

Regional Capacity Building Initiative

FY22 Request for Proposals



Chesapeake Bay Trust

108 Severn Avenue, Annapolis, MD 21403

(410) 974 – 2941 ♦ www.cbtrust.org

Regional Capacity Building Initiative

At A Glance

Program Summary:

The Regional Capacity Building Initiative (RCBI) is designed to increase the effectiveness of collaborative efforts working within one of five priority regions. RCBI will support collaborative strategies and increase collective capacity to advance shared regional goals at the intersection of community and watershed health.

Deadline:

Friday, August 13th, 2021, at 4:00 PM EST

Eligible Project Locations:

This program welcomes requests for proposals from organizations working in five specific regions in the Chesapeake Watershed: Wards 7 and 8 in the Anacostia region, the Baltimore Metro Region, the Choptank River Watershed, Lancaster County, and the Shenandoah Valley.

Resources to be Requested through a proposal to this RFP:

Successful applicants will be awarded entrance into the program, which will offer training and/or funding (pending funding availability), for up to five years. Proposals should be accompanied by a year 1 funding request not to exceed \$200,000.

Submit Your Application:

Follow the instructions online at:

https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_1520?SA=SNA&FID=35176

Contact:

Kacey Wetzel, Director, 410-974-2941 ext. 104,
kwetzel@cbtrust.org



Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Program Goals.....	3
RCBI Assistance Provided.....	4
Evaluation Criteria.....	5
Eligible Applicants	6
Funding Availability, and Timeline	6
Deadline	6
Application Review Process	6
Awards and Notifications.....	6
Contact	7
Narrative Questions	7
Budget Instructions.....	8
Online Application Submission Instructions	9
Appendix A: Regional Priorities.....	11

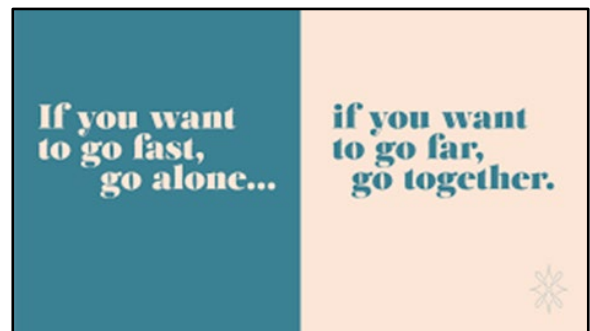
Introduction to the Chesapeake Bay Trust and Program Partners

The Chesapeake Bay Trust (Trust) is a nonprofit, grant-making organization dedicated to improving the bays, streams, rivers, forests, parks, and other natural resources of our local systems, from the Chesapeake to the Coastal Bays to the Youghiogheny River. The Trust, supported in large part by Maryland's Chesapeake Bay License Plate and partnerships with other regional funders, engages and empowers diverse groups to take actions that enrich natural resources and local communities of the Chesapeake Bay region. Since 1985, the Trust has awarded over \$130 million in grants to municipalities, nonprofit organizations, schools, and public agencies throughout the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Capacity Building Initiative is an initiative of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network and is supported and administered by the Chesapeake Bay Trust. Funding partners include the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Chesapeake Bay Program, Agua Fund, the Keith Campbell Foundation, the Hillsdale Fund, Prince Charitable Trust, The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, and the Kentfields Foundation. These funders also compose the Capacity Building Initiative workgroup of the Chesapeake Bay Funders Network.

Program Goals

Different organizations bring different strengths to bear when tackling certain challenges. Some bring large followings, some bring greater connection to resources, some bring name recognition. Working together – collaborating – can therefore advance common goals, as organizations can leverage each others' strengths rather than building them up alone internally.



The Regional Capacity Building Initiative (RCBI) is designed to enhance local networks composed of organizations from a variety of sectors who are committed to working collaboratively on shared goals at the intersection of community and watershed health. Through the collaboration support provided through this initiative, local networks' ability to advance programs and policies to improve community and watershed health of regions will be enhanced in the short-term as well as beyond the five-year term of the initiative.

Through this initiative, funders will provide to the organizations that are part of a collaborative network, as well as the network framework itself, a) program/organizational/network potential evaluation and training services, b) technical assistance on key topics related to working together as a collaborative network, and c) grants to strengthen and diversify regional networks working together to advance a shared regional and community-driven agenda that improves the quality of life in the region and protects and restores natural resources.

Within each regional network, one entity will apply to this RFP. Applicant organizations must apply on behalf of a network and be excited to participate in a multi-year capacity building initiative. The best proposals will describe proposed networks that are "cross-sector," meaning that different types of organizations who have missions focusing on a variety of community and environmental topics propose to work together. Examples could be organizations who are primarily faith-focused and have an interest in natural resources under the

umbrella of faith; organizations that are primarily focused on improving communities or neighborhoods and view green spaces as part of that mission; organizations who prioritize the arts and are open to natural resource themes in that art; and organizations who prioritize improving natural resources and recognize that engaging residents is part of that work. Any network member included in the proposed collaborative must be willing to participate in trainings and network meetings, and ready to work to identify and advance shared goals.

