



Scaling Up Local Capacity for Multi-Benefit Projects Throughout Colorado

June 23, 2023

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Executive Summary

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. 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 point to the need for reliable and permanent capacity funding, a team approach that draws from multiple skillsets, community support, and 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.

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

Recommendations for the 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 other 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 NGOs:

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.

Background

Approach

Agricultural organizations (nonprofits and conservation districts) and watershed groups throughout Colorado are being pressed to lead the charge in implementing multi-benefit projects, as their missions, purposes, eye to local solutions, and built community trust naturally align with multi-benefit project goals.

- Seventy-four (74) conservation districts in Colorado work with landowners to address natural resources conservation (Colorado Association of Conservation Districts, 2023).
- Eighty-five (85)+ community nonprofits and watershed groups in Colorado (based on lists provided by River Network Stream Management Plan Peer Learning Network, Colorado Watershed Assembly, and Southwest Collaborative Support Network) have missions that advance solutions to natural resource issues.
- These numbers do not account for the numerous local governments, Tribes, special districts, place-based collaborative groups, statewide NGOs, wetland focus area committees, water conservancy districts, and others that take on multi-benefit project work throughout the state.

This white paper is prompted by the desire of River Network and partners to advance conditions and frameworks for local organizations to be successful with multi-benefit project implementation throughout Colorado. This paper considers data provided via:

- The final grant report (River Network, 2023a) on River Network's two-year pilot project to increase the quantity and quality of multi-benefit projects pursued on private land by funded agriculture organizations in the Yampa and Southwest basins.
- Interviews with statewide/regional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), funders, and model programs from other states either working in partnership with pilot communities or undertaking similar initiatives to develop multi-benefit projects.
- Applicable research and case studies observing efforts to build capacity for multi-benefit and rural conservation and restoration initiatives across the United States.

Resulting is an assessment of common successes, challenges, and lessons learned regarding the project coordination and organizational capacity needs associated with development of multi-benefit projects, and recommendations for strategic investment to support the scaling of multi-benefit projects throughout Colorado.

Definitions

The following terminology is used throughout this paper:

Multi-Benefit Project: River/watershed protection, conservation, and enhancement project with beneficial outcomes for multiple water use interests (agriculture, municipal, recreational, environmental).

Agricultural Coordinator: Staff hired as part of River Network's pilot project to identify, prioritize, and coordinate multi-benefit projects and serve as the lead point of contact with landowners, ditch owners, partnering organizations, technical advisors, and contractors, to coordinate communications, develop project proposals, and realize funding opportunities.

Project Life Cycle: The various phases included in a project – pre-planning, stakeholder engagement, design, permitting, implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and maintenance.

Project Coordination Capacity: Adequate staffing for management and coordination of collaborative stakeholders and relationships, fundraising, reporting, communication, and education and outreach.

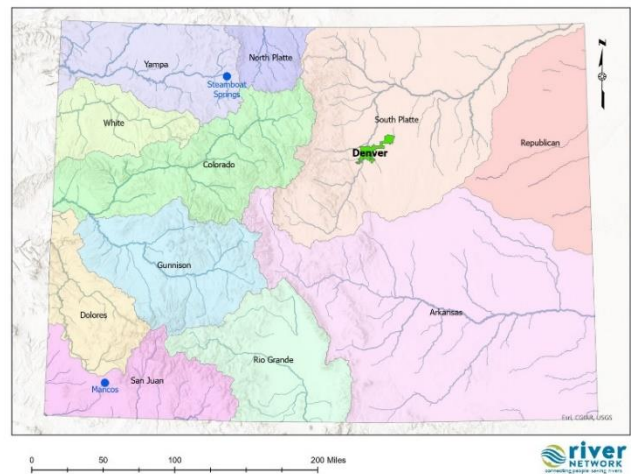
Organizational Capacity: Adequate staff and administration systems, provided by stakeholder(s) of aligned mission, to develop multi-benefit projects via strategic leadership (board of directors and staff), fundraising competency, and strong community relationships.

Equity: Recognizing the differences that exist among communities throughout Colorado and actively working to eliminate the unique barriers experienced by disproportionately impacted communities, where 40% of the population are low-income, housing cost-burdened or people of color (Colorado Department of Public Health and the Environment, 2023, p. 18), pursuing multi-benefit projects.

Local Capacity Investment: Funding to support project and organizational capacity at the local level.

