



Maryland Heritage Areas Program Strategic Plan

A Statewide Vision for Success July 2025 – June 2032

Approved by the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority May 15, 2025



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Message from the Chair

Every time I visit a heritage area, chair a Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHA) meeting, and interact with staff and grantees, I am in awe of the passion and dedication of the people and places behind the Maryland Heritage Areas Program.

As Secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning (MDP), I can further attest to the importance of heritage and planning working hand in hand. It results in sustainable cities, towns, and rural landscapes whose cultural assets are not only preserved but valued as an integral part of the character, livability, and economic engine of thriving communities. This intersection of values is reflected in the Maryland Heritage Areas Program's support of the five goals of "Heritage2031," the statewide preservation plan, and all three of MDP's strategic priorities.

This new MHA approved strategic plan ensures that all elements of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program will continue to bolster our communities, attract visitors, and provide residents with experiences that enhance their quality of life while also contributing to the Moore-Miller Administration's goal of creating an "Equitable, Robust, and Competitive Economy for Maryland." I am grateful to all our stakeholders and constituents for the important roles they play in making the Maryland Heritage Areas Program - one of only two state heritage area programs in our country – a model for balancing the past with the present. I encourage everyone to get out there and enjoy all that our heritage areas have to offer!



REBECCA L. FLORA
AICP, LEED ND / BD+C
Secretary
Maryland Department
of Planning

Chair, Maryland
Heritage Areas Authority
(MHA)

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rebecca L. Flora".

Maryland Department of Planning Strategic Priorities:

- Value Our Shared Heritage
- Shape Places Where All Have the Opportunity to Thrive
- Inform Decisions for Sustainable Growth



Executive Summary

In a show of unwavering bipartisan commitment, Maryland has protected and proudly shared its collective history for nearly 30 years through the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA), an independent unit of government in the Executive Branch that oversees the Maryland Heritage Areas Program (the Program).

Since 1997, 13 certified heritage areas have been designated throughout the state; each distinguished by unique physical and cultural characteristics. Their boundaries include acreage in all 23 counties and the city of Baltimore, and a diverse array of historic, cultural, and natural assets. Through funding from the Department of Natural Resource's Program Open Space, the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority has awarded more than \$74 million in grants to hundreds of organizations in the heritage areas that promote, support, and create place-based experiences for visitors and residents alike. Since its inception, these grants have generated over \$175 million in matching funds. This combined investment contributes greatly to local economies and speaks to the Program's remarkable success, impact, and potential.

Recognizing that constituent needs and operations evolve over time, MHAA and Program staff embarked on an inclusive strategic planning process in June 2024. More than 600 participants including MHAA members, Program staff, local heritage area management entities, grantees, and various partners and stakeholders worked to inform this plan that will guide MHAA and the Program at the state level for the next seven years. This plan clarifies the Program's vision and purpose, desired results, guiding principles, and outlines priorities and strategies for success. This exciting path forward prioritizes impactful grantmaking, increasing support to the heritage areas, and refining governance, operations, and messaging. It also recognizes the central and essential role heritage plays in contributing to tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability.



Defining the Maryland Heritage Areas Program

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program is a state program that is housed administratively within the Maryland Historical Trust.

The governing body of the Program is the **Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA)** which is an independent unit of government in the Executive Branch of government that operates in the Department of Planning.