The Trust is committed to the advancement of diversity and inclusion in its award-making and environmental work. As a result, the Trust strongly encourages applications directly from underrepresented groups and for projects that increase awareness and participation of communities that are traditionally underrepresented, such as communities of color. For a full description of the Trust's efforts to engage under-engaged groups, see our strategic plan at www.cbtrust.org/strategic-plan and <https://cbtrust.org/diversity-inclusion/>.

Regional Capacity Building Assistance Provided

Regional networks selected for participation in the Capacity Building Initiative through this Request for Proposals will receive an assessment of potential opportunities and barriers by an outside third-party (not the funders), training to overcome one or more of the barriers identified, technical assistance, and funding (as available) over the course of the five -year initiative. The intent of funders is to make a five-year investment strengthening the collaboratives, diversifying the types of organizations working together to tap into diverse strengths, enhance network sustainability, and advance coordinated strategies. Once selected, planning and capacity building grants will be available to networks in each region on an annual basis for up to five years, pending funding availability. Funding will be managed by a lead network member, and can be used to support network coordination, development and implementation of collaborative programs, network communication and planning efforts, sub-awards to network members, as well as targeted capacity building activities within individual organizations.

These resources and associated estimated time commitments are described in greater detailed below:

Third-party collaborative assessments and services: Networks will be aided in identifying needs and specific actions focused on establishing a shared agenda, analyzing collective strengths, gaps in capacities, how to effectively engage those that are missing from the collaborative, and increasing their collaborative sustainability. Outcomes from the assessments will inform training and technical assistance offered via third-party contractor(s). While the time commitment associated with assessment efforts will be driven in part by network members, it is anticipated that network members will complete the assessment a minimum of three times with the network contractors over the course of a five-year period.

Trainings: Selected networks will participate in trainings based on assessment outcomes. Depending on the specific needs of program participants, the Initiative will provide training sessions, workshops, and peer learning opportunities on various topics related to needs and strategies of the networks. These training and information sharing sessions will be scheduled independently and in combination where possible. Applicants should anticipate attending a minimum of one training and/or information sharing session annually over the course of the initiative.

Technical Assistance: Networks will receive coaching and technical support periodically throughout the five-year period. In year one the contractor will schedule meetings with the selected networks to build on themes from the trainings and help guide the network in operationalizing best practices. Network members will have

the opportunity to bring challenges, questions, and concerns to the network consultant, therefore shaping the technical assistance offered. Applicants should anticipate attending a minimum of two network coaching sessions annually.

A Collaborative Capacity Building Grant (up to \$200,000): As part of the initial application, networks will request up to \$200,000 to advance a year 1 collaborative scope of work, discussed further below. Once networks are selected for multi-year program participation, they will not have to re-apply during the five-year period; however, networks will have to submit collaborative scopes of work on an annual basis to unlock additional years of funding. Award agreements for this initiative will be between the Chesapeake Bay Trust, the fiscal agent of the funding initiative, and the lead network organization (the organization that submits the request on behalf of the network.) Organizations participating in the networks will work together to develop collaborative scopes of work. Funding requested can support but is not limited to projects to diversify network membership; network coordination, development and implementation of collaborative programs, network communication and planning efforts, and targeted capacity building activities within individual organizations. Organizations participating in and benefiting from funding resources must be willing to work towards an enduring and sustainable network. While individual organizations may choose to disengage from the network at any time, they would no longer be eligible to receive funding through this initiative if they do so. Funds may not cover full costs of collaborative implementation plans, but they should be leveraged to build capacity and critical support for change. In recognition of funding limitations network members will be encouraged to seek additional funds from other sources to expand implementation of plan strategies.

Evaluation Criteria

Funders anticipate selecting four to five networks. The following criteria will be used by reviewers to score proposals:

Need (40 points): There is a demonstrated need for network support and/or enhanced collaboration among diverse partners at the local level framed by both the current health of local communities and waterways of the region as well as the status and need for cross-sector collaboration to enhance local efforts.

Readiness (20 points): Networks must demonstrate readiness to accelerate collaborative approaches to their work to advance one or more of the priorities identified within their region, which are detailed in Appendix A. Networks must also demonstrate a willingness to develop or enhance a shared agenda and collective actions with other groups engaged in the initiative. Networks must also demonstrate the ability to work with a diverse array of community partners, including but not limited to local governments, non-governmental organizations, landowners, farmers, other private citizens, community and neighborhood organizations, and businesses.

Diversity (20 points): The network includes organizations representing a variety of non-profit sectors that could be essential to advancing regional goals by building a more powerful base of community support and/or a more strategic and coordinated delivery of programs to advance clean water and community health goals. Organizations participating must have a demonstrated track record of leadership in relevant local communities to address specific community needs through direct services, advancing policy reforms, working in partnership with government and nongovernmental organizations to find innovative solutions and increase public engagement.

