STRATEGIC PLAN
2021 - 2025

TBEP
TAMPA BAY
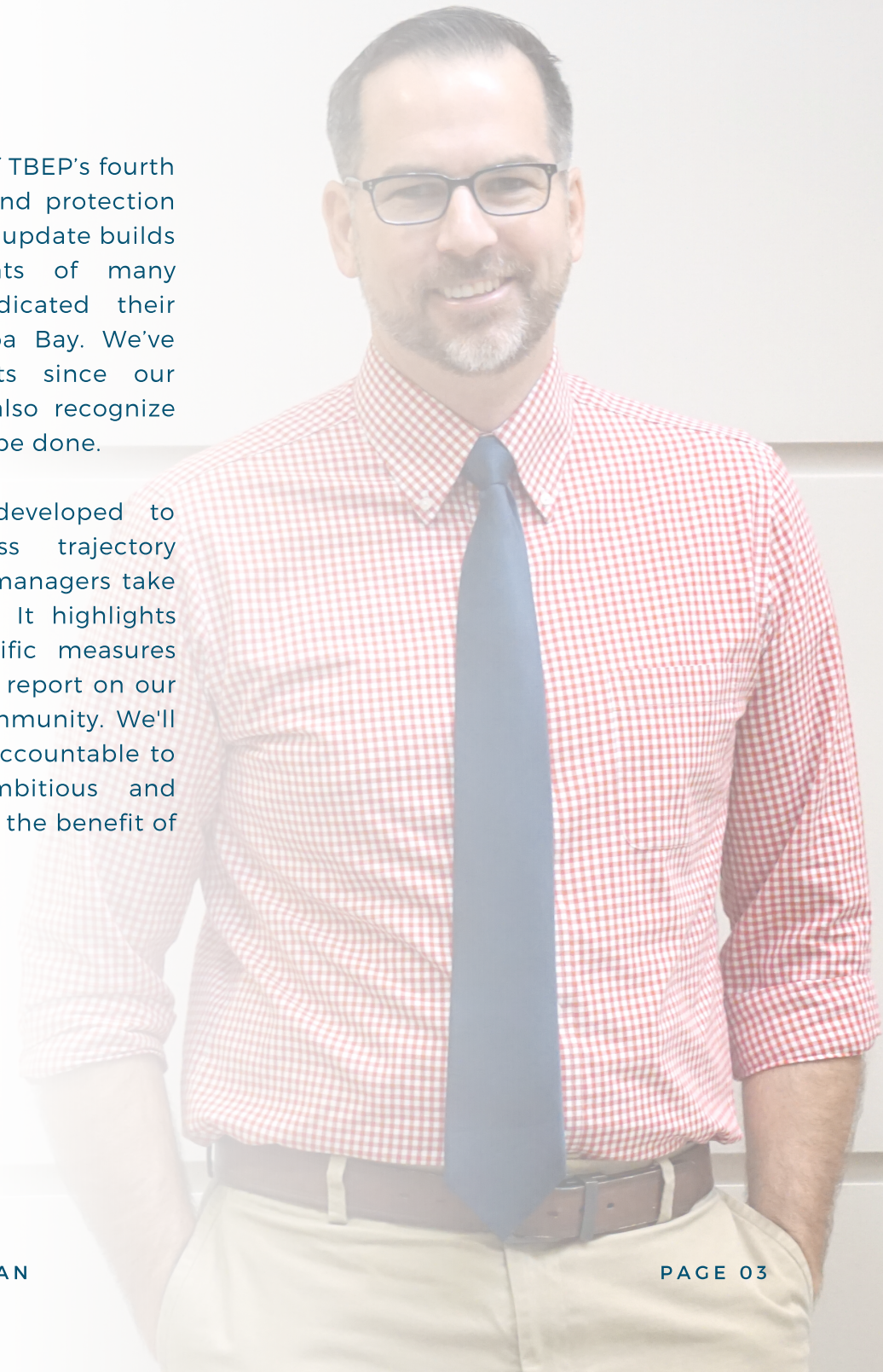### ESTUARY PROGRAM
PARTNERSHIP FOR A HEALTHY BAY

CONTENTS

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

As we mark the beginning of TBEP's fourth decade of bay restoration and protection initiatives, this strategic plan update builds upon the accomplishments of many individuals who have dedicated their careers to improving Tampa Bay. We've learned from these efforts since our inception in 1991, but we also recognize that much work remains to be done.