Pilot Project Communities

In working on Stream Management Plans (SMPs) throughout Colorado since 2017, River Network has repeatedly heard there is a significant demand by community-based agricultural and watershed organizations to become effective advocates for multi-benefit projects that integrate irrigation water management and infrastructure improvements, river flow restoration and/or leases, and management of private riparian lands. Local agricultural and watershed organizations furthermore have stressed the need for additional support in overcoming various challenges: lack of capacity for meaningful outreach to landowners, lack of information on available funding sources and how these can work in concert, and lack of technical skills to develop appropriate project plans.



Community Agriculture Alliance is based out of Steamboat Springs in the Yampa Basin while Mancos Conservation District is out of Mancos in the Southwest Basin.

In response to these needs, River Network conducted a two-year pilot project with funding from a CWCB Water Plan grant and organizational matching funds to provide agricultural organizations in both the Yampa and Southwest basins with resources to increase the quantity and quality of multi-benefit projects on private lands. River Network provided funding to support agricultural coordinator positions housed within agricultural organizations. In addition, each agricultural organization was provided with a small budget for technical assistance in the project scoping phase (i.e., pre-planning and design) of the pilot project. River Network also provided mentorship throughout the pilot project such as grant proposal review, coaching on landowner outreach, and networking and advice on partnership development. Pilot participants were:

Community Agriculture Alliance (Yampa River, Yampa White Green Basin)

In northwest Colorado’s Yampa Basin, Community Agriculture Alliance (CAA) has worked since 1999 to preserve agriculture in the Yampa Valley by initiating and supporting programs and policies that benefit

and connect producers, consumers, and the community. Through the pilot project, CAA expanded its outreach to agricultural producers to identify, prioritize, scope, and develop proposals for multi-benefit projects. CAA and partners additionally supported the Yampa White Green Basin Roundtable’s Integrated Water Management Plan (IWMP) for the Yampa River, which includes recommendation that partners “build support for IWMP recommendations through coordination, collaboration, partnerships, communications, and leadership for agriculture (Yampa White Green Basin Roundtable, 2022).”

Mancos Conservation District (Mancos River, Southwest Basin)

In Southwest Colorado, the Mancos Conservation District (MCD) has a proven track record of success working with private landowners and irrigation companies to restore riparian and floodplain areas and, at the same time, improve critical agricultural drought resilience. MCD provides a capacity role for these projects as fiscal sponsor or by assisting landowners and irrigation companies through the grant application process. The pilot project builds on previous and ongoing MCD/regional collaborative planning efforts (including the ongoing development of a SMP with the collaborative Mancos Watershed Group, or MWG, for the Mancos Rivers and served communities) to identify priority projects using an integrated, holistic approach to watershed resilience for all water users.

Elements of Local Capacity

There are various levels of capacity that occur at the local level and enable successful implementation of multi-benefit projects (Figure 1). First, organizational capacity is foundational to an organization’s success, thus positioning them to include project development into their program portfolio. Second, there is specific capacity associated with project coordination that is critical at all stages of a project’s life cycle, and important for simultaneously managing multiple projects at once.

