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Over \$970,000 Awarded for Grants to Strengthen Local Organizations Advancing Environmental and Community Health Goals

The Chesapeake Bay Trust, in partnership with the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Chesapeake Bay Program, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, and several other funders, announces over \$970,000 for 36 organizations to help build their capacity to achieve local goals for watershed restoration and protection. Through the Capacity Building Initiative (the Initiative), awardees will receive funding to increase the effectiveness of their organizations to address natural resource and community health issues within the Chesapeake Bay, Coastal Bays, and Youghiogheny River watersheds. Great work cannot happen without strong organizations.

“The Capacity Building Initiative ensures we invest resources into the local organizations taking meaningful steps to ensure their own communities have access to healthy natural resources,” **said Megan Milliken McPherson, executive director of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network.** “We can achieve our collective goals for the Chesapeake Bay and surrounding watersheds when we bring more groups into this movement, supporting their ability to implement the on-the-ground action needed to protect and restore the environment in communities across the region.”

The Capacity Building Initiative is supported by a diverse group of funders including the Chesapeake Bay Trust, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Chesapeake Bay Program, Keith Campbell Foundation, Hillsdale Fund, Prince Charitable Trusts, Philip Merrill Foundation, and Agua Fund. Not all funders invest in this type of work, which has a myriad of long-term benefits but sometimes fewer immediate visible on-the-ground environmental outcomes, and the Initiative’s funder collaboration has been lauded nationally for its willingness to address these challenges faced by nonprofits.

“Smaller organizations often grapple with challenges like technical assistance, leadership training, and strategic planning as they build strong foundations to achieve their goals,” **stated Martha Shimkin, EPA Director of the Chesapeake Bay Program Office.** “This funding empowers organizations that have bold ideas and real solutions to strengthen our natural resources, helping them scale up and deliver critical results.”

The initiative is led and administered by the Chesapeake Bay Trust on behalf of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network. This annual grant program provides funding to organizations to promote their ability to carry out their missions. Grants are awarded to eligible nonprofit organizations or local governments in Delaware, Maryland, New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia and Washington, DC.

Examples of projects funded include overarching external assessments of organizational effectiveness and then work to address areas for improvement; creation of volunteer programs; strategic plans; website upgrades; development of stronger boards through training and recruitment; staff leadership and management training; development of efficient operations processes; software upgrades and other technology improvements; and fundraising plan development. New this year is funding for smaller municipalities who often have fewer resources to build capacity to carry out critical watershed improvement efforts.

“Investing in organizational health for smaller nonprofits and governments allows for the implementation of local strategies, empowering people to enact the green solutions needed for their communities,” said **Dr. Jana Davis, president of the Chesapeake Bay Trust**. “We are proud to administer this program to help community-inspired and community-owned initiatives grow and thrive to ensure the sustainability and health of all of our neighborhoods.”

2024 Capacity Building Initiative Awardees

Shenandoah Valley Black Heritage Project: *Virginia* - \$29,260 to improve fundraising capabilities and strengthen its board and volunteer engagement. These improvements will allow the organization to continue to expand its work into uncharted areas of the Valley.

C&O Canal Trust: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$14,780 for the upgrade of its website and its mobile C&O Canal Explorer app. The project will impact the entire length of the C&O Canal National Historical Park (NHP) from Georgetown, D.C. to Cumberland, MD.

Northern Virginia Conservation Trust: *Virginia* - \$18,893 to develop a five-year Strategic Development Plan. The project involves analyzing NVCT’s historical giving data and conducting training to bolster fundraising knowledge and creating a portfolio of compelling marketing materials.

Chesapeake Conservancy: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$25,340 for a website to support the Chesapeake Conservation Partnership (CCP), a collaborative of 100+ partners (federal, state, tribal, nonprofit, land trust) working toward protecting 30% of the Chesapeake Bay watershed by 2030.

Resilience Authority of Charles County, Maryland, Inc: *Maryland* - \$31,600 to develop a Strategic Action Plan to provide direction and resource management for Whole Watershed Restoration.

GreenTrust Alliance Inc.: *Maryland* - \$21,987 to strengthen and sustain Baltimore Area Conservation Goals by supporting board development and fundraising planning.

Trash Free Maryland: *Maryland* - \$20,800 to develop an effective strategic plan to maximize resources to systemically reduce trash with an emphasis on plastic.

Annapolis Maritime Museum & Park: *Maryland* - \$15,825 to achieve the vision of Annapolis Maritime Museum through the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS). The leadership team will complete training to optimize AMM's mission and impacts.

Sultana Education Foundation: *Maryland* - \$15,000 to develop strategies to further diversify its Board and staff.

Virginia Association for Environmental Education: *Virginia* - \$14,992 to have the technology, staff, and infrastructure to support their work as they transition from a grassroots volunteer organization to an organization leading within the environmental space.

Minorities In Aquaculture: *Maryland* - \$27,000 to build the capacity of the board and CEO. MIA will build an internal sustainable operation aligned to a long-term strategic plan.

Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance: *Virginia* - \$30,000 to increase the capacity of the Conservation Hub. They will improve their fundraising strategy, financial management, communications, and procurement and staffing protocols.

