

# **Findings and Recommendations for Discussion and Decisions at the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership's January 14-15<sup>th</sup> 2020 Leadership Council Strategic Planning Meeting**

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## **Background**

As an integral part of the preparation for the January 14-15, 2020 Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership's Leadership Council meeting, the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership Office's consultants, CoastWise Partners, conducted individual telephone interviews with the Leadership Council members, the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee chair, the Executive Director and the rest of the members of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership's (APNEP) Office staff.

Key findings based on a review of the compilation of all the interview responses are provided below. Each finding is followed by a recommendation or set of recommendations generated by CoastWise Partners for discussion, consideration and, ultimately, decisions by the Leadership Council. The complete compilation of responses to each of the interview questions are provided in **Attachment A**. Leadership Council members and Partnership Office staff are strongly encouraged to review the full compilation of interview responses prior to the January strategic planning meeting to understand first-hand the depth and breathe of concerns, ideas and recommendation recorded during the interviews of the Partnership's leaders and staff.

## **Key Findings and Recommendations**

**1. Finding:** The Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership staff is viewed by their partners as providing important services as conveners and facilitators, with the potential for serving as a nexus of science, management and policy for the APNEP study area. Partners believe that APNEP is making progress on SAV assessment and monitoring and is recognized for developing successful K-12 education programs through their 'Shad In the Classroom' efforts. APNEP is now considered 'fully-staffed' after several lean years, and staff are recognized as effective in bringing Action Teams together. The APNEP Leadership Council members recognize that serious challenges remain to becoming a successful Partnership. However, they also recognize the potential benefits and advantages of addressing the challenges and appear ready to tackle them.

**Recommendations:**

**1.1 Agree to renew the partners' commitment to the goals of the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership** through a formal agreement signed by the engaged partners. Consider staging a public ceremony for this signing, signaling a renewal of the Partnership to the public.

**1.2 Agree to a date (month, year) at which time a formal agreement will be signed** and the steps needed to prepare for the signing ceremony. Consider holding a Recommitment Ceremony in conjunction with the signing of the updated CCMP in 2022.

**2. Finding:** After recognition as an estuary of national significance over three decades ago, the Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership still faces a number of very fundamental questions regarding its collective goals, its shared mission, its effectiveness, its unique roles and niches, its public recognition and whether it is truly a partnership with a shared governance structure and collaborative decision-making responsibilities or strictly a federal grant program with limited implementation funds and a small staff.

**Recommendations:**

**2.1 Reach agreement as to whether to continue to proceed forward strictly as a \$600,000 federal grant program supported by 8 staff persons or evolve into a true partnership** with a common governance structure and shared policy, programmatic and technical decision-making on targeting implementation actions supported by a diversity of funding sources.

**2.2 Charge the Partnership Office staff to develop a renewed set of draft goals, mission statement and descriptions of the roles and responsibilities of the Partnership, its partners and the Partnership Office staff** based on input from the January Strategic Planning Meeting for final decisions by the Leadership Council at a spring 2020 meeting.

**3. Finding:** The Partnership is burdened with a CCMP containing 52 different actions, an office staff working under an ecosystem-based management interpretation that dictates addressing all issues in all places, a multitude of Implementation Action Teams and Monitoring & Assessment Teams, and the lack of a clear set of partnership-approved priorities focused on a select set of integrated topics and defined geographic area(s) for management application.

**Recommendations:**

**3.1 Charge the Partnership Office staff to team up with the chairs of the Leadership Council, the (recommended) Management Board, and the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to develop a limited set (2 or 3) of integrating restoration and protection focus areas and the corresponding geographic areas** which would be formally

adopted by the Leadership Council as the Partnership's shared funding and near-term implementation priorities. Base the selection of integrated priority focus areas on their importance to the environmental and economic health of sounds and their watersheds as recognized by scientists, managers, policy makers and the public. Until adoption of a revised CCMP, these formally adopted focus areas and geographies would supersede what is contained in the current CCMP.

