

Chesapeake Bay Trust

Cultivating and Strengthening Partnerships with Underrepresented Stakeholders

Final Report

Prepared by Chesapeake Conservancy

August 2022



Contents:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Chesapeake Bay Program Staff Conversations
- Community Conversations
- Leadership Briefings and Workshop
- Community Forum
- Conclusion and Recommendations
- Suggestions for Next Actions
- Appendix:
 - Acronym list
 - Materials
 - Developed resources
 - Continued education (outside resources)

Executive Summary:

The “Cultivating and Strengthening Partnerships with Underrepresented Stakeholders” project was funded through the Chesapeake Bay Trust (CBT) Goal Implementation Team (GIT) Funding Program. This program funds consultant services to provide technical assistance to support Chesapeake Bay Program goals and outcomes. This project was proposed by the Chesapeake Bay Program Stewardship Goal Implementation Team (GIT 5) and their Diversity Workgroup. Chesapeake Conservancy was contracted to complete this project.

“Cultivating and Strengthening Partnerships with Underrepresented Stakeholders” began in the spring of 2021 and culminated in the summer of 2022. The project goals aimed to help the Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) develop a better understanding of the needs, barriers, and priorities of organizations led by and serving historically underrepresented and underserved communities such as communities of color. The objectives were to engage communities in meaningful ways to build trust and sustainable long term relationships.

The project began with conversations with community leaders and Chesapeake Bay Program staff to understand the current state of engagement, where barriers and opportunities were identified. Following these conversations, Chesapeake Bay Program leadership engaged in a Leadership Workshop to gain direction on defining meaningful community engagement for the Bay Program. The project culminated with a Community Forum in July 2022 where community members and Bay Program leadership and staff came together for the first time in discussion to build a foundation of trust, and engage communities in developing engagement strategies for the Chesapeake Bay Program partnership.

A series of recommendations for actionable next steps was compiled based on input from community members and staff who participated in the project and a community engagement guide was developed by a contracted community leader. Overall, these conversations and recommendations should help the CBP to continue developing long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities.

Introduction

The project team was led by the contractor, Chesapeake Conservancy, and included: Gabrielle Roffe, Manager of Equity and Community Engagement; Briana Yancy, Chesapeake Bay Program Diversity Work Group Coordinator; Stephen Graves, DEI Consultant; Daphne Pee, pro-bono volunteer social scientist and member of the CBP Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC); BeKura Shabazz, Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice (DEIJ) Specialist and Racial Bias Remediator, also a member of the CBP CAC; and steering committee members from the CBP Diversity Workgroup. Monthly meetings were held to track the progress of the project with steering committee members, and weekly meetings were held with the core project team members.

The process of the project was iterative and informed by the information being gathered in the conversations and interviews with key community members. Community experts were consulted in planning and developing the project content and contacts.

Project Outcomes:

- Conduct sensing conversations to develop a better understanding of how organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities view CBP and how they envision participating in successful, long-term partnerships with CBP partners given the conservation/restoration projects that are already underway on both ends.
- Develop a better understanding of capacity-related needs, priorities, and barriers for organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities in relation to participation in Chesapeake Bay restoration and conservation efforts. Understand the community currencies that are valued and would incentivize and result in meaningful relationships and engagement.
- Gather input from organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities on the potential formation of a CBP Community Advisory Board.
- Initiate relationship building between CBP partners and historically underrepresented communities through community forums where organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities can speak about their work and interact with CBP partners.
- Develop and provide resources, tools, and/or workshops tailored towards addressing needs, barriers, and priorities of organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities.
- Develop recommendations for the CBP to establish long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities.

Sensing Conversations:

Chesapeake Conservancy hosted dialogs and stakeholder engagement sessions with two separate populations, internal and external to the Chesapeake Bay Program. Six Sensing Conversations sessions were held to gather feedback on engagement of underrepresented communities within CBP. These sessions were rooted in principles of diversity dialogue to encourage listening, trust, and individual expression. The conversations were designed to develop an open, baseline understanding of where we came from, how we view the current status, and visions for the future of CBP and each person's contribution is used together with the whole to inform a broader picture. In these 1.5 hour sessions, what was heard was summarized by notetakers anonymously and themes between discussions for each population engaged were recorded.

