

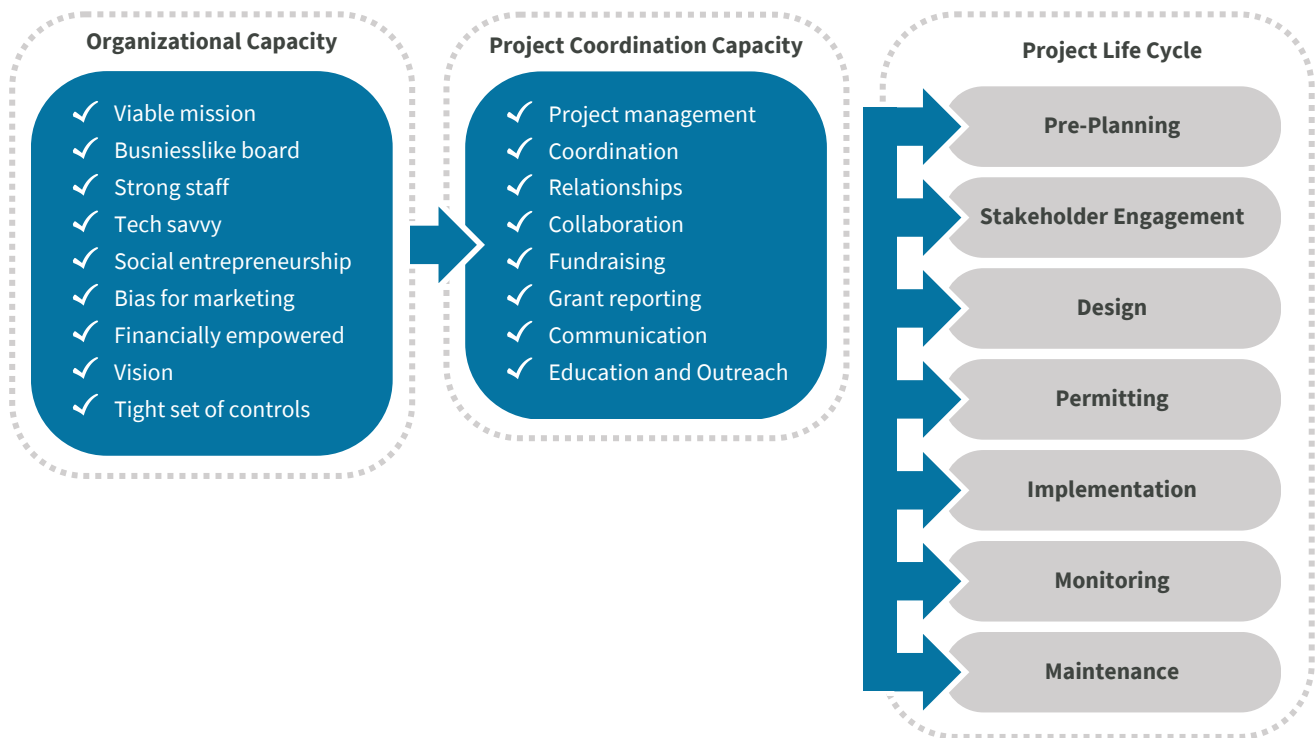
## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