**3.2 Reconstruct the existing suite of Implementation Action Teams and Monitoring & Assessment Teams to focus on the adopted near-term integrating focus areas** for review by the Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council. Restructure the existing relevant teams around the adopted priority focus areas and retire or suspend teams which do not address them.

**3.3 Charge the Partnership Office staff to develop options, with pros and cons, for stepping up engagement of Virginia within the Partnership** for review by the Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council.

**4. Finding:** The current management structure is not functioning effectively, is missing critical organizational components, is not fully representative of key partners and stakeholders, is not fully engaged, is lacking communication and clear direction, and does not have organizational procedures driving towards producing implementation-oriented products and decisions, with the sheer number of teams outstripping the ability of partners to lead and participate in and Partnership Office staff to support them.

**Recommendations:**

**4.1 Charge the Partnership Office to develop a set of options and their recommendations for making changes to the Partnership's management structure and governance procedures to directly reflect the Partnership decisions on the focus areas and the corresponding geographic areas** for review by the Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council. These recommended changes should directly address the extensive feedback provided by APNEP leaders and Partnership Office staff through the series of phone interviews performed by CoastWise Partners including, but not limited to, the following:

- Ensure the Leadership Council members are higher policy level representatives who can make commitments on behalf of their respective agencies and organizations;
- Increase the frequency of Leadership Council meetings to quarterly during the revisions to the management structure. Direct agendas towards policy-oriented decisions and setting of priorities for the rest of the partnership;

- Incorporate a Management Board into the management structure charged with responsibility to integrate the work of the teams and advisory committees. Management Board members could include representatives of the organizations comprising the Leadership Council and other Partnership organizations. Members should have the ability to integrate information from the Science and Technical Advisory Committee, the Citizen Advisory Committee, the Actions Teams and other relevant information;
- Reinstate a Citizens Advisory Committee and charge them with bringing the perspectives from the larger public communities into the Partnership;
- Re-build a more functional and effective Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee; and
- Build the institutional mechanisms for staffing and supporting a more functional, multi-partner management structure charged with making consensus decisions directed towards increasing on-the-ground restoration and protection actions.

**4.2 Charge the Partnership Office to develop an updated organizational chart** along with a supporting set of updated governance procedures, bylaws and roles and responsibilities for each of the committees (including a newly convened Management Committee and re-established Citizens Advisory Committee) and teams to reflect the formally adopted near-term focus areas and geographies for review by the Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council.

**5. Finding:** Beyond conveners and facilitators, there are a diverse set of perspectives on the roles of the Partnership, the partners and the Partnership Office staff supplemented by a lack of understanding or misunderstanding of the existing roles by those in both partnership and partnership office leadership positions as well as staff support positions.

**Recommendations:**

**5.1 Charge the newly convened Management Board to work with the Partnership Office Director and the staff** on reaching agreement on the most appropriate priorities, roles and responsibilities for the Partnership Office Director and each of the staff positions which, collectively, will fully reflect the Partnership adopted focus areas and geographies. The agreed-to Director and staff priorities, and roles and responsibilities would be documented in detail and posted on the Partnership's web site for ensure full transparency and accountability for the future work of the Director and the rest of the Partnership Office's staff.

**5.2 Charge the Partnership Office to develop a recommended set of roles and responsibilities for the partners** for incorporation into the Partnership's governance

documentation after review by the Management Board and approval by the Leadership Council.

**6. Finding:** The effectiveness and productivity of the Partnership's Office staff is hampered by lack of internal leadership, the absence of clear priorities and follow-through, the lack of a collaborative team-based perspective, fundamental disagreements about the future course for the partnership, an inability to break from the past and establish a clear vision for the future, and questions as to the scope and focus of their individual and collective day-to-day roles and responsibilities.

**Recommendations:**

**6.1 Charge the Management Board with ensuring that outcomes of this Strategic Planning meeting are being met, and that the Partnership Office Director and staff are fully accountable to the priorities and focus areas/geographies approved by the Partnership.** Charge the Management Board with reporting progress toward implementation of the Strategic Planning session decisions on a quarterly basis to the Leadership Council.