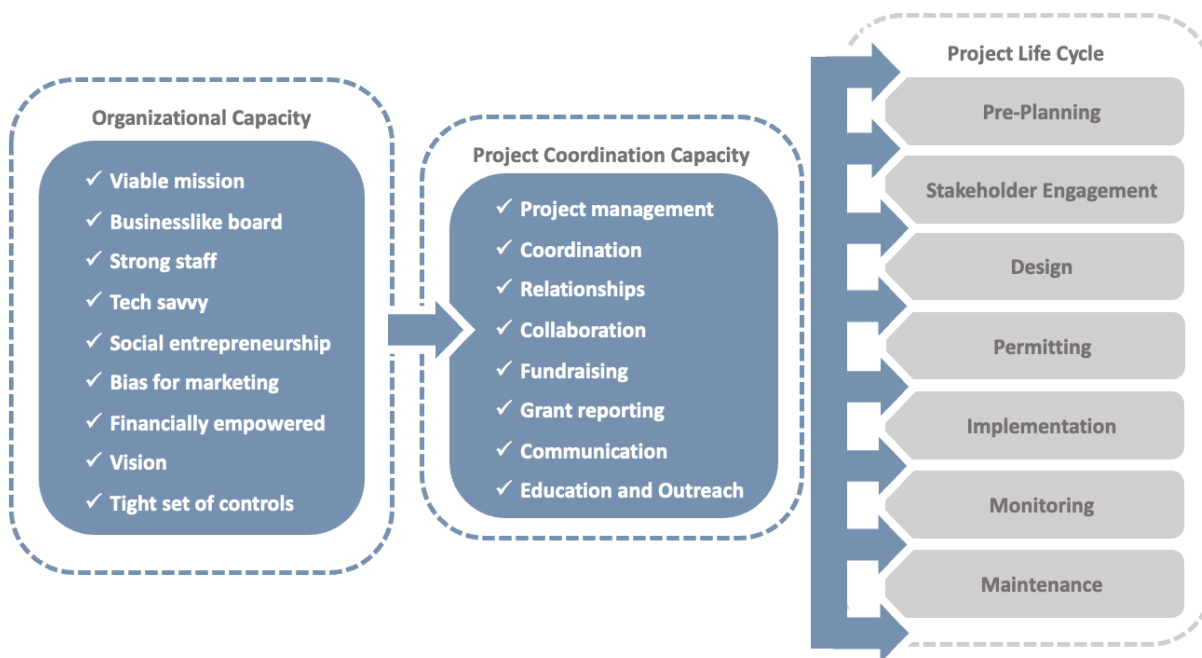


Figure 1. Conceptual model of how “local capacity” (organizational and project coordination capacity) support all aspects of a project life cycle. Adapted from (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019).

Organizational Capacity

Organizational capacity refers to the level of capability of an organization to implement its mission, or to deliver products and services that satisfy expectations and continually anticipate future opportunities (Murphy, 2007; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2014). Characteristics of a successful nonprofit organization can be applied to conservation districts as well and include a viable mission; businesslike board of directors; a strong, well-educated staff; wired and technologically savvy; social entrepreneurship (i.e., willing to take risks); a bias for marketing (i.e., understand that everything they do is marketing); financial empowerment (i.e., diversified income and income from non-traditional sources like an endowment or mil levy); a vision for where they are going, and; a tight set of controls (Brinckerhoff, 2000). All these characteristics make it possible for organizations to take on and successfully implement programs. Organizations that successfully execute conservation projects have strategic plans, engaged boards, dedicated staffing, knowledge/experience, fund development and administration systems, and relationships with a suite of funders (Sanderson, et al., 2022). Pilot project participants reiterated the need for organizational capacity, specifically the characteristics of board leadership, knowledgeable and trusted staff, and being financially empowered to ensure overall success of multi-benefit projects. Additionally, pilot project participants and interviewees emphasized the importance of developing and maintaining the trust of the community as an important underpinning to any mission-based work.

Capacity for Project Coordination

Funders, statewide/regional NGOs, and pilot project interview participants universally note that quality project coordination is essential in transforming multi-benefit project ideas into on-the-ground realities. Project coordination capacity is managing all stages of a project life cycle and includes coordination of a whole project implementation program or portfolio of projects and, therefore, is not limited to management of one project at a time. Project coordination builds on strong organizational capacity and includes capacity for project management, and stakeholder coordination, relationship building, collaboration, fundraising (e.g., grant writing), grant reporting, communications, education, and outreach (Adapted from (Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019). For example, building strong working relationships with stakeholders and addressing their concerns through planning and design can lead to successful project outcomes such as staying on track with budgets and schedules (Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019). This also includes capacity for communicating the inherent complexities of multi-benefit projects and how they fit into community priorities. As (Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019) found, there needs to be landowner comfort with the workflow and time to communicate and help landowners understand and/or vet engineering or other technical components of a project. Small organizations are often challenged by lack of capacity for basic project management tasks, including grant management and grant-related communications (Sanderson, et al., 2022).

Pilot project landowners in Mancos, CO share that, with support from the agricultural coordinator at MCD, they were able to complete projects that had been “sitting on the backburner for decades.” MCD shared that project coordination capacity has allowed them to pursue large-price tag projects by virtue of providing the time needed to build relationships with federal funding partners.

