



2025 CHESAPEAKE WATERSHED FORUM CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 11:59 PM on Sunday, June 1, 2025

BACKGROUND AND THEME

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay will hold the 20th Annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum on November 7 - 9, 2025, at the National Conservation Training Center (NCTC) in Shepherdstown, WV. This watershed-wide event reaches up to 400 restoration and conservation practitioners annually to inspire and empower local action towards clean water. We do this by:

- Sharing successful tools and techniques,
- Offering lessons and learnings from on-the-ground work,
- Building the capacity of local organizations,
- Networking with each other and fostering partnerships,
- Educating on new initiatives and emerging practices, and
- Celebrating our successes.

Our 2025 theme is “Shaping the Future of Conservation with Human-Centered Approaches.”

For two decades, the Chesapeake Watershed Forum has brought together partners to collaborate, innovate, and drive meaningful progress in restoring and protecting the shared waters of the Chesapeake Bay watershed. As we mark this milestone 20th anniversary, we have an opportunity to reflect on the successes and challenges that have shaped our work and the lessons that will guide us forward.

2025 is a pivotal year - both a moment to celebrate how far we have come and a chance to plan for what's ahead. *Planning for 2025 and Beyond* efforts led by the Chesapeake Bay Program challenge us to think critically about the future of conservation and restoration efforts. While uncertainties exist, by embracing a mindset of resilience and adaptability, we can continue building a strong foundation for the next generation of conservationists in our region.

This year's theme centers on human-centered approaches – ensuring that the needs, well-being, and aspirations of people remain at the core of our work. By prioritizing trust and collaborative decision-making, we create impactful solutions and longstanding outcomes. Our ability to navigate change isn't just about responding to external forces; it's about proactively shaping a future that meets the needs and collective futures for all of us.



FORUM SESSION GUIDELINES

Proposal Evaluation:

- We will evaluate each proposal using the rubric provided at the end of this document. A maximum possible score is 21 points for 90 and 180-minute sessions and 16 points for 60-minute sessions.
- We aim to serve our entire Forum audience by offering balanced content tailored to three different knowledge/experience levels:
 - Introductory or Early Career: 100 college course level or less than 5 years of professional experience;
 - Intermediate or Mid-Career: 200 – 400 college course level or 5+ years professional experience; or
 - Advanced or Late Career: Graduate level or 10+ years of professional experience.

When submitting your proposal, please select the knowledge/experience level that best reflects your target audience. If you feel strongly that your session transcends a specific experience level, you may submit your proposal without selecting one.

- More than one session proposal may be submitted, but each proposal must be submitted separately.
- The Forum Planning Team may ask speakers to condense more than one proposal into a single session based on shared themes or topics. Please note your willingness to do so in your application.

Presenter Expectations:

- The Chesapeake Watershed Forum is an in-person conference. All presenters will be present on-site at NCTC in Shepherdstown, WV.
- One presenter per session will receive complimentary registration to the conference for the day they are presenting. All other presenters must pay for their registration or may apply for a scholarship.
- It is our priority that both speakers and audience get the most out of each session. Speakers are expected to attend a webinar on giving effective and meaningful presentations on Tuesday, October 7, 2025, at noon. In the two weeks leading up to the Forum, presenters giving 90- or 180-minute sessions are encouraged to participate in a virtual run-through of their session with Alliance staff or planning team members in preparation for the event.



- The Alliance may offer honorariums for speakers on a limited basis. If you or a co-presenter will require an honorarium to speak at this year's event, please note this request and amount, if known, in your application.