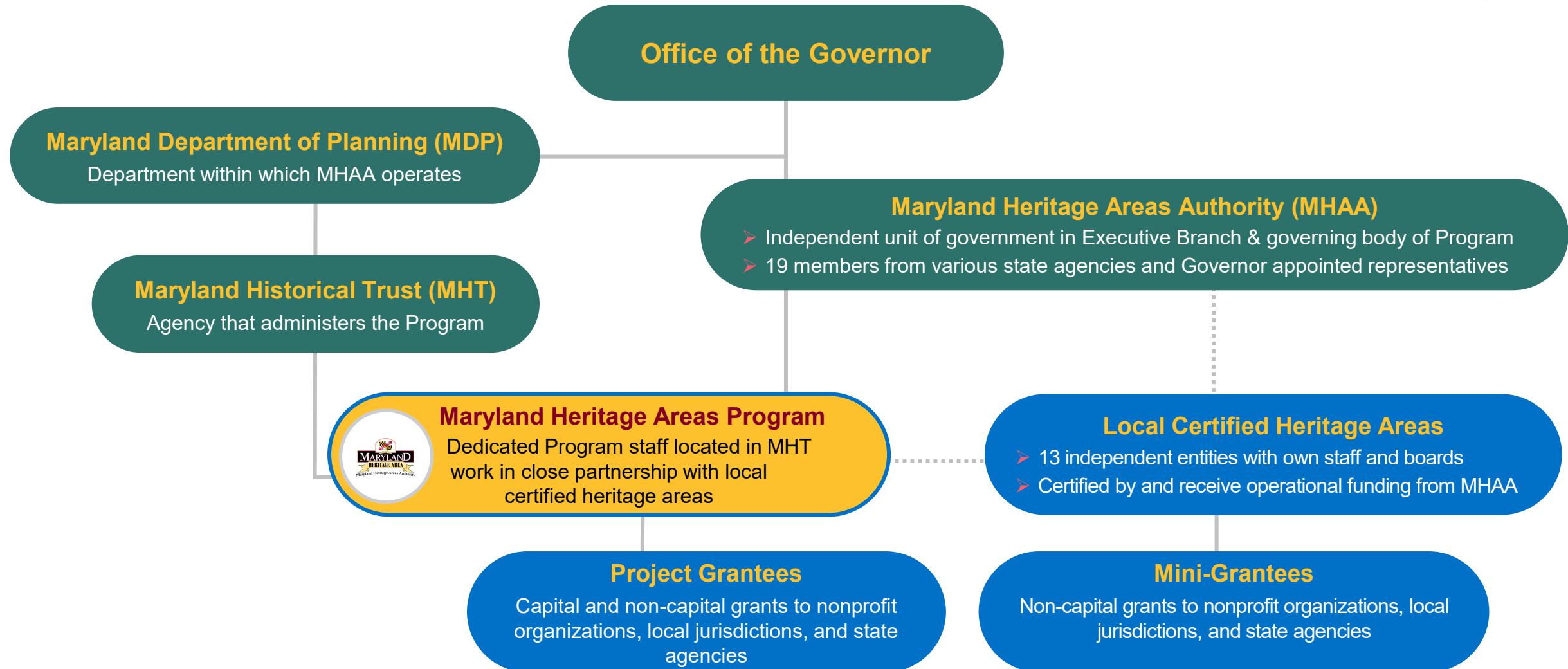
The primary activities of MHAA and the Program are to:

- Designate, support, and work in close partnership with a statewide network of local certified heritage areas
- Award grants that highlight Maryland's diverse heritage, enhance local communities, and promote tourism and economic development
- Provide technical assistance and training to heritage partners statewide

The **certified heritage areas** are managed by independent entities that have their own staff, boards, and strategic plans that play a key role in fulfilling the Vision and Results of the Program at the local level.



Organizational Framework of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program



Key Roles and Responsibilities of the Program



Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHA)

- Fiduciary oversight and governance, including adherence to statute, regulations, and bylaws
- Heritage areas certification and approval of boundaries
- Strategic plan development and oversight at the state level
- Grant review oversight and approval (state Grants Review Panel is authorized by MHA to review, prioritize, and recommend grants)
- Promote state-level partnerships
- Program evaluation and continuous improvement
- Stewards of state dollars
- Provide oversight to MHA Program staff
- Serve as liaisons with state agencies and the organizations or professional fields they represent

Maryland Historical Trust (MHT)

- Administrative and financial structure to operate the Program
- Grant applicant review for compliance, easement, and archaeology preservation requirements
- If easements or special conditions are required, support applicants to fulfill preservation requirements
- Grant agreement processing and payments
- Legal counsel to Program staff provided by MDP's Office of the Attorney General, housed at MHT's headquarters
- Alignment of statewide preservation goals