Some interview participants suggested that NRCS is a logical partner to provide project coordination support for multi-benefit projects, with numerous funding opportunities being made available through the Farm Bill, and the technical assistance support the agency can provide as landowners develop conservation plans that position projects for funding. But there are barriers to this involvement: NRCS is

often understaffed and/or staff have limited time availability capacity (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, 2022, p. 8). NRCS is not proactive in landowner outreach on their own; rather, the agency either waits for landowners to approach it to develop projects or relies on partnerships with external organizations (either formal or informal) to develop relationships, present opportunities to landowners, and in some cases, provide support for the development of conservation plans. Further, local project coordination provides an opportunity to secure non-federal funding to leverage/match NRCS resources, and/or provide alternative funding when NRCS fund development is challenged to keep projects advancing.

Spectrum of Existing Local Capacity

Factors such as geographic isolation, local economic conditions, life cycle stage, program model/revenue base, and capacity of complimentary community organizations can greatly influence the level of capacity that exists (Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2014) for coordinating and implementing multi-benefit projects, both organizationally and for project coordination (Figure 2).

- **Geographic isolation:** Lack of opportunity for local collaboration and can require more resources and time on the part of the local organization to build non-local relationships and partnerships (i.e., with funders, state leadership, technical consultants), and elevate awareness of the organization's mission.
- **Economic conditions:** Lower nonprofit salaries in rural communities (Colorado Nonprofit Association, 2020) and high housing costs overall, can make it harder to retain and hire staff, especially those with technical skill sets that require higher pay.
- **Life cycle stage:** Organizations will face different obstacles and opportunities depending on their stage – start-up, adolescent (growing), mature, revitalizing, or declining. These stages can influence an organization's tolerance for risk-taking, areas of investment (program versus organizational capacity development), need for systems, and many other factors (Palmer, Dunford, & Akin, 2009, p. 29).
- **Program model & revenue base:** Program considerations such as leadership or revenue structure and diverse or sustainable program funding (i.e., mil levy) can influence level of capacity. Small organizational budgets and smaller staff sizes mean that organizations serving rural communities have less time and people power to apply for and administer federal and other types of funding and/or large grants that are necessary for implementing multi-benefit projects (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, 2022) (Sequoia, 2022).
- **Capacity of complimentary organizations:** Community collaborations, nonprofits, local governments, and other entities that are taking on similar work can provide an opportunity to leverage resources.
- **Organizational fit:** The extent to which the development of multi-benefit projects is aligned with the organization's mission and goals.

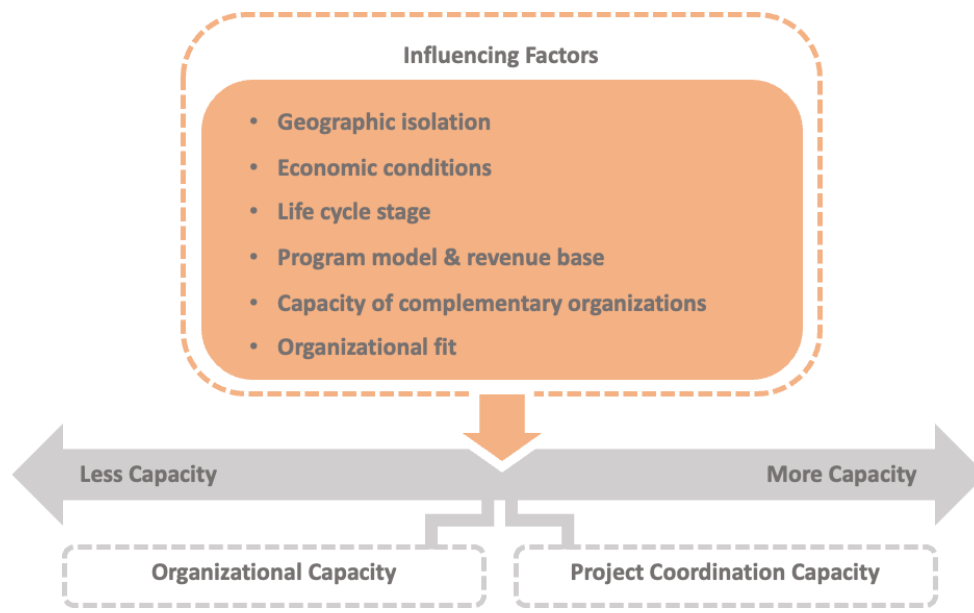


Figure 2. Conceptual model of the spectrum of existing local capacity. Adapted from (Brinckerhoff, 2000; Grantmakers for Effective Organizations, 2014).