Specific Guidelines Related to Session Length:

- Sessions are scheduled for 60 minutes, 90 minutes, or 180 minutes. Moderated panel discussions are discouraged.
 - **60-minute sessions** spotlight a case study(s) or introduce new, innovative, and/or hot topics.
 - No more than **two presenters** per 60-minute session will be accepted.
 - 60-minute sessions will not be graded by the participant engagement criteria in the rubric.
 - **90-minute sessions** are in-depth presentations that facilitate discussion and application to activities and organizations at the local level.
 - We strongly encourage no more than **three presenters** per 90-minute session. Lodging at NCTC is limited, and we do not guarantee presenters will be housed on-site. The more presenters in your session, the more likely some will be housed off-site during the Forum.
 - **180-minute sessions** are an opportunity to lead a deeper discussion into a topic of choice about which the presenter(s) have special experience, knowledge, or expertise. The 180-minute blocks are well-suited for either workshops or field trips.
 - The 180-minute sessions may occur on or off the NCTC campus. Classroom space, computer labs, and an extensive paved and unpaved trail system are available on the NCTC campus to incorporate into your session. If off campus, travel should be included in the 180 minutes.
 - Please be specific in your proposal about any expected costs (e.g., materials, entrance fees, bus rentals, boat rentals, etc.). The Alliance will work with you to either cover all of the costs associated with your activity or to build in an additional fee for participants to cover the remaining expenses.
 - Please specify in the proposal if there will be any restrictions that may limit who may participate in your session (e.g., a farm tour requires walking on rough terrain, maximum capacity, etc).

SESSION TOPICS TO CONSIDER

The following list includes relevant topics for sessions under the Forum focal areas. **Highlighted in yellow** are the topics of high priority for this year. We also encourage unrelated submissions, especially if the topic is theme-related and creative. However, proposals that relate to the topics below likely will receive a higher ranking than others (see evaluation rubric).

Focal Area	Topics	
Restoration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture (rural/urban/suburban) • Riparian forest buffers • Urban tree canopy • Emerging green technologies • Green energy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Soil health • Practice maintenance • Wetlands • Green stormwater infrastructure • New best management practices • Traditional ecological knowledge
Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Forest and urban woodland management • Policies and laws 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wildlife research/identification • Chesapeake Bay 101 • Native plant research/identification
Education and Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Art and the environment • Behavior change • Organizing grassroots campaigns • Water quality monitoring • Volunteer management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engaging new audiences • Youth engagement • Ecotherapy • Non-closure practices • Community/Coalition building
Organizational Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Alternative sources of funding • Fundraising • Introductory grant writing • Large event planning • Executive Leadership • Succession planning • Workforce development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating multi-generational workspaces • Expanding corporate engagement beyond one-time sponsorship • Advocacy 101 • Collective impact • Human Resources
Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advanced leadership training • Volunteer skill development • Self-Care 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young professional skill development • Project management
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Basic graphic design • Data interpretation • Storytelling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media engagement • Social media and marketing for small nonprofits

ONLINE PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Each proposal must include/answer the following:

- Title of proposed session (6 words or less).
- Under which focal area(s) (see page 3) does your session fall? Which topic will your session focus on?
- A summary/abstract (100 words or less).
- Is this a 60, 90, or 180-minute session?
- Describe your target audience (100 words or less) and their knowledge/experience level.
- List the practical lessons and/or skills your target audience will take away from this session. Please be specific as to why these are practical lessons and/or skills best suited for the target audience's knowledge/skill level. Are these lessons and/or skills relevant and transferable across sectors? If so, how? (200 words or less)
- How does your session relate to the theme? (100 words or less)
- 90 and 180-minute sessions only: How will you engage participants in your session? Do you intend to share your content beyond the traditional lecture format? If so, how? (200 words or less)
- 180-minute sessions only: logistics of the session that must include length, the maximum number of attendees, cost, and any specific equipment/clothing the participants should bring. (200 words or less)
- Preferred Session Date (Friday, Saturday, or either).
- Are you willing to combine your proposed session with one or more others into a single session at the discretion of the Forum planning team? Please note, that we will only offer one one-day scholarship for the combined session, with the other co-presenters able to apply for scholarships.
- Biography for each presenter (100 words or less).
- Have you presented at the Forum before? If so, how many times?
- Do you or another speaker need an honorarium to present at the Forum?



