



## 2026 CHESAPEAKE WATERSHED FORUM CALL FOR SESSION PROPOSALS

**SUBMISSION DEADLINE: 11:59 PM on Friday, May 29, 2026**

### BACKGROUND AND THEME

The Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay will hold the 21st Annual Chesapeake Watershed Forum on November 13 - 15, 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 2026 theme is “Practical Solutions for People and Planet.”**

As we enter a new era for the Chesapeake, the focus has shifted from what we must do to how we will get it done. The 2026 Chesapeake Watershed Forum theme centers on the tangible: the tools, techniques, and collaborative models where research meets results.

This year, we invite technical and topical experts across disciplines to share their research or hard-earned knowledge with the Forum community. Every session is designed to apply practical solutions to ongoing challenges—whether through deepening scientific understanding, mastering a new restoration methodology, or scaling a real-world solution. By bridging the gap between innovative research and on-the-ground action, we are building the foundation for watershed success. Join us to find the practical building blocks for people and the planet.

### 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 requisite knowledge or 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 Wednesday, October 7, 2026, at noon.
- 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. 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).

High Priority for 2026	Other Focal Area Topics	
Restoration, Conservation and Applied Science		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● New best management practices</li> <li>● Agriculture</li> <li>● Emerging green technologies</li> <li>● Wildlife research and identification</li> <li>● Native plant research and identification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Riparian forest buffers</li> <li>● Urban tree canopy</li> <li>● Forest and urban woodland management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Practice maintenance</li> <li>● Wetlands</li> <li>● Green stormwater infrastructure</li> <li>● Traditional ecological knowledge</li> <li>● Policies and laws</li> <li>● Chesapeake Bay 101</li> </ul>
Education and Engagement		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Non-closure practices</li> <li>● Volunteer management</li> <li>● Community, Coalition, or Collaborative building</li> <li>● Workforce Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Art and the environment</li> <li>● Behavior change</li> <li>● Youth engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Ecotherapy</li> <li>● Organizing grassroots campaigns</li> </ul>
Organizational Development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Grant and budget management</li> <li>● Introductory grant writing</li> <li>● Board management</li> <li>● Fundraising</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Large event planning</li> <li>● Executive Leadership</li> <li>● Succession planning</li> <li>● Collective impact</li> <li>● Workplace AI usage and ethics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Navigating multi-generational workspaces</li> <li>● Corporate Engagement</li> <li>● Advocacy 101</li> </ul>
Personal Development		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Executive leadership</li> <li>● Self-Care</li> <li>● Middle Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Project management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Young Professional Skill Development</li> </ul>
Communications		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Storytelling</li> <li>● Basic graphic design</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Media engagement</li> <li>● Data interpretation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Social media and marketing for small nonprofits</li> </ul>

# ONLINE PROPOSAL APPLICATION QUESTIONS

## Each proposal must answer the following:

- Title of proposed session (6 words or less).
- Is this a 60, 90, or 180-minute session?
- Under which focal area(s) (see page 3) does your session fall? Which topic will your session focus on?
- Session abstract (100 words or less).
- Describe your target audience. Who would benefit the most from attending your session? What prerequisite knowledge is beneficial for an attendee to have in order to gain the most from your session? (100 words or less)
- Is your target audience's knowledge/experience level introductory, intermediate, advanced, or will your session serve Forum participants across a broad range of knowledge/experience levels?
- 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, "Practical Solutions for People and Planet"? (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 and contact information for each co-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](mailto: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 is relevant or a priority to Forum participants (as noted in the RFP), but the abstract suggests the session is not timely or appropriate. I would probably not attend this session.	The topic is relevant and the abstract suggests the session is timely and important, but it does not focus on a priority topic (as noted in the RFP). I would probably attend this session.	The topic is a priority (as noted in the RFP) and the abstract session is timely and important. 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 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 clearly presents a practical solution to common ongoing challenges facing Forum attendees or related to relevant emerging research.	The topic details cutting edge, relevant, or groundbreaking efforts to deepen scientific understanding, master a new restoration methodology, or scale a real-world solution to common challenges.

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