CAA and MCD entered the pilot project with differing existing local capacity, which directly impacted the number and scale of multi-benefit projects identified, scoped, and developed. Both organizations are situated in rural areas with geographic isolation, have strong support from their Board of Directors, and a long history of working with their respective agricultural communities. Key differences between the organizations include:

- *Capacity of complimentary organizations:* In the Mancos basin, formal ditch companies make decisions collectively and can serve as the fiscal agent on projects which allowed for seamless collaboration by MCD in developing projects with them. Agriculture in the Yampa basin is represented by a mix of family run operations who work together in an informal fashion and large-incorporated ditch companies who make management and financial decisions under formalized agreements. The lack of incorporated ditch companies and adopted governance and financial structures greatly reduces their ability to apply for and meet the requirements of federal grants. There is a lack of a "culture of collaboration" amongst shared ditch users that must first be established, which takes time and trust building work before any project can move forward.
- *Organizational fit:* CAA's work has historically focused on local food production, only recently implementing multi-benefit projects with landowners, while MCD has years of experience working on multi-benefit projects with the mission to address natural resource concerns through locally driven solutions. As a conservation district, MCD has taxing authority, access to conservation district-specific grants, and the ability to serve as fiscal agents for projects with landowners. In addition, MCD has established relationships and experience with NRCS and the Colorado State Conservation Board and is able to take advantage of their technical support, training, and peer-to-peer learning network. As a nonprofit, CAA can bypass the "red tape" faced by government entities, allowing them to be nimbler as an organization. While both organization types have their advantages, the taxing authority, access to resources, and inclusion in a national

network of peer organizations helps conservation districts streamline the multi-benefit process and makes them a natural fit for this work.

Due to these differences, MCD started the pilot project with more existing capacity allowing them to focus on the entire life cycle of multi-benefit projects while CAA spent more time focused on the early stages of project pre-planning, stakeholder engagement, and scoping. This is reflected in the vastly different dollar amounts that each organization was able to procure for projects during the pilot: \$669,040 for CAA versus \$21.6 million for MCD.

Best Practices and Lessons Learned

Importance of Local Capacity Investments

Local capacity investment is valuable for project effectiveness and ensuring the ability to take advantage of implementation funding and keep projects and coalitions advancing over time. Investments in organization capacity (e.g., staffing, operational systems, knowledge & skills) and project coordination capacity (e.g., planning, project management, monitoring) are critical to advance conservation outcomes (Sanderson, et al., 2022; RiversEdge West, 2016). The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB), a lottery-funded grant program with the mission to support watershed restoration, points to its consistent and year-over-year funding awards for capacity as a key factor in making progress toward the state's desired ecological outcomes. From specific large-scale grants that accommodate capacity needs, to consistent annual funding contributions to watershed councils and water conservation districts (typically \$130,000 to each council, \$190,000 to each district), the provision of consistent funds offers stability and flexibility, with minimal requirements for application and reporting.

Local capacity investment also has significant opportunity to leverage dollars. Interview participants provided examples of dollars leveraged by local capacity investments:

- The Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) demonstrated how small-scale funding for capacity, namely planning and stakeholder coordination, can be leveraged into large project investment. In a review of 14 SMP/IWMPs completed in the period 2015-2023, CWCB's \$3 million investment in planning/capacity positions allowed coalitions to leverage \$281 million in potential project implementation funding, with numerous more projects yet to be developed (River Network, 2023b).
- A study by the Oregon Water Enhancement Board (OWEB) showed that for every dollar committed to increase watershed council (i.e., equivalent structures to the local agricultural and watershed organizations operating in Colorado) organizational capacity, \$5.09 from other sources was secured for watershed project implementation (Hibbard & Lurie, 2005).
- The Colorado River Water Conservation District, through its Community Funding Partnership, has invested nearly \$7.5 million in 87 projects, leveraging, and piecing together an additional ~\$63 million from other funding sources.
- River Network's pilot project investment of \$269,411 (\$133,170 from a CO Water Plan grant, \$136,241 in local match) has leveraged \$22.2 million for project coordination and implementation, and additional capacity:
 - CAA leveraged \$48,345 to secure \$669,040 (\$209,000 of this pending) to support multi-benefit projects and capacity (River Network, 2023a).