Leadership support (20 points): Support must be demonstrated by letters of commitment written by the leadership of network member organizations. Letters should validate an understanding of the value of and commitment to collaborative work. Leadership support is critical to network sustainability and will indicate the potential of the network to advance programs and policies to improve communities and clean water beyond the term of the initiative.

Eligible Applicants

The Chesapeake Bay Funders Network and the Trust welcome requests from a single organization on behalf of a group of organizations committed to working together long-term. Organizations eligible to apply on behalf of the network include but are not limited to: 501(c)3 private nonprofit organizations faith-based organizations; community associations, service, and civic groups, municipal, county, regional, state, federal public agencies, soil/water conservation districts, and public higher educational institutions.

Applicant organizations should have the capacity to allow at *least* one staff person to participate in the collaborative process over the five-year initiative.

Funding Availability, and Timeline

Funding Availability: The funding partners anticipate funds available in FY22 as follows:

- ◆ Up to \$200,000 per year for five years, pending funding availability.

Project Timeline: Projects must be completed within 12 months upon receipt of the award before submitting a subsequent scope of work. Requests to extend project completion period will be reviewed and considered on a case-by-case basis.

Deadline

Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 PM EST on August 13th, 2021**. Late applications will not be accepted, and the online funding opportunity will close automatically and promptly at 4 PM EST. Applicants are strongly encouraged to submit at least a few days prior to the deadline given the potential for high website traffic on the due date. The Trust cannot guarantee availability of technical assistance for our online system on the deadline date.

Application Review Process

Each application is reviewed by a technical external peer review committee, called the Technical Review Committee (TRC), composed of individuals who are experts in the fields supported by this RFP. The TRC ranks and scores all applications based on the criteria listed in the “Evaluation Criteria” section above, then meets to discuss the application merits. The TRC then recommends a suite of applications to the Trust’s Board of Trustees.

The funding partners reserve the right to fund projects and budget items that advance their missions and meet specific funding priorities and criteria.

Awards and Notifications

All applicants will receive a letter stating the funding partnership’s decision. An application may be declined, partially awarded, or fully awarded. If approved, the Trust will send an award agreement with award conditions and due dates of status, progress, and final reports. The Trust will mail the first award payment to the requesting organization following: satisfaction of any phase 1 payment award contingencies, including upload

of the signed award agreement. Ten percent of the total award will be held until the final report is submitted and approved. In cases where the awardee fails to submit a status report, progress report, or final report by the due date, the Trust reserves the right to terminate the award agreement and require a refund of funds already transferred to the awardee.

When the project is complete, awardees are required to complete final reports that may include but are not limited to submission of all receipts for supplies, invoices for subcontractors/contractors, and copies of timesheets for personnel time used (timesheets must include date, name, time worked per day, and coding to tie the time worked to the award).

All financial back-up documentation will be grouped and numbered to correspond to the budget line item reported as spent. Organizations with outstanding final, progress, or status reports will not be awarded additional grants.

The 2022 Regional Capacity Building awards will be announced September 2021.

Contact

For technical assistance contact Kacey Wetzel at (410) 974-2941 x 104 or kwetzel@cbtrust.org

Narrative Questions

You will be asked to upload a Word or PDF file addressing the following points. We recommend that you copy and paste the questions below into a Word document to use as an outline for your narrative, ensuring that you have addressed all necessary questions. Make sure that your answers describe how the criteria in the “Evaluation Criteria” section of the RFP will be met.

- 1) Need:** Please describe the need for collaborative capacity building support. Specifically address the following.
 - a. Which of the five priority regions will your group be working in? Priority regions include the Anacostia (Wards 7 and 8), the Baltimore Metro area, the Choptank watershed, Lancaster County, or the Shenandoah Valley.
 - b. Describe the top 2-3 pressing issues impacting the communities and waterways within your priority region. Please make connections to Appendix A. issues where possible.
 - c. Describe your network (established or developing), and the degree of communication, coordination, and collaboration occurring among the relevant organizations within your network. What challenges and needs are your network experiencing?
 - d. Describe how participation in the regional capacity building initiative would help address network challenges and needs. In other words, explain why the region and the groups identified in this proposal are well suited to leverage the support provided by this initiative to affect significant change in the region.
- 2) Readiness:**
 - a. With contractual support from the Consensus Building Institute, CBFN completed a regional capacity assessment of each of the priority regions. Outcomes from the assessment included a summary of key strategies or issue areas to be advanced in each of the regions, which are summarized in Appendix A. A key focal point of RCBI is to select networks that are ready and willing to advance strategies identified in the assessment. Please identify:

- i. Which issues (listed in Appendix A) your network plans to work on (in year 1) and why your network has prioritized these issues. If your network does not intend to focus on any issues listed in Appendix A. please describe which issues your network will prioritize and why.
 - ii. How your network will address the issues prioritized. In other words what will your network do to address the issues and how will network members work together to implement shared strategies in year 1.
- b. Describe your network's ability for meeting the estimated time commitments for participating in the RCBI offerings described in the 'Regional Capacity Building Initiative Assistance Provided' section above and the network's proposed collaborative projects.