# SCALING UP LOCAL CAPACITY

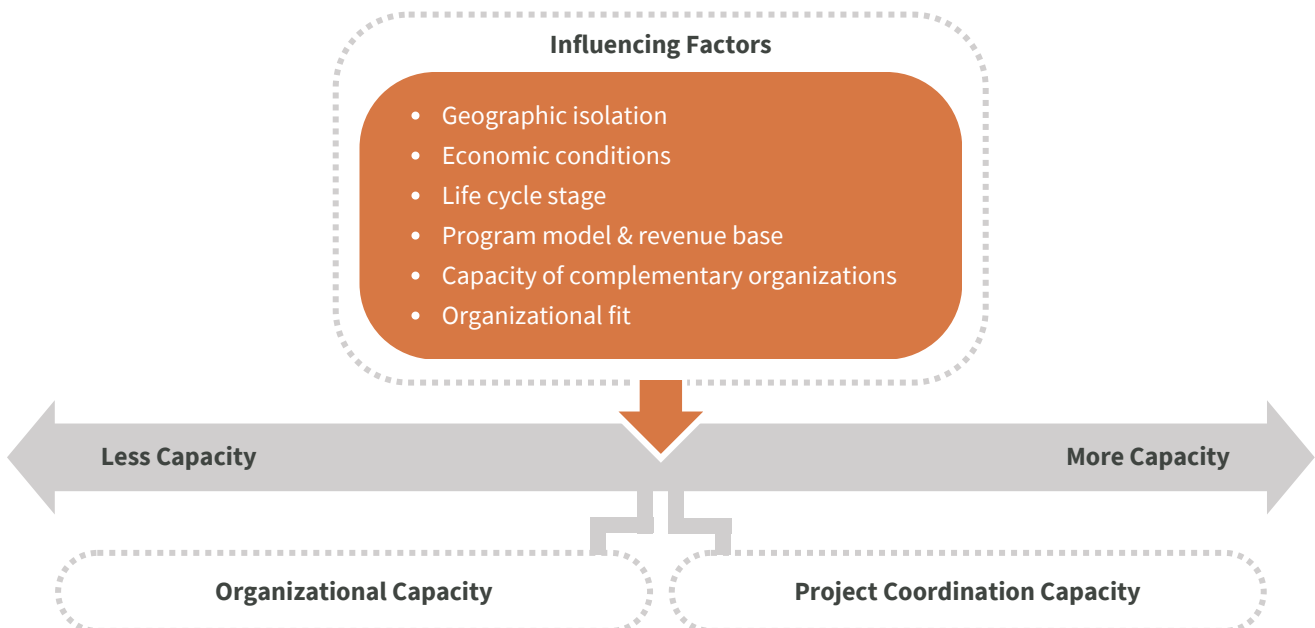
## FOR MULTI-BENEFIT PROJECTS THROUGHOUT COLORADO

Multi-benefit watershed/river projects are a win-win for the environment and water users as they improve watershed health while enhancing water storage, agricultural efficiency, and outdoor recreation. However, the pursuit of local multi-benefit projects requires a complex mix of staffing and resources, organizational support, technical assistance, and funding. This examination is prompted by the desire of River Network and partners to advance conditions and frameworks for successful multi-benefit project implementation throughout Colorado. Recommendations are geared toward the Colorado Water Conservation Board, statewide NGOs, and other funders who are considered the primary players in lifting an initiative to scale-up multi-benefit projects.

Organizational and project coordination capacity at the local level or “local capacity” are critical for advancing multi-benefit water/watershed projects. The scale and needs of capacity vary between communities and so can the influence of geographic isolation, economic conditions, organizational fit, and other factors.



Conceptual model of how “local capacity” (organizational and project coordination capacity) support all aspects of a multi-benefit project life cycle. Adapted from (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019).



Conceptual model of the spectrum of existing local capacity. Adapted from (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2014).

Lessons learned and best practices drawn from River Network’s Agricultural Coordinator pilot project and numerous other NGO and funder experiences in advancing multi-benefit projects emphasize the importance of capacity investments for leveraging program funding and making conservation gains, and point to the need for:

- **Reliable and permanent capacity funding**
- **A team approach that draws from multiple skillsets**
- **Community support**
- **Partnership from statewide NGOs**

Community-based agricultural and watershed organizations are mission-aligned and could have community support to grow their capacity for multi-benefit projects. Communities with stream management or other watershed plans have a foundation in terms of community support and project prioritization.

However, no two organizations or communities are alike and careful consideration of existing local capacity and influential factors is necessary if local capacity is to be scaled in a certain location.

While there are numerous financial opportunities for advancing multi-benefit projects, local capacity is mostly underfunded and/or the accessibility of that funding for rural and disadvantaged communities is a limiting factor.



*Ben Wolcott, landowner and agricultural producer in Mancos, CO, River Network Agricultural Coordinator participant. Photo by Lauren Harper.*

Specific capacity investments are necessary from Colorado Water Conservation Board, NGOs, and private funders to scale-up multi-benefit projects throughout Colorado. The following actions are recommended:

## Recommendations for Colorado Water Conservation Board

1. **Invest in capacity:** Utilize CWCB's most effective tool, grantmaking, to advance progress on capacity building for local communities.
  - a. Provide consistent and durable funding to sustain capacity in local communities beyond the current programs designed to leverage federal funding opportunities.
  - b. Advocate for capacity funding among peers. CWCB should collaborate with other primary players to tell a statewide story of success and advocate with private funders (private foundations and donors, water conservancy districts) to fill funding gaps in basins and communities throughout the state.
2. **Measure results:** Evaluate capacity building programs to ensure maximum effectiveness and that commitments to equity are acted upon.
  - a. Set and track clear and real-time metrics for Local Capacity and Technical Assistance grants starting in 2023. Measure the amount of dollars leveraged, the qualitative/quantitative impact of regional program coordinators, and impacts to organizational growth over time.
  - b. Commit to public reporting.
  - c. Conduct a systematic equity evaluation of all funding programs. Use Colorado's EnviroScreen to identify themes and patterns in terms of what organizations/communities are/not being awarded funding and why; and understand opportunities to align with the federal Justice 40 Initiative.
3. **Enhance funding access:** Continue and build upon initiatives to make funding opportunities more accessible.
  - a. Reduce/eliminate grant matching requirements.
  - b. Consider alternatives to reimbursement-paid grant awards to reduce barriers for organizations that lack large or flexible cash reserves.
  - c. Encourage community inclusion on Basin Roundtables. Implement actions to encourage broader community diversity according to Water Equity Task Force recommendations.

## Recommendations for Statewide/Regional NGO

1. **Be strategic to identify statewide needs and capacity building approaches.** Coordinate with other statewide NGOs to determine where to work, identify roles, and develop funding.
2. **Coordinate metrics and evaluation to collate initiatives and tell a statewide story of success.** Establish a collective reporting structure to share and consider evaluation metrics internally and externally.
3. **Facilitate access to funding.** Help community organizations to navigate funding opportunities and/or serve as fiscal agent to enable larger-scale funding applications.
4. **Be intentional with outcomes and meet organizations “where they are.”** Balance intended outcomes with specific capacity needs and anticipated challenges of communities that are the focus of capacity investments.
5. **Develop local funding sources.** Use resources and expertise to assist local communities with the development of durable financial strategies (e.g., water funds, tax initiatives, etc.).
6. **Convene peer learning.** Establish and support peer-to-peer information exchange and mentoring for local organizations.

## Recommendations for Private Funders

1. **Provide consistent and durable capacity funding to sustain capacity in local communities.** Provide multi-year and continuous funding commitments that meet the needs of individual organizations.
2. **Replicate regional technical assistance programs throughout the state.** Continue and replicate capacity and technical assistance programs such as the Colorado River District Accelerator Program.
3. **Be realistic in terms of timing and expectations.** Make strategic investments that support the long-term sustainability of programs where conservation outcomes may take years to be realized.

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*Written by:*

*Stacy Beagh, Strategic by Nature*

*Chelsea Silva, River Network*

[www.rivernetwork.org](http://www.rivernetwork.org)