- MCD leveraged \$55,159 to secure \$21.6 million (\$21 million pending) to support multi-benefit projects and local capacity, with the possibility of an additional \$25 million in the next five to seven years through Natural Resources Conservation Service Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (NRCS PL-566).
- A \$50,000 capacity investment in 2022 in RiversEdge West by state and private funding sources has leveraged \$50,000 in NRCS capacity-building funding and \$240,172 in non-federal support for work on private lands. In 2023, with a similar \$50,000 investment, REW is estimating \$923,047 to be approved by NRCS.

While these stories are encouraging, interviewees and case studies of coalitions throughout the Western United States confirm that funding for capacity building and staffing in small and medium-sized river restoration and management organizations is difficult to secure (AMP Insights, 2022). For example, while helpful, most CWCB Water Plan grants can only be used for project coordination that is specifically tied to one phase in a project (e.g., planning or project implementation), not the overall capacity that is needed for long-term success toward conservation outcomes.

Reliable, Permanent Funding

Multi-benefit project implementation in Colorado is funded primarily through state and foundation grants, with some projects engaging federal funding. Grant funding is a reliable and efficient way to fund projects, and given the scope and scale of many projects, will continue as an important and appropriate source of funds. However, sustainable funding expressly for capacity could help organizations overcome the challenges associated with project-based grant awards – e.g., project coordination during non-implementation phases of projects and required matching funds.

- High Competition for Limited Dollars: With few exceptions, conservation grantors largely lack the ability to or interest in funding capacity because there is not a discrete/tangible deliverable. As a result, programs with capacity dollars are limited and highly competitive. Organizations with lesser capacity usually get outcompeted and left at even more of a disadvantage.
- Limitations on Use of Funds: Of those that do allow for capacity, they primarily support capacity that is tied to the implementation of a specific project. One interviewee describes piecing together funds provided by half a dozen grantors to provide for one staff position, “Which comes with the burden of preparing six funding proposals, training staff in six different funding sources/billing codes, aligning funds solely with the implementation component of the project, and meeting the reporting requirements of six different funders.”
- Match Fund Requirements: Many grants require matching contributions by the recipient. While it is not impossible for organizations to meet this requirement, many report being challenged by the additional capacity required to raise the funds, with adequate lead time (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, 2022). The prospect of having a reliable source of funds year after year that could be used as match is attractive to many of the organizations interviewed.

Positioning an organization with long-term and durable funding support helps to ensure momentum is maintained, and that projects are viable and effective well into the future. Interview participants explain the importance and necessity of simultaneously moving forward multiple projects, often at largely different phases, to ensure timelines match with funding opportunities, and to allow for contingencies when projects are delayed. Projects can take years to develop, monitor and maintain after

implementation is completed, with these tasks often outliving the funding contract. One interviewee, a funder, explains that investing large amounts of money in short-term (3-5 year) capacity building initiatives delivers mixed results, including an inability for local partners to maintain capacity beyond conclusion of the investment, and thus suggests that lower and more strategic capacity investment over time (rather than scaling to match project investment) may produce a most lasting result. Bonneville Environmental Foundation found its modest ten-year funding commitment provided advantages over short-term investment, citing that the minimal amount of time to construct an operational foundation and build momentum for the needed multi-decade efforts set them up to realize considerable conservation gains (Warren, Reeve, & Arnold, 2016). One model is for capacity investments to be contextual (i.e., tailored to meet the needs of the specific organization), multi-year and continuous (i.e., take the long-game approach), and collective (i.e., invest in multiple levels inside of an organization) (Bartczak, 2013).

Applicable Sustainable Funding Sources & Structures

Aside from encouraging private funders to structure strategic investments, interview participants present a variety of models for consideration in designing permanent and reliable funding sources for organizational and project coordination capacity, and matching purposes (Table 1). As it is not in River Network’s scope to review all possible sustainable funding options, the following are relevant examples that are currently in existence and present an opportunity to replicate.

Table 1. Sustainable funding models that could be replicated for local capacity investments.