Maryland Heritage Areas Program Staff

- With Chair, coordination and management of MHA
- State-level strategic plan implementation
- Grant program management including grant documents, application and review processes, oversight and reporting
- Technical assistance and training to heritage areas and grant applicants
- Coordination of Grants Review Panel including grant prioritization
- Communication and collaboration with certified heritage areas
- Working with MHT, adherence and compliance to state legal requirements
- Tracking and reporting Program impact
- Develop and maintain relationships with state agencies and other statewide partner organizations
- With MHT, create and manage content of website and social media

13 Certified Heritage Area (Independent management entities)

- Local partner engagement to elevate and support programs and projects that recognize, value, and protect local heritage resources
- Communication and collaboration with Program staff
- Development of local planning documents in alignment with state-level priorities
- Grant promotion and outreach to increase or sustain local participation of high-impact and aligned projects
- Technical assistance for grant applicants
- Mini-grant management
- Local review of grant applications and preservation related activities
- Marketing of local natural, historic, scenic, and cultural resources among residents and visitors
- Work with other heritage area directors to advocate for Program funding and needs of heritage areas

Primary Constituent Groups Within the Program



Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA):
Program staff, state agencies, organizations and professional fields members represent



Maryland Historical Trust: Grant applicants and grantees, Program staff



Maryland Heritage Areas Program Staff: MHAA, heritage area management entities, grant applicants and grantees, statewide partners



13 Certified Heritage Areas (independent management entities): Local partners, grant applicants, mini-grantees, local heritage area governing boards, visitors and residents

Engagement and Participation



From the outset it was important that the planning process be statewide and collaborative. A Coordinating Team provided direction on engagement throughout the process to ensure a wide-reaching level of participation. The first step was completing internal and external surveys with heritage area management entities boards and staff, grants review panelists, grantees, members of MHAA, Program and MHT staff, state and national agency partners, and heritage-related organizations. Opportunities for deeper conversation came next through small group listening sessions, interviews, visioning and planning meetings, and field testing. All told, nearly 175 hours were spent gathering and synthesizing feedback from over 600 constituents in a yearlong process that included a diverse number of perspectives from sectors such as the arts, state and national parks, tourism, humanities, preservation, history, destination marketing organizations, planning, and Maryland state commissions and agencies.

4

Coordinating Team Meetings

Meagan Baco
Anacostia Trails Heritage Area
Brigitte Carty
Lower Susquehanna Heritage Area
Dennis A. Doster
Maryland Heritage Areas Authority
Ariane M. Hofstede
Maryland Heritage Areas Program
Lucille Walker
Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
Nell Ziehl
Maryland Historical Trust

88

Internal Survey Respondents

35

External Survey Participants

321

Grantee Survey Respondents

107

Mini-Grant Survey Respondents

35

Partner/External Constituent Interviews

13

Heritage Area Director Interviews

3

Visioning & Planning Sessions with MHAA Members, Program Staff and Heritage Area Directors

4

Maryland Heritage Area Coalition Meetings

3

MHAA Small Group Strategy Sessions



A Statewide Vision for Maryland's Heritage 2025-2032



VISION

Maryland's rich and diverse heritage is shared and valued, deepening connections to the past, enhancing communities today, and inspiring future visitors and residents.



PRIORITY 1

Ensure accessible, efficient, and high-impact grantmaking



PRIORITY 2

Provide resources and ongoing support to heritage areas to enhance their capacity and impact



PRIORITY 3

Assess and refine Maryland Heritage Areas Authority governance and the operational effectiveness of the Program



PRIORITY 4

Enhance the Program's messaging, outreach, and communication



PURPOSE

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program designates, supports, and collaborates with certified heritage areas and their partners to create place-based experiences for the public that preserve and promote Maryland's unique stories and contribute to the well-being of local economies.



RESULTS

- Maryland's diverse historic, cultural, and natural assets within heritage areas are enhanced, preserved, and accessible
- Heritage areas support equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies
- Communities and visitors are connected and enriched by experiencing Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions
- Local partnerships and networks across heritage areas are expanded and strong

Guiding Principles for Clarity and Alignment



STEWARDSHIP

Ensure the thoughtful and equitable distribution and transparent reporting of state funds.