Chesapeake Bay Program Conversations:

The purpose of the *internal* conversations was to explore how the Chesapeake Bay Program can cultivate and strengthen relationships with currently underrepresented communities. The goal was to understand WHY we want to engage underrepresented groups so we can understand the most intentional ways for engaging communities. We used an abundance-oriented approach to gather CBP's capacity to engage underrepresented communities and develop an understanding of assets and resources to reach communities in meaningful ways.

Methods: The first round of conversations took place over two sessions on September 16, and 21, 2022 virtually on a Zoom platform. The 1.5-hour sessions had a total of 25 participants, and included introductions, an icebreaker and setting shared agreements, a sensing conversation, and an asset mapping activity. The Pre- and Post-Survey answers were collected anonymously through MentiMeter. The asset mapping activity took place over Jamboard.

Meaningful Findings:

- The Chesapeake Bay Program staff and leadership expressed the need for an authentic interest in engaging underrepresented audiences in the Bay Program, both internally within the diversity and retention of staff, and externally in community engagement efforts.
- Participants described this effort as mission critical, as civil servants it is their duty to engage voices of underrepresented communities in Chesapeake Bay Program goals.
- There was a general consensus that current and past programs have been unsuccessful due to systemic barriers.
- Through the discussion there were many assets highlighted within the Bay Program and its partnerships to increase representation in authentic and meaningful ways. Opportunities include developing long term visions for career pipelines to diversify CBP staff, culture change to increase retention of diverse staff, and capacity for developing and supporting community engagement based on authenticity, trust, and mutual benefits. Many resources were highlighted to engage underrepresented communities, and participants acknowledged the need to meet communities where they are and lead with what their needs are.

Community Conversations:

The purpose of the community conversations was to bring together leaders from underrepresented communities to hear from them about what their needs are and find ways to collectively build mutually beneficial relationships with the organizations involved in the Chesapeake Bay Program to better connect those who represent these communities to resources and other opportunities. These sessions were focused on people of color who have experience working with the Chesapeake Bay Program in the past, to understand barriers and learn about opportunities for growth.

There were a total of 17 participants in these conversations. Participants included a) community leaders who have worked with the Bay Program in the past and are no longer actively involved, b) organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities currently involved in CBP, and c) community leaders who have some engagement with the CBP. One focus group primarily focused on 8 people who identify as people of color who have worked with the Bay Program in a staff or internship capacity and have since left the Bay Program.

Methods: The second round of conversations took place over four sessions on September 22, 28, 29, and October 1 virtually on the Zoom platform. The 1.5-hour sessions included introductions, an icebreaker and setting shared agreements, a sensing conversation, and a needs assessment. The sensing activity was an honest discussion that was anonymously recorded by note-takers. The Pre- and Post-Survey answers were collected anonymously through MentiMeter. The needs assessment activity took place over Jamboard.

Meaningful Findings:

- From the community's perspective, conservation and stewardship values are fostered through a variety of social justice issues from personal connections to nature, environmental quality and justice, and community wellness. Based on the participant's demographics and group affiliations, there are intersectional connections to achieving Chesapeake Bay health. Intersectional environmentalism advocates for the protection of both people and the planet. Intersectional Environmentalism focuses on achieving climate justice, amplifying historically excluded voices and approaching environmental education, policy, and activism with equity, inclusion and restorative justice in mind.
- Communities aren't resourced in ways that allow them to fully participate in meetings, workgroups, and funding opportunities.
- There are many barriers within current grant making practices including lack of flexibility in spending grant money, capacity to receive funding, program requirements, and barriers of complex systems to navigate.
- Respondents indicate lack of trust, wariness and frustration with CBP as a result of the amount of time they have spent engaging in CBP-related meetings and the ensuing lack of consideration or integration of their recommendations.
- One concern that was not captured in our focus groups is that there are Diversity Workgroup members who do not feel comfortable engaging in conversations due to the Bay Program members' lack of training and experience in equity work.

Leadership Briefings and Workshop:

Through the process, the project team sought direction from CBP leadership to clearly define the roles of the Diversity Workgroup and other workgroups in CBP in engaging with underrepresented communities. The team explored the purpose, scope and format for bringing community contributions and input into the Bay Program to ensure that their time, voices, and feedback is valued. The CBP Leadership Workshop was centered on Intent and Impact: Defining Community Engagement at the Chesapeake Bay Program. Overall, 14 people attended briefings and 10 members of Bay Program leadership were present at the workshop. Note takers were present documenting the discussion anonymously.