3) Diversity:

- a. Describe your network's membership structure and provide a detailed list of your network's membership. A key focus of RCBI is the support and advancement of diverse networks of cross-sector organizations. Please highlight diversity in participating organization's mission and issues of focus as well as their role in the network.
- b. If you envision an expansion of the number of groups engaged in your network, list what groups or types of groups you would like to involve in the future and why they would add value to the network.

4) Leadership Support: What is the level of commitment from the leadership of the member organizations in participating in the RCBI offerings and supporting the network to advance shared goals? *Please provide letters of commitment from each of the participating network member organizations. Letters should affirm the value the organization sees in network membership and confirm each organization's intent to meet the time commitments required of RCBI, designate a key contact(s) to serve as a representative within the network, and a commitment to the long-term sustainability of the network.*

5) Sustainability: The Trust aims to invest in projects that have the longest potential longevity, after the initiative has ended. At the end of five years of support from this initiative what would success look like in your region? Discuss the future you see for the work for which you are requesting funds. What factors may affect its long-term value and how will you ensure its long-term value is maximized? If the network will need ongoing financial resources to maintain its value, provide an abbreviated plan describing how the project will be sustained beyond the term of the initiative.

6) Contractors: If you plan to subcontract work, applicants must have either already obtained cost estimates or quotes from at least three service providers prior to completing the application, indicate in the proposal that at least three estimates or quotes will be obtained. Has/will a contractor be hired and has a contractor been selected? Describe your contractor selection process, including justification and background of the selected contractor. If using a bid process, describe the process.

Budget Instructions

Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Upload

You will be asked to upload your budget using the "Application Budget" worksheet of the Chesapeake Bay Trust's **Financial Management Spreadsheet (FMS)**, an excel file template. The template can be found by visiting <https://cbtrust.org/forms-policies/> where you can also watch a video with instructions on how to complete the FMS.

Financial Management Spreadsheet – Application Budget Information

This online application component will ask you to enter budget category and request totals. These totals will be automatically calculated in the FMS Application Budget, so you will only need to copy and paste the values from the FMS to the Online Application.

Additional Budget Justification

This online application component will ask you to provide a descriptive budget narrative to justify and explain costs.

If the success of the work is contingent upon award of other funds, make this clear in your budget justification section.

Online Application Submission Instructions

The Trust uses an online system for the application process, and if awarded, project management. To apply for an award, go to https://www.grantrequest.com/SID_1520?SA=SNA&FID=35176 and click on “Get Started” to begin a new application. This will open a new window asking you to log in or create an account on our online system. If you have applied in the past, use your existing username and password (if you have forgotten either of these use the ‘forgot password’ feature). If you have not used our online system before, click on “New Applicant” and follow the instructions.

Applicants must submit applications in the **Chesapeake Bay Trust Online System** by **4:00 pm on Friday August 13th**. Late applications will not be accepted, and the online funding opportunity will close promptly at 4:00 pm.

By applying to this program, applicants acknowledge that: 1) they are compliant with federal employment and non-discrimination laws and 2) they have not been debarred, convicted, charged or had a civil judgment rendered against them for fraud or related offense by any government agency (federal, state or local) or been terminated for cause or default by any government agency (federal, state, or local). In addition, all final products will be provided to the funding partners for use and distribution at the sole discretion of the funding partners.

Watch our video on how to apply for and submit an application using our online system at <https://cbtrust.org/grants/>.

Online Application Form

You will be asked to provide the following information on the online application form. Some items are required in order to submit your application. Refer to the online application for details.

- Eligibility Quiz
 - This three-question quiz is meant to assist you in determining if your project meets the requirements of this award program and that your staff/organizational structure best supports a successful application.
- Applicant Information Tab
 - Provide the organization’s name, mailing address, phone number, organization type, mission, EIN number, and DUNS number.
 - Provide the Executive Officer and Project Leader’s name, title, address, phone, and email address.

- Both an Executive Officer and a Project Leader, two separate individuals, must be identified for all applications.
 - The Executive Officer and Project Leader must both be able to make decisions on behalf of the organization either as a board member, an employee, or other approved position recognized by the organization but not a contractor of the application.
 - The Project Leader will be responsible for all project coordination and correspondence with the Trust for the duration of the project. The email address entered here **MUST** be the same as the email address you used to log in to the online system. The Project Leader is the primary point of contact for the application, and the email address used to submit the application via the online system must be that of the Project Leader. Applications in which the email address associated with the Project Leader in the applicant information tab of the online opportunity does not match the email address used to submit the application will not be considered for funding. The Trust cannot conduct any official correspondence with contractors or other project partners. If at any time the Project Leader cannot continue in the position, the organization must contact the Trust and assign a new qualified Project Leader.
 - To avoid conflict of interest issues, individuals associated with for-profit entities to be engaged in the project cannot serve in either role.
- Project Information Tab
 - Provide a project title; project abstract; the watershed, county, and legislative district in which the project is located; and the latitude and longitude coordinates of the project location.
- Timeline Tab
 - Add the project start and end date. Provide a project timeline that includes major tasks and their associated start and end dates.
- Deliverables Tab
 - Provide estimated metrics for your proposed project such as project participants and outreach and restoration outcomes.
- Volunteers Tab
 - Provide a description of volunteer activities, the number of volunteers, and total number of volunteer hours.
- Project Partnerships
 - Provide a list of project partner organizations or contractors, individuals, their areas of expertise, and their role(s) in your project.
 - Applicants are encouraged to upload a letter of commitment for the project from each partner describing in detail the partner's role or contribution to the project. Applications including strong letter(s) of commitment often receive higher scores. If not submitted with the application, letter(s) of commitment may be required prior to the release of any awarded funding. To better understand the Trust's definition of and policy on Letter(s) of Commitment, visit our Forms and Policies webpage: www.cbtrust.org/forms.