HERITAGE

Acknowledge and support the central and important role that heritage plays in tourism, local economic development, environmental stewardship, historic preservation, community enhancement, recreation, and education.



COLLABORATION

Build strong, trust-based partnerships that are grounded in transparent and open communication, shared goals, and collaborative action.



CUSTOMER SERVICE

Deliver excellent service by providing accurate and timely information to partners, stakeholders, and grantees.



IMPACT

Strive for measurable, statewide impact that reflects the cumulative work done across all heritage areas.



DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION, AND ACCESS

Embed practices into operations and grantmaking that support diversity, equity, inclusion, and access.



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Access within the Maryland Heritage Areas Program



These definitions will guide the Maryland Heritage Areas Program in aligning its practices and decision-making with its aim to promote diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible heritage experiences for all Maryland communities.

Diversity: The representation, active participation, and empowerment of a wide range of communities, cultures, and perspectives across Maryland's heritage areas, encompassing race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender, ability, and other identities.

Equity: Recognizing and addressing the historical disparities that have impacted underrepresented groups and places within Maryland's heritage areas, ensuring resources, grants, and technical support are distributed in ways that enable heritage areas to fully represent and amplify a diversity of people.

Inclusion: A felt sense of being welcomed, respected, and valued among residents and visitors of heritage areas, as well as the leadership, staff, and stakeholders at the state and local levels. This includes a diversity of people participating in decision-making and shaping Maryland's historical narrative.

Access: Ensures that all individuals, regardless of background, socioeconomic status, or physical abilities, can engage with and benefit from the Program and heritage areas. This extends to equitable access to the grantmaking process, as well as eliminating barriers to experiencing heritage sites, stories, and resources. Access also includes opportunities for communities to tell their own stories and shape how their histories are preserved and shared.

2025-2032 Priorities & Strategies



PRIORITY 1 Ensure accessible, efficient, and high-impact grantmaking

The Program will continue funding heritage-related projects that are accessible to both visitors and community members. Its grantmaking will remain focused on heritage tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability. Continuing to refine the Program's grantmaking process will enhance transparency and equity in response to the needs of heritage areas and grant applicants. Additional improvements include increasing cap allowances on grants as funding allows and hosting more information sessions for potential grantees.



STRATEGIES

- **Continue to fund heritage-related projects** that create and enhance publicly accessible place-based experiences
- **Clearly define heritage as encompassing tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability**, fully integrating these as the grant program's core areas of focus and impact
- **Continue enhancing the grant application, review, and award process** to ensure it is simplified, transparent, and equitable, with ongoing improvements based on feedback and evolving needs
- As funding allows, **increase cap allowances on grants** and adjust project match requirements to account for inflation, increased costs, and evolving financial needs of grantees
- **Improve consistent tracking of metrics** to demonstrate the impact of grantmaking

2025-2032 Priorities & Strategies



PRIORITY 2 Provide resources and ongoing support to heritage areas to enhance their capacity and impact

Newly aligned and simplified request and reporting processes will allow heritage area management entities to spend more time on their programming and impact. To strengthen heritage area capacity, the Program will seek partnerships and identify additional resources. To generate more resources for heritage areas, the Program will provide data and information in support of increased funding and explore aligned funding opportunities.



STRATEGIES

- **Develop renewable cooperative agreements** with heritage area management entities that support their operational needs and planning documents
- **Build and manage relationships** with aligned professional organizations and state and local agencies to increase resources for heritage area management entities
- **Collaborate with heritage area management entities** and other partners to provide trainings, capacity building, and networking opportunities
- **Investigate additional funding opportunities** for heritage area special initiatives
- **Communicate and coordinate** with heritage area management entities on aligned goals and statewide activities

2025-2032 Priorities & Strategies



PRIORITY 3 Assess and refine Maryland Heritage Areas Authority governance and the operational effectiveness of the Program

A variety of strategies will serve to strengthen the operational core of the Program, including increasing the knowledge and engagement of MHAA members and revising foundational governance documents and operating procedures. MHAA members will benefit from enhanced tools, training, and on-site experiences to strengthen their understanding of their roles and the Program's operations.