The purpose of the workshop was to gain direction from CBP leadership to help align intentions and impact regarding engaging with underrepresented stakeholders. The goal was to clearly define the role of the CBP (as a whole, individual orgs, GITs, workgroups, etc) in engaging with underrepresented communities, then consider where we can make changes to our structures and systems to overcome barriers.

Methods: Briefings were 1 hour each on May 4 and May 11 and included a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the project to date. The Leadership Workshop was facilitated by DEI Consultant Stephen Graves over the Zoom platform on May 24th, 2022, for a 2-hour session. Methods used included facilitated discussion and breakout sessions, and the use of tools such as: Courageous Conversations Compass, and Spectrum of Public Engagement. The workshop concluded with discussion of the upcoming Community Forum.

Meaningful Findings

- The leadership workshop offered the opportunity for leaders to discuss and explore what it meant to actively engage historically marginalized communities. We explored systemic barriers and guided the group in discovering how they envisioned themselves as participants and champions in collaborating with the community. The leaders asked thoughtful questions and showed a willingness to continue ongoing exploration on this topic.
- Intent for meaningful community engagement is apparent, however, there are gaps missing (solutions/direction) to connect CBP DEIJ & engagement goals.
- CBP leadership identified a need for tackling this issue at two levels - internally within the Bay Program with guidance from a new DEIJ Coordinator, and externally through supporting local jurisdictions engaging with underrepresented communities.

Community Forum:

The project culminated in a virtual Community Forum on July 8, 2022. This forum brought together 32 participants from the project representing CBP staff, leadership, and community leaders with the goal of foundational trust building and relationship building with communities.

At the community forum, we created space for community leaders to share their insights and perceptions on fostering a culture of DEIJ in environmental justice, power sharing, and future engagement with the Bay partnership and its workgroups. Attendees also participated in breakout exercises to define what success in the DEIJ space would look like in 5 years, specific DEIJ-focused initiatives they would like to see, and key groups who would foster accountability.

Methods: The Community Forum took place virtually over the Zoom platform for 2 hours, facilitated by DEI consultant Stephen Graves. As an addition to the project team, Bekura Shabazz of First Alliance Consulting and Criminal Justice Reform was contracted to help plan the Forum and to participate as a presenter. The agenda included a presentation by BeKura Shabazz on the history of the Bay Program and DEIJ, and a panel discussion with Queen Shabazz, Virginia Environmental Justice Collaborative; Eliseo Magos, CHISPA, Maryland League of Conservation Voters; and Reggie Tupponce, Upper Mattaponi Tribal Administrator. The Forum concluded with a discussion, JamBoard exercise, debrief, and questions.

Meaningful Findings:

- Communities want to be heard - the partnership must find ways to integrate community voices into discussions from the start, with transparency in the process, and continuous updates.
- Trust and diversity in perspectives create a more holistic picture for environmental work and policies.
- DEIJ must be prioritized and integrated at all levels of the Chesapeake Bay Program to foster a culture of belonging and ensure those most impacted by the work are a part of the conversation and decision making process
- Communities would like to see actionable items such as funding underrepresented communities and hiring people from these communities.
- Instead of creating and adding a new "community" branch to the CBP which was proposed as a Community Advisory Board, expand the agencies and staff from the current partners to represent local voices.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, the most prominent barriers around meaningful engagement encompass the need for more internal DEIJ work and clarification. The following recommendations are based on lessons learned and limitations encountered throughout the course of this project.

Clarify Goals and Intentions Prior To Engagement

Internal DEIJ work needs to be addressed and clear goals need to be set for community engagement before reaching out to involve community representatives. The Project goals were vague and throughout the process it became apparent that due to the variety of organizations that make up the Bay Program, there was no clear direction for defining community engagement goals within the Bay Program partnership.

This project sought to gain clear directives from leadership and within workgroups on how and when to engage communities and this work needs to be continued moving forward. It is also important to gain a better understanding of the capacity to do this work long term, sustainably and meaningfully amongst all the CBP groups as engagement is mentioned several times throughout CBP documents. After clarifying these goals and intentions, the project team recommends evaluating the DEIJ action plan and how other groups can work with the Diversity Workgroup to spread DEIJ across the program. This holistic organizational approach to DEIJ will also emphasize the importance of accountability across the Bay Program for DEIJ work.

