knowledge and capacity

2. Engage local officials in opportunities for capacity building via trusted sources.

Local leaders have many competing interests vying for their attention and often limited time and resources. Given this situation, it was recognized that existing trusted source events and programming can play a key role in increasing the knowledge and capacity of local government officials on issues related to water resources. There is also a constant turnover of local officials throughout the watershed and, hence, a need for programs to be offered on a recurring basis. Increasing the frequency and consistency of core training on a Bay-wide and regional basis can address the wide disparity in knowledge and capacity that currently exists, as well as provide opportunities to focus on specific regional and/or local complexities. Steps to achieve this action may include:

- Track current training and capacity building opportunities
- Build relationships with local government trusted sources in each jurisdiction
- Scale-up and diversify regionally-tailored training and capacity building opportunities, with a minimum of one engagement opportunity per signatory jurisdiction per year. All events will be aligned with *A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay* and in coordination with trusted sources and signatory jurisdictions.

3. Improve and enhance local official engagement

While a lot of available information and opportunities exist, there continue to be multiple opportunities to improve and enhance local official engagement. Steps to achieve this action may include:

- Increase peer-to-peer knowledge transfer opportunities for local officials
- Assist GITs and Workgroups that have identified local government audiences in their management strategies and logic and action plans
- Expand the educational content of '*A Local Government Guide to the Chesapeake Bay*' and increase accessibility of available content

Cross-Outcome Collaboration and Multiple Benefits

The *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement* is complex with intersecting Goals and Outcomes. To establish a culture of excellence across the watershed, the Local Leadership Outcome depends on the achievement of other Outcomes, including Citizen Stewardship, Diversity and Environmental Literacy. Local officials react to the needs of their diverse constituents, so a culture of stewardship at the grassroots level is also important to the success of this Outcome. An environmentally literate electorate can help drive the success of increasing citizen stewardship and engaging local leaders.

Many other Goals and Outcomes, including Outcomes for the Urban Tree Canopy, Water Quality, Climate Adaptation and Land Use Options and Evaluation, among others, rely on the local implementation of actions, and the increased knowledge and capacity of local officials. When a strong culture of excellence in natural resource management exists among local officials, it provides the framework for the action necessary to achieve the vision(s) articulated in the *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Agreement*. Therefore, the GIT 6 is cross-collaborating with all of the Goal Implementation Teams and Workgroups that are responsible for Outcomes that depend on informed local leaders.

The approaches cited above are intended to facilitate local participation and develop local leaders who can participate more fully in local conservation actions that help to meet the outcomes of the Watershed Agreement. To facilitate greater local participation from under-served and under-represented communities, the Local Leadership Workgroup will work closely with the Diversity Workgroup to identify non-traditional partners and trusted sources.

VII. Monitoring Progress

In 2022 a baseline survey of local officials' knowledge and capacity was conducted³. Results informed the creation of a Local Leadership Indicator⁷. See Baseline and Current Condition section.

VIII. Assessing Progress

Progress toward building the knowledge and capacity of local officials will be assessed periodically, with the goal of updating the Local Leadership Indicator every two years. It is anticipated that this strategy may require one or more two-year cycles to fully determine whether the initial effort has been successful.

IX. Adaptively Managing

As the latest two-year period has concluded, the existing workplan has been updated and accompanies this Management Strategy. The purpose of updating the two-year work plan was to maximize the effectiveness of the methods utilized to increase the knowledge and capacity building of local leaders.

⁷ [Local Leadership Indicator 2023](#)

X. Biennial Workplan

This Management Strategy outlines the approach the Chesapeake Bay Program will be taken between now and 2025. A biennial workplan, focusing on the priorities and resources available to all participating signatory representatives and partners for the following two years has been updated and accompanies this Management Strategy.