STRATEGIES

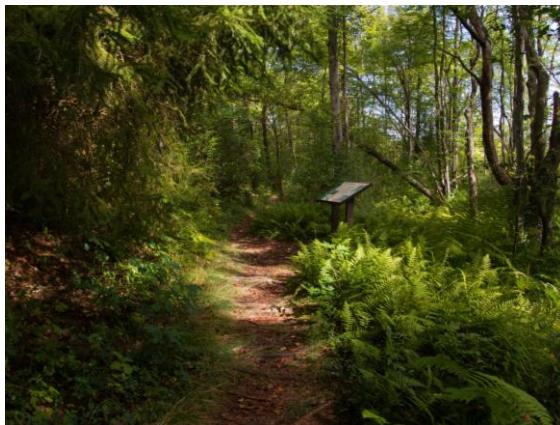
- **Provide MHAA members with tools and training** to guide their roles and responsibilities
- **Increase engagement of MHAA members** in meaningful work in service of the Program
- **Assess the Program's needs and ability** to grow and expand geographic and thematic reach
- **Update foundational documents** to support the strategic plan
- **Conduct efficient and informative standing meetings**
- **Review and update Program policies and guidelines** on a regular basis

2025-2032 Priorities & Strategies



PRIORITY 4 Enhance the Program's messaging, outreach, and communication

With a statewide vision and refined roles, the Program will seek opportunities to clarify its audience and messaging. A new, user-friendly website will cater to grantees while also highlighting heritage area projects and the Program's impact in alignment with updated Results and performance measures. To ensure that the Program is representative and inclusive, staff will intentionally engage the voices and interests of underrepresented communities with its communications.



STRATEGIES

- **Consider a rebranding process** to establish a distinct and clear identity for the Program and its various stakeholders
- **Create a dedicated online presence** for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program
- **Track, analyze, and share Program impacts** publicly and regularly
- **Increase awareness of the Program** with new and diverse audiences



VISION

Maryland's rich and diverse heritage is shared and valued, deepening connections to the past, enhancing communities today, and inspiring future visitors and residents.



PURPOSE

The Maryland Heritage Areas Program designates, supports, and collaborates with certified heritage areas and their partners to create place-based experiences for the public that preserve and promote Maryland's unique stories and contribute to the well-being of local economies.

A Statewide Vision for Maryland's Heritage | 2025-2032

PRIORITIES & STRATEGIES

1. Ensure accessible, efficient, and high-impact grantmaking

- Continue to fund heritage-related projects that create and enhance publicly accessible place-based experiences
- Clearly define heritage as encompassing tourism, community enhancement, and sustainability, fully integrating these as the grant program's core areas of focus and impact.
- Continue enhancing the grant application, review, and award process to ensure it is simplified, transparent, and equitable, with ongoing improvements based on feedback and evolving needs
- As funding allows, increase cap allowances on grants and adjust project match requirements to account for inflation, increased costs, and evolving financial needs of grantees
- Improve consistent tracking of metrics to demonstrate the impact of grantmaking

2. Provide resources and ongoing support to heritage areas to enhance their capacity and impact

- Develop renewable cooperative agreements with heritage area management entities that support their operational needs and planning documents
- Build and manage relationships with aligned professional organizations and state and local agencies to increase resources for heritage area management entities
- Collaborate with heritage area management entities and other partners to provide trainings, capacity building, and networking opportunities
- Investigate additional funding opportunities for heritage area special initiatives
- Communicate and coordinate with heritage area management entities on aligned goals and statewide activities

3. Assess and refine Maryland Heritage Areas Authority governance and the operational effectiveness of the Program

- Provide MHAA members with tools and training to guide their roles and responsibilities
- Increase engagement of MHAA members in meaningful work in service of the Program
- Assess the Program's needs and ability to grow and expand geographic and thematic reach
- Update foundational documents to support the strategic plan
- Conduct efficient and informative standing meetings
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4. Enhance the Program's messaging, outreach, and communication