- Narrative & Supporting Documents Tab
 - Upload a Microsoft Word or PDF file that contains your answers to the narrative questions found in the Narrative Questions section of this RFP. Upload additional supporting documents, if needed/required.
- Budget Tab
 - Upload your application budget, provide budget category and request totals, and provide additional budget justification. Use the Trust’s Financial Management Spreadsheet and fill out the “Application Budget” worksheet. Refer to the Budget Instructions of this RFP.
- Terms and Conditions Tab
 - Agree to the specified terms and conditions for the program for which you are applying.

Appendix A: Regional Priorities

Between summer 2020 and spring 2021 a regional capacity assessment was conducted of six priority regions in the Chesapeake watershed. These regions were selected for assessment based on an iterative mapping process and stakeholder input. Several factors were considered when prioritizing regional assessment work, including the degree of pollutant loading, development pressure, prevalence of factors tracked via EPA’s Environmental Justice Screen, and the opportunity to build capacity in the region given current resources. Third-party services focused on surfacing key barriers to improving natural resources and associated focus areas that should be addressed as well as the collaborative capacity of stakeholders in the selected regions. Assessment work included an iterative set of interviews resulting in tailored capacity assessment reports for each region, a portion of the outcomes of each of the reports is summarized below.

Anacostia (Wards 7 & 8) – Five focus areas were identified as high priority to be addressed in the Anacostia region, including:

- **Reframe the “Environment”** - The capacity assessment in the Anacostia highlighted the need to talk about how community members describe “the environment” and how nearby resources can support personal growth. To engage a broader set of residents in water quality and natural resource issues, the environment must be reframed in new ways. Ideas ranged from community storytelling to connecting older residents and children, restorative justice circles, and coordination with homeless support services. The recently completed Women Like Us cohort sought to improve mental health for ten participants through nature-based trauma-informed care programming. This is a much broader framing of environmental benefits than typical benefits such as walking, biking, and fishing, but is critical to engaging a wider range of residents in an authentic way. Using a broader framing will make it easier to engage the community in natural resource and health issues that impact them.
- **Develop Green Jobs** - Green jobs are a priority in the Anacostia because there are gaps in which green jobs are needed (especially for maintenance of green infrastructure projects) and unemployment rates in Ward 7 and 8 are very high. It has been difficult to secure long-term jobs for graduates of green job certification programs. Some example efforts to date include the Ward 8 Woods which provides jobs to clean up parks, the Anacostia Park Community Corps, and Ranger Programs at Kingman and Heritage Islands Park. Workforce development organizations like Ward 7-based Constituent Services Worldwide trains workers for a wide range of green infrastructure services (e.g., rain gardens, green roofs, wetland

planting, and other stormwater infrastructure). While additional efforts are underway via the DC Green Jobs Workgroup, enhanced strategies to advance green job development are critical.

- **Build Community Leaders** – While some leadership development efforts are underway, such as Community Leadership Empowerment Workshops (CLEW) as part of the 11th Street Bridge Project, and the APACC Fund to support community projects and give leaders on-the-ground experience, there is still a significant need for leadership development programs to enhance community-led efforts.
- **Environmental Education** – The capacity assessment identified the need to help shift how the community views the environment by continuing to connect youth and teenagers directly to the environment through school coursework and community events. By increasing the environmental literacy of teens in the priority region (who will soon be young adults) the social capital of the region will be lifted so that residents have the knowledge and skills necessary to engage on natural resource and community health issues that impact their lives.
- **Water Quality and Community Health** – The capacity assessment surfaced a desire for successful community programs that are both improving water quality and community health to be expanded. For example, Anacostia Riverkeeper’s water quality testing and restoration work and Ward 8 Woods litter clean up events were both identified as scalable efforts. Additionally, it was noted that enhancement of the ongoing efforts to start a bottle and can recycling program and expansion of the civic engagement efforts led by the several regional non-profits related to the Sediment Project and improving stormwater permits are important efforts that should be scaled up.

Baltimore Metro Region – Three focus areas were identified as high priorities to be addressed in the Baltimore Metro region.

