WATER for AGRICULTURE

Why and What For: Funder Experiences in Collaborative Agricultural Water Programming

Jake Reilly
Director, Chesapeake Bay Programs, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation

The Water for Agriculture Webinar Series welcomed Jake Reilly who shared collaboration insights and experiences from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) Chesapeake Bay Stewardship Fund, a 20+ year partnership with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Designed to support regional watershed restoration, the Fund has grown to a $20 million program that provides 1,300 grant awards to more than 500 organizations every year. "At NFWF," Reilly explained, "our basic model is to pull our resources across interested funders and help design and deliver grants and programs aimed at addressing the largest conservation challenges in key regions across the country," he explained. To support on-the-ground species and habitat restoration, Reilly helps NFWF bring together funding and collaboration opportunities between federal agencies, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector.

On December 29, 2010, the U.S. EPA established the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), a historic and comprehensive "pollution diet" to restore clean water in the Chesapeake Bay and the region's streams, creeks, and rivers. "The TMDL program," Reilly explained, "called for practices to be in place by 2017 to meet 60 percent of the overall nitrogen, phosphorus, and sediment reductions from the Bay by 2025." "As of 2019," he continued," the Chesapeake Bay was only about 25 percent of the way there." "We saw the need to significantly scale up implementation."

In 2017, the EPA called for a midpoint assessment of NFWF's Chesapeake Bay Programs. "They were interested in better understanding how grant and public funding programs could be used to accelerate implementation [of Best Management Practices (BMPs) in the Bay]," Reilly explained. The University of Maryland's Environmental Finance Center was solicited to analyze NFWF Chesapeake Bay programs primarily funded by EPA resources. After investigating nearly 700 grants awarded from 2010 to 2015, analysts "laid out a theory of change that encapsulates the various elements needed to [have successful BMP implementation programs]."

"They found that there was a need for thinking more broadly about how we can use collaboration and partnerships to support implementation outcomes," Reilly described. "The overarching takeaway is that there is a need for a more codified approach to regional scale investing in support of water body improvement in the Bay that includes projects and programs, but also investments in directly building things like practitioner capacity and informing use of continuous evaluation for adaptive management."

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An additional third-party evaluation of NFWF's nutrient and sediment reduction grants program recognized three takeaways: (1) partnerships and networks are essential for diffusing innovations in watershed management and BMP adoption; (2) clustering projects by geographic location helps enhance innovation transfer; and (3) programs should continue developing, leveraging, and supporting partnerships to facilitate dissemination and adoption of effective and innovative practices. Reilly described how NFWF concluded that "It's not just about coming up with and testing innovations. It's about replicating them and getting them out there in the landscape."

After these various reports were completed, including EPA's TMDL mid-point assessment, the EFC analysis, and NFWF's own third-party program evaluation, Reilly was "called to the carpet by the EPA to come up with a plan for how [NFWF Chesapeake Bay Programs] was going to put these recommendations into action." "One of the first things I did," Reilly explained, "was to conceptualize what we are trying to get at as an organization. What are the kinds of models we can show that we want this work to touch on?" Reilly created a framework for supporting regional restoration partnerships and networks (see below). The Y-axis (vertical) asks, "How do you get the entire landscape to be successful?" The X-axis (horizontal) asks, "How do organizations interact with each other?" "This framework illustrates that networks and partnerships range in how they collaborate and how successful they are," Reilly explained. "What we want folks to be doing is moving along the Y-Axis and up the X-Axis."
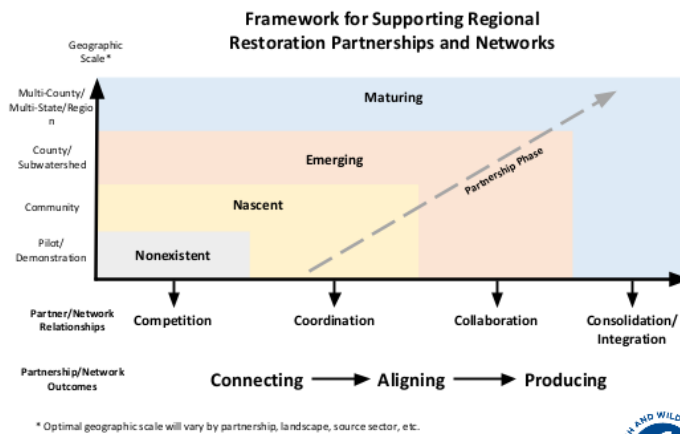
With support from the EPA, NFWF contracted the University of Virginia Institute for Engagement and Negotiation to conduct a review of model ecosystem restoration collaboration across the U.S. The goal of this study was to identify the key factors that enable and drive collaboration success and impact. Using a review of academic literature in combination with expert interviews, observations from a workshop with Chesapeake Bay funders and practitioners, and data from an online survey with 40+ collaborators, four key factors were identified as being imperative for successful collaboration: Motivation, Capacity, Process, and Evaluation. This list of factors, their definitions, and examples of funding strategies is included on the last page. Findings from this work "affirm what we've heard over time and reinforces what we've heard anecdotally from our partners for years," Reilly explained. "It formalizes and details how collaboratives are designed and supported by funders."