Funding Mechanism	Examples
<p>Local taxing models. While these vary in scope and scale and can be challenging to pass (based on the political will of a given community), once established this funding mechanism can be indefinitely durable.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pitkin County Healthy Rivers and Streams Fund: Created in 2008 via a voter-approved ballot initiative; provides one tenth of one percent sales tax for local planning, research, education, and project implementation (Pitkin County Healthy Rivers, 2021). • Chaffee County Common Ground: Created in 2018 through sales tax revenues. Grants are awarded via an advisory committee to various forest, water, and community resilience initiatives (Chaffee County Common Ground, 2023). • St. Vrain & Left Hand Water Conservancy District Property Tax: Passed in 2020, and using stream management plan priorities as a base, this property tax increased funds for the District Water Plan. As a result, the District is poised to leverage up to \$240 million in federal and state dollars for multi-benefit water infrastructure projects (Smith, 2023). • Colorado River District Accelerator Program: Putting a recent mil levy increase to use, the Colorado River District created a “special funding round to support grant writing, feasibility, design, preliminary environmental review, benefits analysis, and engineering to support federal funding application (Colorado River District, 2022).” • Mancos Conservation District (MCD) Mil Levy: MCD is a taxing authority, proceeds of which fund one percent of its budget. This small-but-mighty revenue stream provides for grant matching funds and is flexible in providing for organizational needs.
<p>State budget allocations or dedicated funds. Unless established by constitutional amendment, most funding of this type is not reliable year</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board: A lottery-funded state agency providing dedicated capacity grants to annually fund state-registered watershed councils (Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board, 2023). • California Watershed Coordinator Program: Established in 2000, this program supports watershed coordinator positions at local governments or

<p>over year as it requires annual legislative (re)authorization.</p>	<p>NGOs to help achieve state natural resources goals in surface and groundwater, climate change resiliency, forest health and outdoor access (California Department of Conservation, 2023).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Colorado Water Conservation Board (CWCB) Federal Technical Assistance Program: Provides Local Capacity and Technical Assistance grant programs to help communities prepare and apply for federal funding (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023a). The Federal Technical Assistance Program provides one-time funding through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Program Act (ARRPA) and demand is high, with one-fifth of the funds already awarded in the first six months of the program (State of Colorado, 2023). OWEB’s capacity grants have provided roughly \$4 million annually for capacity alone suggesting that the CWCB Federal Technical Assistance Program is a good start, but likely will not meet the funding need throughout the State.
<p>Community-based philanthropic funding. Once established, endowments are perpetual sources of consistent funds, though dependent on investment returns.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yampa River Fund: A community-driven, voluntary water fund designed to leverage philanthropic contributions through an endowment. Earnings on restricted funds are granted to priority projects, including project coordination capacity (e.g., stakeholder/landowner relationship building and project development) (Yampa River Fund, 2023). • Gunnison County Stewardship Fund: Contributions from various business partnerships make up the fund which supports efforts to sustain and enhance public and conserved lands (National Forest Foundation, 2023).

A Team Approach to Draw from Multiple Skillsets

Interview participants note that coordinating multi-benefit projects requires multiple and diverse skillsets, captured in four categories: leadership, relationship building, administration, and technical knowledge and skills. Each of these skillsets is unique and may take years of training and experience to cultivate in a single individual. Interview participants note that it is very difficult to find one with all four skillsets and that expecting to find a “unicorn” able to fulfill all four roles is unrealistic; more effective is a team approach. Just as it may be unrealistic to expect one person to fulfill these roles, it may be challenging for a single organization to be fully responsible; distributing the workload across organizations is likely to buffer the challenges and risks of a single organization approach.

Interview participants mention that no matter the model employed to achieve multiple skillsets coverage, it is important to build in compensation and dedicated time and space for mentorship and on-the-job training in positions and coalitions. Pilot project participants shared regular check ins and email correspondence with each other, and River Network allowed for invaluable idea generation, problem solving, and peer-to-peer discussion. As a result of on-the-job training and mentorship, pilot project participants note gains in their professional growth and development that made them more prepared and confident in their positions.

Leadership

Managing complex moving parts (relationships, multiple projects at different stages, etc.) in multi-benefit projects takes leadership. Interview participants note that confidence, clear communication, humility, openness to new ideas, and respect are needed to maintain and strengthen important relationships with landowners, funders, project partners, and teams. Pilot project participants share that coordinating several multi-benefit projects at once requires constant problem solving and setbacks. One

pilot project participant note having some projects in the early stages while others are near completion is important for maintaining momentum and community interest in the face of challenges and delayed project timelines. Coordinators must have vision to connect the dots between the funding, relationships, and projects, and they must have the ability to shift and bounce back from difficult moments and failure.