**6.2 Agree that the Leadership Council will work to ensure that the Partnership Office Director and staff are receiving the required level of support** from the partners themselves. Charge the Partnership Office Director to raise concerns about the lack of support from partners to the attention of the Management Board and the Leadership Council for follow-through actions and decisions.

**7. Finding:** There are growing concerns about and a diversity of perspectives on the best home entity of the Partnership Office and its staff and funding which, perceived or real, are impacting the ability of Partnership Office and the Partnership itself to be seen as independent conveners and facilitators for bringing partners and stakeholders towards for the purposed of shared decision-making and priority setting all supporting on-the-ground implementation actions.

**Recommendations:**

**7.1 Agree to continue the ongoing assessment of the need for and potential alternatives for an organizational home.**

**7.2 Finalize a decision on the need for changes, if any, to the organizational home by January 2021, to allow adequate time to implement the decision prior to the 2022 recommitment and CCMP signing ceremony.**

**8. Finding:** There is a multi-decadal scale and well-established history of dramatic swings in the physical number of staff persons, the organizational location of the office, as well as level of support for and visibility of the Partnership with changes in state administrations in North Carolina. These damaging dynamics, repeated throughout the Partnership's history, call into question the long-term viability of the Partnership and continued funding support from U.S. EPA.

**Recommendations:**

**8.1 Agree that the Leadership Council recognizes that if the Partnership is to be successful and continued EPA funding assured, the Partnership needs to become more resilient to changes in North Carolina's state administrations.**

**8.2 Agree that the Leadership Council will identify and implement actions needed to prevent changes in staff, partnership visibility and priorities which are not based on decisions by the Partnership.** Many of the recommendations described in this paper will help modulate the degree of partnership changes with changes in state administrations, but further actions and commitments by the Leadership Council may be needed.

**9. Finding:** The Partnership can't demonstrate success as it lacks agreement on key indicators and measurable environmental targets, a comprehensive suite of monitoring networks generating management-relevant data, a system for shared assessment and interpretation of complex source and environmental response data sets, and systems for tracking implementation actions and ensuring accountability to commitments toward shared goals.

**Recommendations:**

**9.1 Charge the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to prepare a recommended set of indicators with numerical targets which will be regularly reported to the public as measure of progress towards the Partnership's goals.** Charge the Partnership Office Staff to work with the reconvened Citizens Advisory Committee as the initial 'sounding board' to ensure that the draft indicators and their numeric targets are understandable by, and resonates with, the public prior to presentation for review by Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council.

**9.2 Charge the reconstructed integrated Implementation Action Teams and Monitoring & Assessment Teams with responsibility for developing a monitoring network strategy responsive directly to the data and informational needs of the Partnership-approved integrated focus areas** for review by Management Board and decisions by the Leadership Council. Charge the Scientific and Technical Advisory Committee to peer review the draft monitoring network strategy to ensure the networks are taking full advantage of the latest monitoring technologies and are responsive to management's needs. Outcomes from

development of the monitoring strategy should include: creation of a regional monitoring agreement to be signed by all the monitoring program partners; and development of a partnership-based data analysis, assessment and interpretation infrastructure with an array of agency, university and organization partners having defined roles and responsibilities.

**10. Finding:** In the face of unanimous agreement that limited funds are one of the biggest challenges facing the ability of the Partnership to be more effective in making progress towards its goals, it is not clear that the Partnership and its individual partners are pursuing all possible avenues for raising funds for supporting expanded implementation of management, restoration and protection actions prioritized by the Partnership.

**Recommendations:**

**10.1 Charge the Management Board** to invite a series of funding partners and financing experts share their recommendations on how to expand the current sources of funds available to the partners and the Partnership for supporting priority implementation actions. Direct the Management Board to bring its collective findings and recommendations to the Leadership Council for further consideration, direction and decisions.

**10.2 Charge the Partnership Office** to evaluate the applicability to APNEP of sources of funding and financing opportunities being tapped into other National Estuary Programs and other similar watershed/large waterbody-based partnerships (e.g., Chesapeake Bay, Great Lakes). Direct the Director to bring Partnership Office staff's findings and recommendations to the Leadership Council for further consideration, direction and decisions.