



Decision Making and Governance

STAC November 2025 Topical Meeting Synthesis

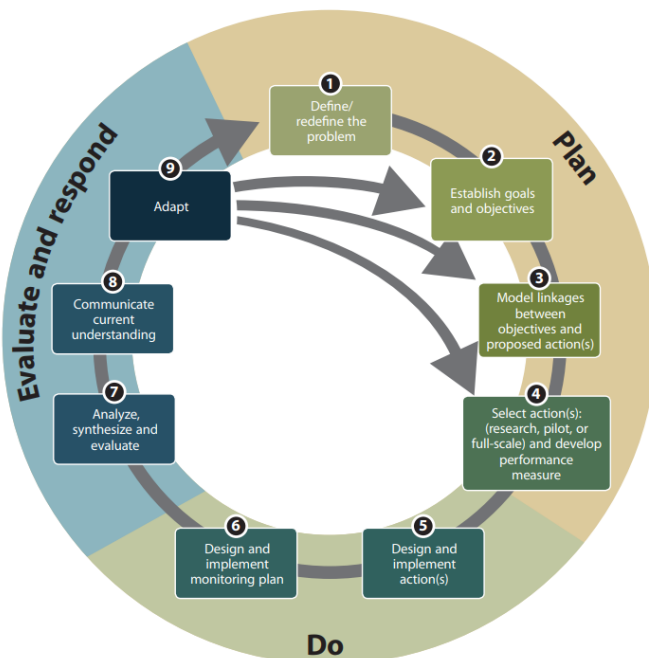
The Chesapeake Bay Program (CBP) Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee (STAC) held a virtual topical meeting titled *Decision Making and How it Affects Governance* on November 18, 2025, with a focus on decision making and governance changes in the CBP. The CBP is currently undergoing a transformation to a new organizational structure and governance model in association with the *2025 Revised Watershed Agreement*. This STAC meeting was designed with a focus on the functions associated with this new structure and discussion on strengths/weaknesses of potential logic framework changes. STAC members and meeting participants convened with a goal to provide technical advice to the CBP through this process. In order to develop a more robust discussion, we invited four speakers with regional stormwater program experience, followed by breakout sessions and a group discussion. The meeting was facilitated by Dr. Lara Fowler, Penn State University (PSU).



Fig. 1. In clockwise order: Dan Coogan (US EPA), Tanya Heikkila (University of Colorado Denver), Rich Batiuk (CoastWise), and Penny Vlahos (University of Connecticut).

Dr. Dan Coogan, the new CBP Director, introduced himself and his experience with governance (Fig. 1). Dr. Tanya Heikkila, from the University of Colorado Denver, summarized her experience with the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta program (as well as other programs). Dr. Penny Vlahos, from the University of Connecticut, shared her experience with the Long Island Sound program. Mr. Rich Batiuk, the former CBP science lead, co-authored “*Restoration of the Chesapeake Bay: Lessons for other ecosystems*” and shared his experience in the Chesapeake Bay and elsewhere.

Adaptive Management Cycle



The adaptive management cycle employed by the *Delta Science Plan (2019)* that was presented by Dr. Tanya Heikkila (Fig. 2) was embraced in the breakout sessions because this version of adaptive management included several avenues for feedback in addition to the traditional circular feedback cycle. CBP would benefit from identifying multiple avenues where feedback can influence adaptive management, which correspond to the different questions in the proposed CBP Logic Model (Fig. 3). A flexible set of adaptive management cycles requires good structure and well-designed rules. Ultimately, employment of flexible adaptive management can build resilience and effectiveness in the CBP.

Fig. 2. The Delta Plan’s Adaptive Management Framework. The Delta Science Plan can be viewed at <https://deltacouncil.ca.gov/pdf/2019-delta-science-plan.pdf>

In response to the discussion at the Topical Meeting, a potential logic model for the CBP is presented where the inputs lead to activities which in turn generate outputs and ultimately outcomes (Fig. 3). On the adaptive management side, the questions “How do we know what is right?” “Are we doing the right things?” and “Are we doing things right?” relate to the inputs, activities and outputs respectively. The four advisory committees can play a crucial role in answering these questions and provide reasons for celebration or recommendations for improvements. On the accountability side, the CBP Executive Council focuses on funding and regulations, the jurisdictions and US EPA focus on implementation activities, other program partners focus on outputs, and ultimately the community are the judge of the outcomes.



Fig. 3. A potential CBP Logic Model proposed by the [STAC Inform Governance and Accountability Ad-Hoc Workgroup](#) to prompt discussion.

Summary Conclusions

- 1. Adaptive Management and the Advisory Committees:** Effective adaptive management of the CBP has been a long-standing objective, and continued efforts to develop more effective approaches are warranted. Utilizing the four CBP advisory committees (Science and Technical Advisory Committee, Stakeholders' Advisory Committee, Local Government Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee) will result in reaching a broad group of people, receiving input, and ultimately generating an effective adaptive management feedback loop.
- 2. Decision Making:** The CBP needs a clear picture of who is accountable for which outputs and outcomes. A clear causal model that links the activities of the different groups who participate in Bay Program activities will help identify the synergies obtained through collaboration. Rather than avoiding conflict through the consensus continuum, having structured and facilitated conflict management can result in better outcomes.
- 3. Accountability:** Performance goals need to be embedded in reporting and feedback, especially for non-TMDL goals. Clarity in reporting is crucial, and both the evaluators and the process of evaluation need to be clear. The time scales of accountability are important – how often are the outputs and outcomes being evaluated, and are there different time scales for different outcomes?
- 4. Communication and Engagement:** A nested suite of communication products is necessary to provide broad overviews and more details for those wanting more depth. It is important to communicate good news, bad news, and uncertainty. Having a trusted source is key to the effectiveness of the communication. Meaningful engagement is key to broadening the support base for CBP initiatives.
- 5. Experimentation:** The community typically doesn't understand the concept of experimentation related to environmental management. The concept of investing in a project where failure is possible is untenable for the public sector. Yet, scientists and resource managers appreciate that the various implementation efforts are, in fact, large scale experiments. The lack of appetite for experimentation leads to a preponderance of traditional management practices, rather than trying out different approaches that could lead to transformative practices. The [Comprehensive Evaluation of System Response \(CESR\) report](#) makes the case for significant experimentation and this 'sand-boxing' approach is recommended.

Results of a Topical Meeting

The CBP STAC manages a series of virtual topical half-day meetings through the year. This topical meeting was conducted by STAC, and this short summary represents a rapid turnaround overview, which will be accompanied by a more in-depth reporting by the [STAC Inform Governance and Accountability Ad-Hoc Workgroup](#) at a later date.