This five-year plan was developed to ensure that our success trajectory continues as new resource managers take the torch for bay recovery. It highlights actionable steps and specific measures that we will use to routinely report on our progress to the broader community. We'll continue to hold ourselves accountable to goals that are both ambitious and scientifically rigorous - all for the benefit of a healthy Tampa Bay.

ED SHERWOOD
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

> *The mission of the Tampa Bay Estuary Program is to build partnerships to restore and protect the Tampa Bay estuary through implementation of a scientifically sound, community-based management plan.*

ABOUT THE PLAN

This report provides a strategic road map for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP) for the period of 2021 to 2025. The updated strategic plan clearly communicates shared programmatic priorities and intended outcomes, as well as providing a framework that guides decisions about how to align personnel and financial resources with the Program's mission in ways that maximize the Program's impact on Tampa Bay recovery. Recognizing that the Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan (CCMP) is being implemented through a partnership with other entities and organizations, this strategic plan broadly outlines the directional focus of the TBEP as a stand-alone organization.

This plan focuses on the "how," while the CCMP describes the "what." It also identifies and recommends action for operational and organizational issues that were identified through the strategic planning process. This report is based on interviews conducted with management conference members, several workshops, and meetings with leadership and Program staff. This document has been reviewed and approved by the TBEP Policy Board on August 14, 2020.

VISION + VALUES

The Tampa Bay Estuary Program is a national leader in applying robust, reproducible science and compelling storytelling to drive community decisions and individual behaviors for the benefit of cleaner waters, thriving habitats and abundant wildlife—all of which sustain our economy and way of life in the Tampa Bay region.

In general, a mission statement defines what an organization is currently doing, while a vision statement is the ultimate goal of what they'd like to accomplish. The mission is a description of an organization's fundamental purpose. A vision statement describes the desired future position of the organization, indicating what the organization wants to become.

Organizational values are abstract ideas that guide organizational thinking and actions. They represent the foundation on which the organization is formed and define the ideas that are core to its delivery of services.

As an organization and as individuals within that organization, we are committed to:

01   **SCIENTIFIC INTEGRITY**

02   **COLLABORATION, COMMUNICATION, AND PARTNERSHIP**

03   **PROGRAMMATIC CONTINUITY AND STABILITY**

PROGRAMMATIC PRIORITIES

The CCMP establishes clear goals and necessary actions for the protection and restoration of Tampa Bay as they relate to improving water quality, bay habitats, fish and wildlife, dredging and dredge material management, spill prevention, invasive species controls, promoting public stewardship, and addressing the effects of climate change.

These goals and actions are summarized as three programmatic priorities:
Clean Waters and Sediments, Thriving Habitats and Abundant Wildlife, and Informed, Engaged, Responsible Community.
For the purpose of this document, "measures" describe what the Program will use to quantify, manage, and communicate results.

CLEAN WATERS AND SEDIMENTS

- **Measure 1**: Annual Water Quality Decision Matrix

- **Measure 2**: Five Year Nitrogen Loading Trends

- **Measure 3**: Annual Tidal Creek Nutrient Management Assessment

- **Measure 4**: Annual Tampa Bay Benthic Index Summary

THRIVING HABITATS AND ABUNDANT WILDLIFE

- **Measure 1:** Habitat Master Plan Status and Trends (including seagrasses, hard bottom, tidal flats, oysters, wetland habitats, upland habitats and CCHA monitoring syntheses)

- **Measure 2**: Habitat Restoration Projects Implemented in the Tampa Bay Watershed (GPRA)

- **Measure 3**: Tampa Bay Nekton Index

INFORMED, ENGAGED, RESPONSIBLE COMMUNITY

- **Measure 1**: Behavior Change Projects Implemented in the Tampa Bay Watershed (including targeted, social-scientific campaign success evaluations)

- **Measure 2:** Volunteers Participating in TBEP-sponsored Activities (including Give-A-Day for the Bay events, contests, and citizen science opportunities)