- **Strengthen Cross-Jurisdictional Collaboration** - Implementation of the strategies that show promise of strengthening cross-jurisdictional collaboration and building a broader coalition to engage with city and county government agencies with a unified message. The checkered history of city-county collaboration suggests that it would take a multi-year, sustained campaign by NGOs, institutions, and funders to ensure that government leaders and agency staff see the value of collaboration so that it extends beyond the current administrations. This five-year capacity building initiative is a rare opportunity to create that sustained effort, building on efforts already underway.
- **Strengthening the number, capacity, and connectiveness of community-based organizers and organizations** - Strengthening the number, capacity, and sense of connection of community-based organizers could have a significant impact on the effectiveness of environmental and community health partnerships, networks, and initiatives in the Baltimore region. Stronger community-based organizations within the Baltimore Metro region could mobilize more voices of support around city-county wide initiatives and priorities and potentially garner greater attention from the government for increased funding and policies that are shared priorities of NGOs working on environmental and community health issues.
- **Workforce Development** – The assessment surfaced a need to convene organizations and explore a more formal collaborative effort to address the barriers to scaling up workforce development and job placement. There is a need to reach out to a broad range of workforce development organizations in the region to ensure information is shared effectively and the best strategies are advanced within the region. The purpose of the convening would be to discuss opportunities and barriers and clarify the level of commitment of invited organizations to working together to address them.

Choptank River Watershed – Two focus areas were identified as high priorities to be addressed in the Choptank River Watershed.

- **Expand Coordination to support Local Governments and Communities** - Through fundraising and collaborative efforts, partners in the region have piloted several successful initiatives to share “circuit rider” positions to provide technical assistance, outreach, and coordination to farmers, residential landowners, and local governments, to help coordinate and streamline assistance among multiple organizational partners. The regional assessment found that these pilot efforts of shared and coordinated support offered tremendous value to organizational and governmental partners alike. As a result there is a continued need to provide additional shared support, particularly for municipalities and counties, around grant writing, grant management, and planning services. While efforts are underway to build on the work piloted by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation and Healthy Waters Round Table, additional support for to advance to expand coordination is needed. Opportunities exist to work with communities and potentially universities to develop a watershed-wide data layer of stormwater flooding, aiding local governments in strengthening the objectives and strategies (related to water quality and natural resource protection and restoration) in comprehensive plans and other plans and ordinances, and expand outreach to disenfranchised communities.
- **Develop New Barrier-Busting Collaborations and Approaches** - Despite all the work on-going in the Choptank region, significant barriers and opportunities remain. These include:
 - dealing with the ongoing legacy of underfunded maintenance of conservation and restoration practices
 - adapting to the changes in land use that are and will continue to occur with climate change.
 - finding cost-effective solutions for shoreline restoration and other hard-to-fund restoration practices at scale
 - supporting implementation of BMPs for non-operating landowners (NOLs) and leasing farmers
 - building collaboration and leveraging the energy of the Mid-Shore Board of Realtors’ new Clean Water Committee
 - engaging additional disenfranchised communities and deepening the support provided to equip residents and community leaders with the tools they need for effective civic engagement to address water quality and climate change issues.

These important, large-scale, complex issues will require creative interventions to effect necessary change in the region.

Lancaster County - Three focus areas were identified as high priorities to be addressed in the Lancaster County region.

- **Increase Agricultural Technical Service Provision Efficiency and Coordination** - Unfortunately, there are not enough public, non-profit nor private sector agricultural technical service providers to service the need on-the-ground to meet relevant goals, even if there were a modest increase in the total number of full time employees carrying out this work. Several factors, identified in several reports across the Chesapeake, stymie greater efficiency and effectiveness including:
 - State budget cycles and the ebb and flow of legislative commitments don't provide a reliable, steady and multi-year investment for staffing. While foundation funding for additional TSPs as well as a

Regional Conservation Partnership Program grant and other targeted grant programs have helped, they have been insufficient to address the full need.

- Even if monies are available, state and federal government hiring practices, requirements, budget, staffing caps, and other factors can significantly impede hiring, training and deployment of additional employees.
- Many TSPs are typically not paid sufficiently to keep them on the job for the extended time needed to build both technical sophistication as well as strong relationships with farmers.¹ A 2017 NFWF report (2017 NFWF and Chesapeake Bay Funders Network's *Agricultural Technical Assistance Capacity Assessment of the Chesapeake Bay Region*) found that the number one cited barrier to retaining the work force was the inability to competitively compensate employees. Retention is essential because it's estimated that it takes from 18 to over 24 months for TSPs to be fully independent and effective.
- TSPs "soft skillsets" are difficult to train and somewhat hard to find – those who are successful require a nuanced understanding of and ability to interact with the culture of farmers in a region, be that because of the type of farming (dairy versus beef cattle) or the culture of farmers (Plain Sect or non-religious). The Lancaster CAP notes that retaining enough capacity with the mixed technical and relational skillsets needed, combined with long-term commitment to the role, has been difficult to do.
- TSPs among the public, private, and non-profit sector may at times compete, rather than cooperate, engage the same farmers across different BMPs or programs, and not coordinate in a way that could increase efficiency, BMP adoption, and farmer satisfaction. The Lancaster CAP has identified some success in coordinated agricultural outreach, but this has been limited to a few sub-watersheds.