Where do I go to submit my session proposal?

[Click here](#) to submit your proposal. Please plan to prepare your proposal ahead of submitting your session via the online portal.

Forum Proposal Office Hours

The Alliance and our planning team are offering office hours to anyone who wants feedback on a proposal concept before submission. Office hour availability and sign-up can be found [here](#).

For further information or questions about the guidelines, please contact Jenny McGarvey at chesapeakeforum@allianceforthebay.org or (804) 977-1657.

Evaluation Criteria	Poor (1 Point)	Fair (2 Points)	Good (3 Points)	Very Good (4 Points)	Excellent (5 Points)
1. Timeliness, importance, and appropriateness of the topic to the field and participants' interests and priorities (based on abstract and topic)	The topic and abstract suggest the session is not current or appropriate to the field or to the Forum participants. I would not attend this session.	The topic and abstract suggest the session is not current but is a relevant topic to Forum participants (as noted in the RFP). I may attend this session.	The topic and abstract suggest the session is current and relevant to Forum participants, but it does not focus on a highlighted priority topic (as noted in the RFP). I would probably attend this session.	The topic and abstract suggest the session is current and relevant to Forum participants and focuses on a highlighted priority topic (as noted in the RFP). I would attend this session.	The topic and abstract suggest the session is cutting-edge, immediately relevant, and groundbreaking to the field. It also is a highlighted priority topic for Forum participants. I would definitely attend or recommend this session.
2A. Practical Application and Transferability (e.g., skill building, problem-solving, action planning) <u>IF PROPOSAL TARGETS A SPECIFIC KNOWLEDGE OR EXPERIENCE LEVEL</u>	No stated practical application in the proposal, or no attempt to connect practical applications to their target audience.		The practical applications appear to be for the target audience, but lessons are too broad and/or self-evident to be valuable.		The proposal content illustrates a clear practical application to the target audience. The learning outcomes are novel and important, and participants cannot find similar content elsewhere. It includes immediately usable resources or relevant perspectives that a specific set of attendees would highly appreciate.
2B. Practical Application and Transferability <u>IF PROPOSAL IS FOR GENERAL AUDIENCE</u>	No stated practical application in the proposal or the practical applications appear to be for a subset of attendees, not a broad range of participants.	.	The practical applications appear to be for a broad range of participants, but lessons are too broad and/or self-evident to be valuable.		The proposal content illustrates a clear practical application to a broad range of participants. This content is novel and important, and participants cannot find similar content elsewhere. It includes immediately usable resources or relevant perspectives that many attendees would highly appreciate.
3. Participants' Engagement <u>FOR 90 OR 180 MINUTE SESSIONS ONLY</u>	There is no evidence of meaningful interaction with the participants beyond the traditional lecture format.	The proposal includes some vague or poorly defined activities to engage the participants beyond the traditional lecture format, and/or the activities proposed are inappropriate for the session type and use of time.	The proposal includes at least one clearly defined activity to engage the participants beyond the traditional lecture format and is appropriate for the session type and use of time.	The proposal includes several clearly defined activities to engage the participants beyond the traditional lecture format, and are appropriate for the session type and use of time.	The proposal includes several clear, compelling, unique, and well-detailed activities to engage the participants, and are appropriate for the session type and use of time.
4. Relevancy to the Forum theme	The topic is not relevant to the Forum theme.	The topic is related only tangentially to the Forum theme.	The topic may not be current or groundbreaking but is relevant to the Forum theme.	The topic is current, important, and addresses an applicable and/or unique human-centered approach.	The topic details cutting edge, relevant, or groundbreaking tactics that leverage trust building, collaborative decision making, or other human-centered approaches that address the needs and/or aspirations of a community.

→ In addition to above criteria, one point will be given per proposal for a first time Forum presenter(s).