- Consider a rebranding process to establish a distinct and clear identity for the Program and its various stakeholders
- Create a dedicated online presence for the Maryland Heritage Areas Program
- Track, analyze and share Program impacts publicly and regularly
- Increase awareness of the Program with new and diverse audiences

RESULTS

1

Maryland's diverse historic, cultural, and natural assets within heritage areas are enhanced, preserved, and accessible

2

Heritage areas support equitable, robust, and sustainable local economies

3

Communities and visitors are connected and enriched by experiencing Maryland's heritage and cultural traditions

4

Local partnerships and networks across heritage areas are expanded and strong

Glossary of Terms



Maryland Heritage Areas Authority (MHAA): An independent unit of government in the Executive Branch of government that operates in the Department of Planning. The purpose of the Authority is to provide fiduciary oversight and governance to the Maryland Heritage Areas Program which includes designating certified heritage areas; awarding grants to heritage partners throughout the state for educational, economic, and recreational benefit; and facilitating interagency collaboration. The current Secretary of the Maryland Department of Planning serves as chair of MHAA. The 19-member body consists of nine state officials and ten community and association representatives.

Maryland Certified Heritage Areas: Certified by MHAA in recognition of their unique historic, cultural, and natural resources, Maryland's certified heritage areas are locally managed and defined by distinctive focuses and physical boundaries that represent unique aspects of Maryland's character. These special places exhibit each area's diverse heritage through historic buildings and districts, cultural traditions, and natural landscapes, as well as other resources such as museums, trails, parks, and traditional ways of life as revealed in food, music, and art. Heritage areas play a vital role in enhancing communities and creating place-based tourism experiences for visitors and residents alike.

Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition: The Maryland Heritage Areas Coalition is an alliance that brings together representatives from each of Maryland's state-certified heritage areas. As a collective voice, the Coalition works to advocate for strong support and awareness of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program, fair and consistent funding and grantmaking policies by Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, and the resources organizations and communities need to employ heritage tourism for economic development. The Coalition's work is grounded in the belief that understanding, preserving and sharing Maryland's multi-faceted history, culture, landscapes and waterways is about more than honoring the past--it's about building a stronger, more vibrant future for Maryland.

Place-Based Experiences: Educational and recreational activities that take place in, or utilize, a historic, cultural, or natural setting to engage participants in learning about the physical environment, local culture, history, or people in a meaningful way.

Maryland Historical Trust (MHT): The state agency dedicated to preserving and interpreting the legacy of Maryland's past. Through research, conservation, and education, MHT assists the people of Maryland in understanding their historical and cultural heritage. Part of the Maryland Department of Planning, MHT serves as Maryland's State Historic Preservation Office pursuant to the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.

Heritage: Features belonging to the culture of a particular society, racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural group - such as traditions, languages, built and natural places, food, art, and music - that were created in the past or present and hold historical importance and/or relevance.

Heritage Tourism: When historic, cultural, and natural resources are used to attract visitors and residents to an experience that provides access to places, stories, activities, and artifacts of the past and present that represent Maryland's unique heritage. In doing so, heritage tourism also contributes to local economic prosperity, conservation of resources, and social connections that support thriving communities.

Visitor: People traveling overnight or same-day to a destination in pursuit of place-based experiences related to recreation or personal interest, while making use of local resources and contributing to local economies.

Community Enhancement: When strategic investments and projects improve the quality of life and long-term health of a community including its people, businesses, local jurisdictions, and natural and built environments. Grants from the Maryland Heritage Areas Program support community enhancement through the lens of heritage to include, but not limited to, education, historic preservation, the environment, recreation, and economic impact.

Sustainability: When a community or project aligns people, the environment (built and natural), and economic results in a manner that benefits the larger society and contributes towards its prosperity.