Catoctin Land Trust: *Maryland* - \$29,962 to lead the Heart of Maryland Collaborative's shared agenda to preserve the lands and restore the waters of four Potomac River tributaries in Washington and Frederick counties. The project will create a development plan for financial growth and sustainability.

Oyster Recovery Partnership, Inc.: *Maryland* - \$24,911 to hire a consultant to update the organization's strategic plan. The plan will consider future Chesapeake Bay restoration needs.

Harford Land Trust, Inc.: *Maryland* - \$20,270 to build the organization's fundraising program, specifically the development of Planned Giving and Monthly Giving programs. Project activities include consultant support, training, new marketing materials, and establishing and tracking revenue goals.

Friends of the Rappahannock: *Virginia* - \$16,196 to bring their volunteer program to the next level by building new volunteer resources across the three office regions.

Potomac Riverkeeper Network: *District of Columbia* - \$25,000 to redesign its website to improve user experience and drive donations and other engagement actions through more impactful storytelling and content that is responsive to their audiences.

Interfaith Partners for the Chesapeake (IPC): *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$29,723 to strengthen IPC's organizational capacity through strategic planning and systems enhancement. IPC will contract consultants to facilitate the strategic planning process and assess internal operational systems.

West Virginia Rivers Coalition: *West Virginia* - \$14,550 to implement a comprehensive customer relationship management (CRM) platform that integrates external communications and internal management, which will allow the Coalition to more effectively communicate with and track its current and prospective donors and volunteers.

Maryland Reentry Resource Center Inc.: *Maryland* - \$25,000 to enhance organization sustainability by diversifying funding streams and reducing grant dependency. Funding will support a fundraising consultant to help develop a comprehensive fundraising plan.

Lower Shore Land Trust: *Maryland* - \$25,000 to support the refinement of an innovative grant management database. In addition to this, the organization will review and update its employee and HR policies as well as strengthen LSLT's board.

Maryland Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education (MAEOE): *Maryland* - \$37,498 to diversify MAEOE's revenue sources through the development of sustainable practices.

Chesapeake Conservation Landscaping Council: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$28,759 to implement an updated marketing and outreach plan to expand the reach of the Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional (CBLP) certification and training initiative, a Bay-wide program offering training on sustainable landscaping and green stormwater infrastructure (GSI) best practices such as rain gardens and permeable pavement.

AfriThrive: *Maryland* - \$15,000 to develop a comprehensive three-year strategic plan that will enhance organizational effectiveness, sustainability, and resilience.

Assateague Coastal Trust: *Maryland* - \$15,000 to strengthen its Board governance, executive leadership, and internal processes to enable ACT's core mission to thrive.

Dreaming Out Loud Inc.: *District of Columbia* - \$30,000 to hire a strategic planner to empower their team, bolster community health, drive job creation, and support their network of small farmers, ensuring sustainable growth and impactful service.

Vietnamese American Services: *Maryland* - \$30,000 to engage with a large-scale network of partners. Project activities will lead to the development of an action plan for a long-term collaborative environmental protection alliance.

Virginia Conservation Network: *Virginia* - \$30,000 to offer training for VCN Partners within the environmental community. VCN will develop collaborative training programs centered around conflict resolution and inclusive leadership.

Mobilize Frederick: *Maryland* - \$29,560 to develop a fundraising plan and provide training to board members, staff, and volunteers.

Moonshot Missions: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$22,000 to strengthen HR capabilities to support their growing team and implement practices that empower their mission to achieve improved water outcomes.

National Wildlife Federation: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$36,295 to increase its communications capacity internally and among the more than 300 nonprofit organizations in its membership through the hiring of a paid Communications Intern.

Southern Maryland Resource Conservation & Development, (Inc.): *Maryland* - \$29,560 to support professional assistance for financial needs, to retain a more diverse Board, and to train current members to better serve communities.

Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay: *Maryland* - \$150,000 to expand technical capacity for local governments through a shared technical assistance model and create an action plan for each municipality and training for municipal staff. The project will result in increased technical capacity of smaller, under-resourced municipalities to protect local waterways and a long-term, resilient partnership with municipal leagues.

Common Grain Alliance: *Chesapeake Bay Watershed Wide* - \$10,000 to grow its network of grain farmers, processors and grain artisans within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Deepening the network will help develop a stronger financial foundation through revenue from membership dues and expand effectiveness as a regional value chain coordinator.

Valley Conservation Council: *Virginia* - \$18,000 to develop a five-year budget and craft a fundraising strategy to meet budget goals. This project is designed to guide growth as a regional land trust, so that they can better conserve the Shenandoah Valley region.

Chesapeake Legal Alliance: *Maryland* - \$15,000 to support a website update and storytelling project. These initiatives will empower Chesapeake Legal Alliance staff to proactively place cases and increase the visibility of their work.

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About the Chesapeake Bay Trust

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (www.cbtrust.org) is a nonprofit grant-making organization dedicated to improving natural resources through environmental education, community engagement, and local watershed restoration. The Trust's grantees engage hundreds of thousands of individuals annually in projects that have a measurable impact on the waterways and other natural resources of the region. The Trust's work is supported by the sale of a specialty license plate; donations from individuals and corporations; and partnerships with private foundations and federal, state, and local governments. The Trust has received the highest rating from Charity Navigator for over two decades: On average, 90 cents of every dollar go to programs.