- **Measure 3**: Community-Based Grants Awarded

- **Measure 4**: Program Awareness and Science Literacy Reach Index (including social media channels, email marketing, press releases, web hits, and printed materials)

CORNERSTONE STRATEGIES

These define a general direction for how an organization's work will be accomplished in order to achieve the desired future state and are informed by the unique value proposition an organization offers within its sphere of influence. The cornerstone strategies are cross-cutting and support the achievement of the programmatic priorities. Our progress will be measured and communicated through annual performance appraisals, Work Plans, and State of the Bay reporting.

OPEN SCIENCE

Be the primary source of trusted, unbiased, and actionable science for the Tampa Bay estuary, recognizing that open science principles will serve theProgram's core values.

1.1

Report on the status and trends for CCMP indicators using open science tools that are transparent, replicable, accessible, and discoverable.

1.1.1 Create dashboards, presentations, technical documents, peer-reviewed articles, and other communication products (e.g., message boxes, public summaries, content kits).

1.1.2 Fund and/or conduct research that links cultural, economic, and/or environmental benefits.

1.1.3 Establish response protocols to direct management activities when status and trends reporting identifies potential obstacles to environmental recovery.

1.2

Maintain recognized standards of quality and ensure internal checks and balances on data collection, analysis, and reporting.

1.2.1 Standardize quality assurance and control procedures, establish metadata documentation, data curation practices, and integrate into analysis and reporting workflows. Document these procedures in an EPA-approved Quality Management Plan (QMP).

1.2.2 Work with partners to adopt best practices for data management and create open repositories for data that are accessible, discoverable, and permanent.

OPEN SCIENCE
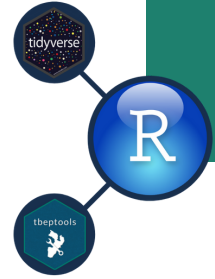
1.3

The Program, through its Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), will identify and prioritize research and data needs necessary for informing management actions.

1.3.1 Identify research and data needs to inform annual Work Plans, grant applications, and development of open science reporting tools.

1.3.2 Periodically refine indicators as necessary to supplement existing monitoring and assessment programs identified in the CCMP Monitoring and Indicators Plan.

1.3.3 Pursue grants, develop projects for annual Work Plans, and cooperate with partners to implement appropriate restoration, research and monitoring projects.

1.4

Support and expand the capacity of Program staff, the TAC, and other partners to deliver unbiased, high quality science.

1.4.1 Encourage implementation and sharing of scientific and technical accomplishments through external grant applications, conference attendance, peer-reviewed publications, and other outreach activities.

1.4.2 Motivate, educate, and invigorate TAC by establishing a roles and responsibilities document (see 3.2.2). Actively identify and recruit missing partners, and ensure that the TAC is engaged in relevant emerging issues.

1.4.3 Encourage staff to lead training events that improve the capabilities of partners to contribute appropriate data for research and monitoring.

STORY BUILDING

Be a reliable, compelling voice for science and stewardship, recognizing that storytelling is a powerful, evidence-based technique to inspire behavior change and lasting awareness of the Tampa Bay estuary.

2.1

Enhance scientific literacy and inform the 3+ million Tampa Bay residents about the value, benefits, and importance of Tampa Bay. Clearly connect communication and outreach initiatives to the Program's science priorities.

2.1.1   Distill the Program's work into grab-and-go content kits (e.g., lesson plans, messaging boxes, public summaries, etc.) that aid in the dissemination and adoption of the Program's story through educators, naturalists, park rangers, and decisionmakers.

2.1.2   Facilitate the training of volunteers, citizen scientists, partners, etc. to ensure comprehensive understanding of the Program's priority initiatives. Use Give-a-Day activities to showcase the Program's science priorities.

2.1.3   Commit to applying the science of storytelling for programmatic priorities. Invest in innovative mediums (e.g., films, in-bound marketing platforms, influential public figures). Build narratives using economic valuation to better communicate the story and value of Tampa Bay.

