

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition
Guiding Framework
July, 2025

I. Introduction

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition envisions healthy soil supporting productive farms, thriving ecosystems, and resilient communities. To work towards this vision, we strengthen and support a broad, collaborative network that improves and expands soil health across all of Virginia's landscapes.

We believe in...

- I. Leveraging the power of a network that represents all of Virginia's diverse landscapes and communities
- II. Pursuing and sharing new and innovative science-based solutions
- III. Enhancing the resilience, productivity, and profitability of Virginia's farms
- IV. Including and engaging all people who care for Virginia's lands, especially those who have been historically marginalized
- V. Protecting and nourishing Virginia's soil to benefit future generations of people, farms, communities, and natural resources

II. Management Team

At the center of the Coalition is the management team that is guided by the Steering Committee. The management team consists of backbone staff of the Coalition and 1-2 Virginia Tech faculty representatives providing supervisory support. Backbone staff and support is run through Virginia Tech/Virginia Cooperative Extension.

III. Steering Committee

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition is guided by a Steering Committee that represents the diversity of partners across the State. The Steering Committee includes 9-12 partners/organizations in addition to all members of the Management Team and provides strategic direction for the Coalition and support for the Coalition management team. We aim to always have at least one farmer representative on the Steering Committee.

Steering committee terms are three years and terms may be renewed three times for a total of nine years with the option to resign if there are conflicts or they are unable to meet requirements. Each year, Steering Committee members in cooperation with the Management Team evaluate the diversity and function of the current Steering Committee and explore opportunities for new members. New members can be nominated by the Steering Committee and broader Coalition network and are voted on by the Steering Committee as new seats become available. Steering Committee members are selected based on organizational diversity as well as their individual leadership skills and commitment to the Coalition's mission, vision, and values. We aim to add no more than two new members per year to ensure proper onboarding and continuity.

To be eligible for the Steering Committee, partners exhibit:

- ❖ Commitment to the Virginia Soil Health Coalition's vision and mission and representation of the values of the Coalition in their daily work.
- ❖ Ability to attend quarterly Steering Committee meetings and quarterly Coalition meetings
- ❖ Commitment to developing and advancing strategic priorities of the Coalition
- ❖ Willingness to engage new partners

The Steering Committee meets quarterly and communicates as needed between meetings. Their primary responsibilities include:

- ❖ Guiding the objectives, strategies, and activities of the Coalition, including any sub-committees that may emerge
- ❖ Helping shape and lead quarterly Coalition meetings
- ❖ Facilitating annual evaluation and review of Coalition progress and strategy
- ❖ Helping identify and conduct outreach to potential new Coalition partners
- ❖ Promoting the VSHC to outside audiences
- ❖ Helping identify and apply for fundraising opportunities for Coalition activities

Steering Committee members are expected to:

- ❖ Attend 75% of the quarterly meetings (members can have a stand-in from their organization attend 1 of the meetings each year if needed).
- ❖ Engage in Coalition subcommittees as they emerge.

If Steering Committee members are unable to meet expectations, they will discuss with the Director the best path forward including the option to resign.

We recognize that participation in the Steering Committee requires time and commitment. To support inclusive engagement, stipends are available for individuals- particularly farmers, grassroots leaders, or those unaffiliated with an organization- who are not otherwise compensated for their time. Requests will be handled confidentially and without impact on selection. Additionally, travel to/from Steering Committee and Coalition meetings is covered for all Steering Committee members as requested.

When a member's tenure on the Steering Committee comes to an end, we hope that they continue their engagement and leadership in an informal advisory role to maintain institutional knowledge and historical context through as-needed conversations and guidance of the Director and other Coalition staff.

IV. Decision-making

Ultimately, decisions are made by the Management Team based on the strategic direction provided by the Steering Committee. However, while the Steering Committee is not a formal decision-making body when decisions do arise, we aim for a modified consensus approach. The consent model of decision-making moves decisions forward in the absence of objections ("I can live with it").

V. Partnership

The Virginia Soil Health Coalition takes a crowded table approach to network building. We encourage organizations who align with our mission, vision and beliefs to share their logos with the Coalition Director to be partners of the Coalition network. Logos will be shared in Coalition outreach and promotion. Organizations and individuals can engage with the Coalition through quarterly meetings, engagement in active subcommittees, contributions to outreach and education (e.g. blog posts, research, etc.), fundraising, and attendance at other events and activities.

Within all VSHC quarterly meetings and other open gatherings, all partners agree to focus on alignment with the vision, mission, and common ground of the Coalition. Outside of Coalition meetings, partners speak as representatives of their respective organizations.

VI. Sub-committees

Issue or project-specific sub-committees can emerge organically as vehicles of peer exchange, learning, and coordinated action, as identified and prioritized by the Steering Committee. Sub-committees help drive a deeper level of coordination, communication, and collaboration within the Coalition and provide a place for experts and practitioners

Sub-committees meet on an as-needed basis as decided by participants and leaders of the committee. Meetings can also occur as breakouts during the Quarterly Coalition Meetings and be open to all participants.

VII. Open Coalition Meetings

To facilitate shared learning and communication among soil health partners, the Virginia Soil Health Coalition holds quarterly Coalition meetings that are open to any interested stakeholders.

The purpose of quarterly meetings is to:

- ❖ Increase stakeholder knowledge of soil health
- ❖ Increase awareness of events, activities, and strategies to advance soil health being undertaken by stakeholders
- ❖ Report out updates from the Steering Committee and any sub-committees
- ❖ Serve as a networking opportunity
- ❖ Identify opportunities for collaboration