The Penn State inventory of programs, funding, and resources concluded: "Given the largely partner-driven capacity for outreach in Lancaster County and the funding-driven opportunities for implementation dollars, we recommend a strategic approach that takes advantage of existing skills and resources of the county's partnership network." There is no lack of ideas for how to address this capacity, even without necessarily increasing the number of FTEs to undertake the work. Many ideas and options are included in Boots on the Ground and other reports. Ideas include creating a supply of culturally and technically competent providers, providing retention bonuses or other financial incentives for retaining providers longer at typically underpaid publicly-funded positions, retooling the roles and functions of TSPs across organizations within a sub-watershed, or building a senior corps of retired farmers to undertake some of the work in a trusted way. The challenge is not a lack of ideas, but rather their testing on the ground from those doing the work, as well as those on the ground prioritizing capacity building investments with the most leverage and greatest chance of success. And of course, funding the priorities chosen.

- **Create and Implement a County-wide Clean Water Investment Plan** - The updated 2020 Lancaster Countywide Action Plan (CAP) outlines a path for achieving a 11-million-pound reduction in nitrogen and a 500,000-pound phosphorus reduction for cleaner and clearer water for throughout the county. This must be done by taking action with agricultural best management practices (BMPs), stormwater BMPs, riparian buffers and restoration practices. However, it has been estimated that the CAP would need \$340 million to achieve its goals, far more than the current investments from multiple sources provide. The Partners assume that there will need to be a *six-fold increase* in funding starting in the second half of 2021, amounting to dollars approaching \$70 million per year.

¹ While there is not readily available data on the exact salary gap, for instance, in Virginia where state salaries are more readily available, the Soil And Water Conservation District Of Thomas Jefferson's in year 2016 average annual salary was \$27,643 and the median salary was \$25,786. This average salary was 41 percent lower than USA average and the median salary was 41 percent lower than USA median. For the Culpeper Soil and Water Conservation District in year 2019, the annual salary was \$38,146 and the median salary was \$46,111 which was 19 percent lower than USA average and the median salary was 6 percent higher than USA median. (<https://govsalaries.com>).

Currently, partners from across the county draw money from nearly 50 distinct funding programs for a variety of activities. Federal funding agencies include EPA, USDA, NRCS, USDA FSA, and USFWS. State funding programs range from Community Development Block Grants to PENNVEST nonpoint source projects and PA Act 13 programs. County funding programs range from Conservation Excellence Grants to the Lancaster Clean Water Fund and Lancaster MPO's Smart Growth Transportation Program to conservation district programs. Foundation funding comes from such sources as the Steinman Foundation, Feree Foundation, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Chesapeake Bay Trust, and the Campbell Foundation, among others. However, these varied sources of funding come in on different timeframes, with different requirements, to different organizations, and collectively leave gaps in both total funding and in programs funded.

Penn State Agriculture and Environment Center completed an inventory of partners and resources and developed a recommended integrated funding strategy for the county in late 2020. It also called for the need to maintain and grow a diversity of funding sources. The Lancaster CAP noted that key success factor number one will be finding and securing long-term dedicated funding for CAP implementation through a diversified and sustainable set of funds.

- **Growing “Others” Capacity** - The host of organizations across the county will continue to need targeted capacity building support to become even more effective partners for water quality improvements. The capacity assessment surfaced a host of challenges and opportunities. For instance, in some sub-watersheds a few talented individuals have become powerful and effective brokers for increasing the coordination and delivery of technical services to farms in that area. But these individuals will not last forever in their positions and furthermore have much to teach others about coordination, differentiation, and leveraging existing resources. Cities and Towns with MS4 permits are advancing their requirements, as well as looking for opportunities to grow a local workforce, especially for residents of color and those with a more marginalized economic status, through green infrastructure projects. A great deal of work has been done on rural well and septic water quality through monitoring and testing but getting resources to these individuals to address their problems requires increased capacity and interconnection. While there are many actors in the county, in some cases long-standing tensions in relationships need to be addressed and reduced in order to increase working relationships and thus increase effectiveness. The county's many actors need to continue to grow their capacity in how to best and most effectively work with state government.

Shenandoah Valley - Three focus areas were identified as high priority to be addressed in the Valley, including:

- **Expand alliances & connections for movement building** - While the Valley has numerous networks, organizations, and individuals committed to conservation across a host of issues, all these efforts and networks have not necessarily been fully tapped to find common cause. In general, without a greatly expanded movement to support clean water, healthy communities, natural resources, sustainable economies, and equity in every sphere, Bay restoration goals in the Shenandoah Valley will remain out of reach. Greater equity will likewise remain elusive. Conversely, there is the opportunity to build a broad, deep, and equitable movement to secure funding and public policies necessary to meet the Valley's Chesapeake Bay and related community health goals. There is a tremendous need, heightened by the national dialogue on race and justice, to engage and expand new constituencies in an authentic and just way. There is a need to bridge the region's urban-rural divide and build supportive relationships with leaders in communities of color and among demographics rarely involved in decisions

about land, water, and economic development.