STORY BUILDING

2.2
Encourage behavioral change through community-based social marketing for the benefit of Tampa Bay.

2.2.1 Ensure that outreach initiatives and social marketing campaigns are evidence-based and informed by best social science practices (e.g. define target audiences, behaviors, locations, and success evaluation measures that are consistent with the "Informed, Engaged, Responsible Community" Programmatic Priority).

2.2.2 Build relationships with the private sector to advance mutually beneficial behavior change campaigns for targeted audience segments.

2.3
The Program, through its Community Advisory Committee (CAC), will review and describe priority communication and outreach needs necessary for equitably informing the broader community.

2.3.1 Develop and use a master content marketing plan that coordinates the Program's keystone events, outreach initiatives, and technical projects to ensure the Program effectively communicates on issues important to the health of Tampa Bay.

2.3.2 Collaborate with the private sector, including (but not limited to) the food and beverage, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries, to create novel campaigns that increase audience reach.

PARTNER SUPPORT

Recognize that Management Conference members are key to the long-term sustainability of the Program and are vital to promoting the health and wellbeing of the Tampa Bay estuary.

3.1

Ensure that members both understand the Program's value proposition to them and that the Program is delivering on this value.

3.1.1 Create annual "Return on Investment" publications tailored to each member agency.

3.1.2 Schedule annual appearances (TBEP Executive Director) at member agency meetings, timed with committee appointments when possible.

3.1.3 Provide regular updates (staff) on priority projects to partner working groups.

3.1.4 Meet with Policy Board members and state legislators to show support for partners and highlight efforts to advance the shared agendas of the Program and its partners.

3.1.5 Participate in coordinated ANEP messaging and visit with the national congressional delegation to educate and inform decision makers of partner successes, shared needs, and common interests.

3.2

Invest in systems and processes that support Program stability and committee effectiveness.

3.2.1 Update and maintain on-boarding processes and materials for board and committee members that include important Program documents, terms of reference, a personal responsibility statement, ethical disclosures as required by law, and introductions to other committee members.

3.2.2 Review and highlight the roles and responsibilities of each board and committee. Clearly define what they are responsible for and how they can be successful in their role. Provide these as clear and concise terms of reference for each committee.

3.2.3 Structure board and committee agendas to ensure there is adequate time and space for robust discussion and clear requests for decision making.

3.2.4 Encourage additional private sector, early career professionals, youth, and underserved community representation on committees and in volunteer programming.

PARTNER SUPPORT

3.3

Enhance communication with management conference members to increase engagement and improve management outcomes.

3.3.1 Provide useful summaries of the Program's work (e.g., metrics reporting, status and trends, campaign evaluation) to help board and committee members serve as estuary ambassadors educating peers, constituents, and partner agencies about Program effectiveness.

3.3.2 Within two weeks of Policy Board meetings, produce and publish draft summaries of board meetings and key actions for sharing information with other elected officials.

3.3.3 Develop concise policy briefs on impactful scientific research that presents management alternatives for consideration by estuary decision makers.

3.3.4 Clearly summarize CCMP actions assigned to partner agencies and develop a self-reporting process to track management activities for the benefit of Tampa Bay.

3.4

Update the Interlocal Agreement to ensure (to the extent possible) continued long-term funding and community implementation of the CCMP.

3.4.1 Recognize that changing the partnership dynamic and geographic scale of the Program is possible, but should be balanced with the Program's ability to deliver its work within resource limits.

FUNDING CATALYST

Be a catalyst for scientific inquiry and collective action, recognizing that grant-making is an effective approach to amplify social and environmental benefits to the Tampa Bay estuary.

4.1

Provide at least $700,000 in grant funding to support partner-directed research, restoration, and community-based projects that benefit the Tampa Bay watershed.

4.1.1 Expand non-traditional financial support from the private sector, environmental fines, or philanthropic giving and direct funds to established grant programs (e.g., Bay Mini Grants or the Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund).

4.1.2 Promote sales of the Tampa Bay Estuary Specialty License Plate ("Tarpon Tag") to secure ongoing financial support for Bay Mini Grants.

4.1.3 Create annual "Return on Investment" publications tailored to private sector/philanthropic donors.

4.2

Use established grant programs, such as Bay Mini Grants and the Tampa Bay Environmental Restoration Fund, to implement specific CCMP actions and Cornerstone Strategies.