Concluding his presentation, Reilly offered three examples of model collaboratives in the Chesapeake region:

➢ Lancaster Clean Water Partners:
https://lancastercleanwaterpartners.com/
➢ Shenandoah Valley Conservation Collaborative:
https://shenandoahalliance.org/project/shenandoah-valley-conservation-collaborative/
➢ Delaware-Maryland (DE-MD) 4R Alliance:
https://4rmidatlantic.com/about/delaware-maryland-4r-alliance/

Though these collaboratives differ in geographic location, motivation, organization structure, and evaluation methods, they offer shining examples of collaboratives focused at varying geographic scales that leverage partnerships between public and private interests.

To view the full webinar, click here.

Jake Reilly, Director, Chesapeake Bay Programs, National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

*This webinar series brief was prepared by Hannah Whitley.

Table 1. Key Factors for Successful Collaborative Agricultural Water Programming

Factor	Definition	Key Elements	Funding Strategies
Motivation	Factors that inspire and sustain engagement	• Strong mission and vision • Building strong relationships among members and stakeholders • Effective and dynamic leadership • Communicates internally the benefits of collaboration, success stories, and lessons learned • Undertakes strategic planning	• Funding for meetings, outreach events, and/or networking events • Funding for collaborative coordinator staff position(s) • Provide 'pass through' funding that collaboratives can manage themselves • Provide long-term and flexible operations funding
Capacity	Factors that empower collaboratives	• At least one paid staff position • Sufficient operational resources to support core operating activities • Paid staff position that provides technical expertise • Diversified fundraising strategy that is not solely reliant on grants	• Fund coordination staff first, technical expertise as feasible • Provide support for staff and leaders to undertake professional development around managing collaboration • Provide long-term and flexible operations funding • Provide pilot/innovation funding to allow collaboratives to test new ideas
Process	Factors that facilitate collaboration	• Conducts regular, effective meetings, including face-to-face meetings • Well-defined and clearly-communicated approach to decision-making • Clear governance structure • Codified processes that guide operations • Effective external communications plan	• Support information-sharing of best practices for collaboration • Provide funding for collaboratives to retain facilitators • Provide or fund trainings for collaboration leaders and staff to gain key organizational and process skills • Assist with and engage in collaborative strategic planning

Evaluation	Factors that advance effectiveness and impact over time	• Well-defined indicators, goals, and outcomes for
		   ◦ On-the-ground projects and programs, AND
		   ◦ Development of its capacity and effective processes
		• System/plan for evaluation that includes both programmatic and process metrics
			• Provide or fund training for collaborative leaders and staff to learn why and how to undertake better evaluation
			• Develop and provide free, easy-to-use templates, models, guides, and tools to support self-evaluation
			• Require grant applicants to include an evaluation plan – including both programmatic process indicators