



2011-2014 Strategic Plan

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, with the help of a grant from The McKnight Foundation, the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities convened the first meeting of what would eventually be called the River Partnership of Community Foundations. Over the last six years, the River Partnership has created lasting relationships among community foundations in the Mississippi River Corridor region and provided grants and capacity building support to individual community foundations to help them make environmental, economic, and cultural improvements to their local communities.¹ A 2008 report that documented the results of the River Partnership clearly demonstrated that the River Partnership has had a profound impact on the 16 active community foundation members.²

As the 2007-2011 strategic plan came to an end, the Steering Committee for the River Partnership solicited input from key stakeholders about the future of the Partnership. With this information, this new strategic plan emerged, for the period from 2011-2014. This plan builds heavily on the successes from the first six years of the Partnership's existence. In addition, it emphasizes the importance of community foundations taking action—individually and collectively—to act as community leaders to improve their local communities. It also envisions a long-term future for the Partnership and an active focus on securing new resources to bolster the work and capacity of the Partnership. Finally, it emphasizes the unity of all of the communities on the Mississippi River and its major tributaries, and calls for participating community foundations to work together and maximize the unique roles and contributions of community foundations in improving the health and vitality of the Mississippi River and the communities along the River.

¹ The River Partnership defines the Mississippi River Corridor as a ten-state region that includes Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Arkansas, Tennessee, Mississippi, and Louisiana and the tributaries located within these states. All references to "the River" should be interpreted to mean the River as a whole, including its tributaries.

² The report, entitled, *Awareness, Capacity, and Leadership: The River Partnership of Community Foundations Phase I Report: 2006-2008*, can be found at <http://www.fundersnetwork.org/participate/river-partnership>.

RIVER PARTNERSHIP OF COMMUNITY FOUNDATIONS STRATEGIC PLAN 2011-2014

Mission

To bolster the leadership, capacity, and impact of community foundations to improve the environmental, economic, and cultural vitality of the communities along the Mississippi River and its tributaries.

Vision

Community foundations in the Mississippi River Corridor will work together to ensure that the Mississippi River and its tributaries are honored, shared resources that are vital, healthy, attractive, fun, and prosperous.

Long-term Outcomes

We believe that if we are successful in continuing to develop the River Partnership and remain focused on achieving our shared goals, in the long-term, the following outcomes will result:

1. Stronger community foundations in the Mississippi River Corridor
2. Vibrant, equitable, and sustainable communities in the Mississippi River Corridor
3. A healthier Mississippi River and its tributaries and sustainable use of the environment
4. Environmental, economic, and cultural improvements that are important to local communities

Although we recognize that there are multiple factors that affect these various outcomes, it is our hope that working in partnership with others, we will have a positive contribution toward achieving these outcomes.

Strategic Goals

Over the next four years, we will organize our work to achieve the following five strategic goals.

1. Increase the leadership and capacity of community foundations
2. Establish a strong network of community foundations in the Mississippi River Corridor
3. Increase funding for community foundations to achieve their River-related goals
4. Cultivate strong individual and collective community foundation leadership to engage in and foster community partnerships and collaborations
5. Ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the River Partnership

Activities

We believe that community foundations share a common purpose of building lasting resources and community assets. Community foundations are most successful at achieving this common purpose when they are engaged in the following types of activities:

1. Grantmaking
2. Convening
3. Facilitating partnerships and connections
4. Serving as knowledge-brokers
5. Catalyzing and incubating new efforts within communities
6. Providing accountability and credibility to nonprofit sector actors
7. Providing leadership to the communities we serve

The strategies articulated in this strategic plan are thus appropriately focused on these types of activities.

Goal #1: Increase the leadership and capacity of community foundations

Strategies:

1. Share tools and resources with and among participating community foundations
2. Continue providing professional development opportunities to participating community foundation representatives
3. Facilitate peer-to-peer learning opportunities
4. Provide capacity building learning opportunities

Goal #2: Establish a strong network of community foundations in the Mississippi River Corridor

Strategies:

1. Conduct mapping project(s) to identify and share common and complementary community assets, partnership opportunities and clusters of aligned work
2. Build the social capital of community foundations by sharing experiences and lessons learned
3. Develop active communications network using online technologies

Goal #3: Increase funding for community foundations to achieve their River-related goals

Strategies:

1. Create a fund-raising campaign to support community foundations' work in the River Partnership
2. Develop active donor outreach strategies such as hosting donor roundtables at community foundations
3. Provide River Partnership members with templates and tools for fund-raising to support their River-related work
4. Create funding proposals to public sector funders including levee boards (when possible, have proposals come from multiple River Partnership members)

Goal #4: Cultivate strong individual and collective community foundation leadership to engage in and foster community partnerships and collaboratives

Strategies:

1. Educate prospective partners across sectors regarding the roles of community foundations and potential partnership opportunities
2. Convene clusters of River Partners and community members around shared concerns, such as restoring wetlands and active floodplains, reauthorization of the 2011 Farm Bill, and reducing agricultural pollution
3. Identify public policy issues of shared interest to community foundation members and speak with a collective voice (not necessarily unanimous) on important public policy issues
4. Provide regular updates to River Partnership members about River-related public policy issues

Goal #5: Ensure the long-term health and sustainability of the River Partnership

Strategies:

1. Develop a strategy for foundation funding; consider options for funding of specific regions or areas of interest
2. Create a challenge grant strategy for individual community foundations to match
3. Explore cost-neutral opportunities for engaging new community foundations in the Partnership
4. Refine messages and storytelling abilities to better communicate about the impact of the River Partnership and the work of individual community foundations

Cross-Cutting Strategies

In addition to the activities identified above, the River Partnership will engage in the following cross-cutting strategies.

1. Hold two convenings per year, visiting various parts of the Mississippi River and its tributaries

2. Expand the awareness of and engagement in the River Partnership among a broad array of people within River Partnership community foundations, including board members and donors
3. Build the community information capacities of the River Partnership and its members through distribution of resources from the Knight Foundation Community Information Challenge grant pool
4. Ensure that all participants take responsibility to provide resources to the River Partnership at appropriate levels and engage in fund raising to support the Partnership

Spheres of Influence

Our efforts will focus on influencing the following audiences, starting with those in the primary ring, followed by the secondary ring, and finally, the outside ring.

River Partnership Spheres of Influence