Members of the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority and Designated Representatives

- Chair, Rebecca L. Flora, AICP, LEED ND/BD+C Secretary, Department of Planning
- Vice Chair, Melissa Archer, Program Officer, Neighborhood Revitalization, representing Jacob R. Day, Secretary, Department of Housing and Community Development
- Chief Donna Abbott, Nause-Waiwash Band of Indian, President of the Senate representative
- Rowland Agbede, Programmer Analyst, representing Kevin Atticks, Secretary, Department of Agriculture (non-voting)
- Hilary Bell, Director, Land Acquisition and Planning, representing Josh Kurtz, Secretary, Department of Natural Resources
- Nathan Brown, Maryland Municipal League representative
- Robert David Campbell, former MHAA Vice Chair, Governor's appointee for historic preservation expertise (term ended April 2025)
- Luis Cardona, representing Harry Coker, Jr., Secretary, Department of Commerce
- Natalie Chabot, former Maryland Greenways Commission representative (term ended March 2025)
- Tara Balfe Clifford, Cliftara CD Consultant and Community Volunteer, Speaker of the House representative
- Dr. Dennis A. Doster, Ph.D. Governor's appointee for heritage tourism expertise
- Liz Fitzsimmons, former Managing Director Office of Tourism & Film, representing Kevin A. Anderson, Secretary, Department of Commerce (term ended December 2024)
- Mary Anne Harms, former Speaker of the House representative (term ended April 2025)
- Lawana Holland-Moore, Director of Fellowships and Interpretive Strategies, National Trust for Historic Preservation, Governor's appointee for historic preservation expertise
- Elizabeth Hughes, State Historic Preservation Officer/Director, Maryland Historical Trust
- Jonathan Hughes, Speaker of the House representative
- Peter Lesher, Maryland Association of Counties representative
- Sandy Maruchi-Turner, Maryland Tourism Development Board representative
- Geoffrey Newman, Assistant Secretary for Finance and Administration, representing Dr. Sanjay Rai, Secretary, Maryland Higher Education Commission
- Peter Phineas Ramsey, Director of Social Studies, Office of Teaching and Learning Instructional Programs and Services, representing Carey M. Wright, Ed.D, State Superintendent of Schools, Department of Education (non-voting)
- Nicholas Redding, President of the Senate representative
- Dr. Julie Schablitsky Chief of Cultural Resources, representing Paul J. Wiedefeld, Secretary, Department of Transportation

Maryland Heritage Areas Program Staff

Ariane M. Hofstedt,
Administrator

Andrew Arvizu, Assistant
Administrator

Martha Waldron, Assistant
Administrator

Thank You

A special thanks to representatives from the following agencies, tribes, and organizations that were interviewed as part of the Maryland Heritage Areas Program strategic planning process*

Heritage Area Management Entities

Anacostia Trails Heritage Area
Baltimore National Heritage Area
Beach to Bay Heritage Area
Chesapeake Crossroads Heritage Area
Heart of Chesapeake Country Heritage Area
Heart of the Civil War Heritage Area
Lower Susquehanna Heritage Area
Montgomery County Heritage Area
Mountain Maryland Gateway to the West Heritage Area
Passages of the Western Potomac Heritage Area (Canal Place)
Patapsco Valley Heritage Area
Southern Maryland National Heritage Area
Stories of the Chesapeake Heritage Area

National Park Service

Appalachian National Forest Heritage Area
Captain John Smith Chesapeake Historic Trail
Chesapeake Gateways Network
National Heritage Areas Program
Thomas Stone National Historic Site

Maryland State Agencies, Associations, and Commissions

Maryland Commission on African American History and Culture
Maryland Department of Natural Resources
Maryland Office of Tourism Development
Maryland State Archives
Maryland State Arts Council
Maryland State Parks
Rural Maryland Council

Maryland State Nonprofit Organizations

Maryland Center for History and Culture
Preservation Maryland
Maryland Citizens for the Arts

Heritage Area Planners and Related Programs

Acorn Hill Strategies
Heritage Strategies International
Pennsylvania Heritage Areas Program
Preservation Pennsylvania
Point Heritage Development Consulting

National Organizations

Alliance of National Heritage Areas

Destination Marketing Organizations

Allegany County Tourism
Maryland Tourism Coalition
Visit Frederick
Visit Annapolis & Anne Arundel County

Native American Tribes and Nations

The Official Piscataway Conoy Tribe of Maryland, Inc.

* This is in addition to the hundreds of grantees and partners that completed surveys and is not a complete list of all participants.



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