The organization of the project was difficult with the staff capacity and turnover of the Diversity Workgroup staff. Incoming of new staff half-way through the project created confusion of roles and caused a lag in project deliverables and scheduling. Turnover in the Diversity Workgroup was noted as a detriment and consistent theme throughout the history of the Diversity Workgroup, as well as during the project's community and staff conversations.

Examine Workplace Culture

Antiracist and multicultural organization strategies were implemented throughout the process by the project team to help improve trust and increase positive project outcomes. It is important to examine workplace culture regularly to ensure that characteristics that do not embody best practices for an inclusive environment do not arise, especially when engaging in DEIJ work. Characteristics such as micromanagement, rush to action, and not properly coping with discomfort derived from harsh realities of community voice and input are inefficacious. When these were mitigated, participants, including community members, felt value throughout the project in that their voice had a platform and their concerns were being brought up to leadership and addressed. It would be beneficial not only for the internal work but for the relationship building work if CBP provides a variety of opportunities for learning and growth for individuals and teams.

Suggestions for Next Actions

The following is a compilation of actionable next steps based on the previous lessons learned recommendations for the CBP to continue developing long-term and mutually beneficial relationships with organizations led by and primarily serving communities of color and other underrepresented communities:

Action #1: Explore Mechanism for Funding Equitable Participation

- Consider barriers to participation in having at-large members participate in GITs, and offer solutions for participation.
- Develop compensation mechanisms for community participation as at-large members.
- Consider alternative meeting schedules for community members (i.e., meet in the evenings, and offer virtual options).

Action #2: Determine How Community Organizations Can Benefit from CBP

- Develop a prescriptive mechanism for receiving community input and incorporating community voices into decision making and science needs.
- Create a more regular platform for bringing community voices to management board and other groups at CBP.
- Create opportunities and means for staff to participate in community-led events to build relationships in communities with the intent of long term and continuous engagement.
- Engage at the local level by empowering local governments and working with jurisdictions to involve communities meaningfully and ensure relevance to community groups.
- Determine what are the benefits State and Federal agencies receive from CBP and translate those to not only equal but equitable benefits to organizations the CBP is trying to reach through DEIJ work.

Action #3: Explore Equitable Grantmaking Solutions

- Develop and support low barrier funding mechanisms.
- Explore revisiting the authorizing language of funding mechanisms, which are at the root of some of the systemic issues.

Appendix

Acronym List:

DEIJ - Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice

CBP- Chesapeake Bay Program

CBT - Chesapeake Bay Trust

GIT - Goal Implementation Team

CAC - Citizens Advisory Committee

Developed Materials

The following materials were developed as a part of this project and are available by request.

- Tools and resources
 - Community Engagement Guide: How to Engage With Communities of Color 101, Guidance for Environmental Agencies and Nonprofits, Prepared by Ms. BeKura W. Shabazz, DEIJ Specialist and Racial Bias Remediator.
 - Guide to facilitating inclusive virtual meetings
- Project materials
 - Agendas
 - Facilitation Guides
 - Briefings
 - Powerpoint presentations
 - Debrief Meeting Summaries
 - Reports

Continued Education (Outside Resources)

- Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization:
https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf
- Choose Clean Water Coalition DEIJ in Action Guide
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/1/folders/1GYbIg2EWwSEJe7pcU3zGEpGQDUWK2CS3>
- White Supremacy Culture, From Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:ef61a058-3c30-30c4-a511-b010d7afd267>
- White Supremacy Culture – Still Here, Tema Okun, May 2021
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XR_7M_9qa64zZ00_JyFVTAjmqVU-uSz8/view?usp=sharing
- The Spectrum of Community Engagement to Ownership, developed by Rosa González of Facilitating Power.
<https://acrobat.adobe.com/link/review?uri=urn:aaid:scds:US:5af5f6ff-b134-33c2-b848-3983dccb7ab5>
- So You Want to Hire an Equity Consultant: A Guide for Leaders and Organizations, By Kerrien Suarez with contributors Ericka Hines, Andrew Plumley, Kate Loving & Seana Jean
<https://equityinthecenter.org/so-you-want-to-hire-an-equity-consultant>