Rural water issues exist across the Valley in ways not yet fully understood. These issues include private wells with potential bacterial or nutrient contamination; individual septic systems poorly performing, if at all, affecting nearby streams; and small scale non-incorporated municipal systems struggling to operate and function appropriately and within standards. As the state's Watershed Implementation Plan notes: "Malfunctioning septic systems are currently the leading cause of groundwater pollution in Virginia." Thus, ensuring small water systems can meet water quality standards and lower-income rural homeowners can both reduce impacts from their septic as well as ensure they have clean water in their private wells is important.

Regarding stormwater, numerous watershed and other groups near and around MS4 permit holders (Harrisonburg, Waynesboro, Stanton, Augusta County, James Madison University, VDOT, others) are not fully informed nor engaged to help move along the implementation of MS4 permits. Opportunities include local employment, green infrastructure, connections to schools and education, and building a stronger rural-urban constituency. There are many interested in rain gardens, swales, highway buffers, green infrastructure, and more natural solutions to drainage and flooding. In addition, there is also opportunity to engage players in the Valley's smaller communities by helping make green improvements that make these places healthier and more beautiful. Most Valley communities fall below the 50,000-population threshold for such permits. Stormwater BMPs can engage citizens in exciting, hands-on, and sustainable projects that allow them to make a practical difference while being part of a greater movement.

- **Integrate water quality with multiple issues & actions** - Most clean water activities named in the Watershed Implementation Plan are focused on agricultural BMPs and stormwater BMPs. However, there are a host of other activities in the Valley with their primary focus NOT necessarily being water quality that do and can have direct water quality impacts or benefits. These include but are not limited to such issues as rails to trails and growing a more local to regional resilient food system.

For example, the Shenandoah Valley is blessed with great beauty and numerous recreational assets. One of the growing features of the Valley are existing or proposed rails to trails, from the local, few-mile Silver Lake walking path in Dayton to the proposed Cooks Creek and Blacks Run Greenway to the 49-mile proposed trail from Broadway to Front Royal, connecting Rockingham, Shenandoah and Warren Counties. These trails and greenways provide numerous benefits such as recreational enjoyment, increased property values, economic development, and health benefits of walking and being outside, brought to the forefront due to COVID-19. These trails, many of which are alongside streams and creeks, can also provide an established buffer for water quality, improved wildlife habitat, and the reintroduction of native species where invasive species once dominated.

The Valley has an active group of citizens and NGOs working on the regional trail; however, there are numerous smaller trails and their advocates across the Valley, not to mention organizations within local cities concerned about equity, equal access, recreation, and public health, who are not particularly connected or linked to one another in more powerful ways. A Valley-wide network of trail advocates and proponents could lead to better and faster development of these trails, the realization of their benefits, and linking between key constituent building efforts. Trail development is a focusing and

powerful way to build and deepen the rich legacy of conservation in the Valley, while also engaging, educating, and connecting citizens and organizations directly with water quality and diversity, access, and equity initiatives. There are also opportunities to create or improve pocket parks and advance access to and expansion of existing parks. Such place-based advocacy can serve as focusing efforts for capacity and constituent-building.

As another example, there is growing attention toward local and regional food systems with a focus on the sustainability of land and resources, including water, with several actors and constituents. This work includes activities such as reestablishing local value-add meat processing and ensuring Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) can be used to purchase locally grown, nutrient dense, healthier foods. While these proponents are typically focused on economic development, public health, and equity, their constituents hold the potential to be a powerful advocate(s) for clean water. After all, sustainable, local agriculture can improve water quality through reductions in inputs (pesticides, fertilizers), improved soil health (low or no-till to regenerative rotational grazing), and intensive attention to sustaining the ecological capital of the region. It will be important for groups to engage openly, directly, and transparently about the linkages and connections to water quality. The goal of this and other recommendations is to bring water quality proponents into the fold of related but currently somewhat separate efforts, while at the same time bringing those proponents into the fold of water quality. Establishing relationships to “show up” for these issues will build trust and reciprocity in strong support and advocacy for water quality.

- **Integrate equity and justice into the region’s strategies to meet Bay restoration goals and protect the Valley’s extraordinary natural resources and improve the quality of life for all residents** - The Valley, like much of the U.S., remains inequitable in terms of access to food, public health, recreational amenities, capital, land, technical services, and other economic opportunities for people of color. There is the need for existing/traditional conservation grantees to learn to identify and authentically engage more diverse constituencies at a one-on-one scale. This work means “going to them,” not asking residents to “come to us.” It means extensive time and patience to build relationships, overcome long barriers of mistrust and neglect, and a commitment to not only begin this journey but stay the course for years to come. There is the opportunity is to address injustice AND to increase access to clean water, air, and land and the resulting public health benefits AND to improve quality of life AND to expand and sustain a powerful sense of home, place and stewardship in the Valley that is inclusive of all.