4.2.1 Use grant programs as a mechanism to initiate research or actions that address emerging issues. Establish decision criteria for how to incorporate emerging issues into consistent work planning.

4.2.2 Invest in open science data products and social science-driven campaigns to build local capacity for science communication.

4.2.3 Re-structure grant programs to deliver deeper impacts with less administrative burden.

INTERNAL OPERATIONS

Prioritize the development of internal systems and processes that ensure efficient, effective staff and Program management, recognizing that these controls are necessary for the Program to "stay on top".

5.1

Develop an internal capacity plan that accounts for staffing changes over the short- and medium-term. The plan should describe how existing staff skills and competencies address the Program's Cornerstone Strategies and CCMP Goals and identify anticipated capacity needs. The plan should describe how staff skills align with the general job descriptions and how staff responsibilities inter-relate.

5.1.1 Ensure there is adequate funding in the budget for Program needs, including retaining, recruiting, hiring, and on-boarding top talent as described by the capacity plan.

5.1.2 Review the onboarding process for new staff to ensure they're successfully functioning in Program operations within one month of the hire date, but also recognizing it can take between 12 and 14 months for individuals to be fully integrated into internal and external operations of the Program. This requires regular check-ins and adjustments during this phase-in period.

5.1.3 Use temporary staffing to help clear project management backlog. This may be especially useful during times of staff transition, hiring, or retirements.

5.1.4 Ensure there are adequate resources in the annual budget or other funding mechanisms that allow for staff professional development and growth. Explore the opportunity to provide staff training with partner agencies/online to reduce costs and increase access.

INTERNAL OPERATIONS

5.2

Streamline efforts required for routine reporting and project management.

5.2.1 Provide transparent, real-time access to project management, tracking and Program-wide reporting. Track the Program-wide status of the percent of project completion using a dashboard or similar tracking tool.

5.2.2 Automate reporting using open science tools, when feasible.

5.2.3 Codify additional standard practices (e.g., RFPs, contracting, invoicing, etc.) in the Program Operating Procedures Manual. Ensure that mechanisms for accepting private funds exist and restrictions on use are clearly accounted and documented.

5.2.4 Solicit continued partner cooperation to simplify reporting requirements for different funding sources.

5.3

Install team management systems that encourage appropriate time management and support interdisciplinary collaboration among staff.

5.3.1 Develop an internal work plan that defines annual priorities and assigns funds and Program resources to those priorities. The work plan should create guard rails for Program staff, allowing them to focus on agreed upon priorities and keeping new and responsive issues outside of the agreed upon workflow until they can be assessed.

5.3.2 Identify opportunities or emerging issues that will require responsive effort, how they will be handled, and what, if anything, can be paused.

5.3.3 Clarify the internal process for encouraging internal interdisciplinary collaboration among staff. Define the differences between operational and collaborative responsibilities and performance evaluations, and assign to core staff competencies accordingly.

REFERENCES

Bednarek, A.T., Wyborn, C., Cvitanovic, C. et al. Boundary spanning at the science–policy interface: the practitioners' perspectives. Sustain Sci 13, 1175–1183 (2018). https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-018-0550-9

Christiano, A. and Neimand, A. The Science of What Makes People Care. Stanford Social Innovation Review (2018). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_science_of_what_makes_people_care

Lowndes, J., Best, B., Scarborough, C. et al. Our path to better science in less time using open data science tools. Nat Ecol Evol 1, 0160 (2017). https://doi.org/10.1038/s41559-017-0160

Mons, B. Invest 5% of research funds in ensuring data are reusable. Nature 578, 491 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-020-00505-7

Safford, H.D, Sawyer, S.C., Kocker, S.D, et al. Linking knowledge to action: the role of boundary spanners in translating ecology. Front Ecol Environ 2017; 15(10): 560– 568, https://doi.org/10.1002/fee.1731

Wright, S. and Neimand, A. The Secret to Better Storytelling for Social Change: Better Partnerships. Stanford Social Innovation Review (2018). https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_secret_to_better_storytelling_for_social_change_better_partnerships#