Relationship Building

Multi-benefit projects in rural communities require buy-in from landowners which starts with trust. Cultivating trust occurs through building relationships which is one of the early steps in advancing multi-benefit projects; this is time consuming and can be challenging work that requires patience and flexibility. Those working in the CAA pilot project mention that their work is made easier by an existing network of built relationships and trust. A coordinator who already has relationships and trust in the community will require less lead time in building and maintaining critical relationships with landowners as well as project partners and funders. SMP/IWMP processes serve as a relationship building exercise that can yield collaborative multi-benefit project opportunities.

Administration

The administrative side of project coordination capacity requires familiarity with budgeting, accounting, and grant writing. Additionally, organizational development skills are needed to ensure funding is available for staff time and the other resources needed to develop multi-benefit projects. Familiarity with the different funding programs that support multi-benefit projects also helps reduce barriers to landowner engagement. Landowners note that coordinators clearly communicated funding programs and grant applications thus opening opportunities for landowners to address projects with grants that otherwise would not have been completed due to lack of funding (River Network, 2023a).

Technical Knowledge and Skills

Having technical knowledge and expertise related to the development of multi-benefit projects (science, engineering, ecology, etc.) allows project coordinators to communicate complex and interacting fields of study to landowners, project partners, and funders, even if consultants are employed to do the actual project design. By nature, multi-benefit projects are interdisciplinary, crossing the bounds of river health science, fish biology, ecology, engineering, etc.

Community Support

Community support comes in multiple forms, from local leaders endorsing project development to place-based collaborative initiatives bringing together multiple stakeholders interested in conservation (or other) outcomes. Interview participants were consistent in acknowledging the important role these supports play in advancing their projects.

Planning

All interviewees acknowledge the importance of using community and/or organizational plans to guide multi-benefit project work. Some interviewees are guided by organizational strategic plans, others by SMPs or IWMPs, basin implementation plans and/or the Colorado Water Plan. The benefits of alignment with and utilization of these plans include:

- Understanding local, community priorities and garnering buy-in for multi-benefit projects to move forward projects and attract funding/resources.
- Solidifying organizational/project credibility among community leaders/members and funders.

- Laying the groundwork for multiple organizations to strategically work together (e.g., shared vision among partners).
- Helping stakeholders to consider the possibilities for collective work pursued at scale, which can be more attractive for larger and/or multi-year funders.
- Attracting funding that supports the goals of the community/organization versus based on funder whim or “chasing” funds.
- Setting the stage for sustainability and long-term investment in both project and capacity in alignment with broader plans and goals.

Place-Based Collaboratives

Many community-based conservation efforts are supported through local place-based collaboratives which provide essential on-the-ground planning, community-based strategy, project coordination, fundraising and evaluation. For example, MCD’s Mancos Watershed Group, a diverse group of private landowners, federal land management agencies, local municipalities, the Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, and various interest groups that work collaboratively at the Mancos watershed scale, advances stream management planning and ongoing community resiliency efforts (Mancos Conservation District, 2023). CAA and other partners recently created the Yampa River Collaborative, a collaborative group to coordinate implementation of specific Yampa IWMP recommendations.

In a review of five multi-benefit projects throughout the West, a key takeaway is the importance of building coalitions/collaboratives that represent the diversity and full range of community interests, especially including Tribes. As an example, Friends of the Verde River, The Nature Conservancy, and Environmental Defense Fund in Arizona have “developed an effective partnership by meeting regularly, establishing an efficient division of labor and roles and working together to build relationships with local landowners and agricultural producers,” all which has been attributed to their success in advancing conservation outcomes on the Verde River and for the region (AMP Insights, 2022). Managing and funding these collaborations is a critical component of project coordination and depending on the scope and scale of a collaborative, can require a level of capacity that is above and beyond project coordination (Sanderson, et al., 2022).

Funding Navigation and Assistance

State agencies provide important support to local capacity efforts through technical and fundraising assistance. CWCB, for example, recently hired basin-scale coordinators to help grant applicants navigate state funding opportunities and developed the Colorado Water Funding Navigator (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023c) which compliments the Colorado Department of Local Affairs (DOLA) Local Community Funding Guide (Colorado Department of Local Affairs, 2023). OWEB employs a staff person to help grantees make connections, resolve issues and advance common strategic initiatives. Other examples that demonstrate the long history of state agencies supporting local communities include DOLA, which hired technical teams to help small communities develop applications for drinking and wastewater projects, and the basin coordinators retained by the state’s Water Quality Control Commission (dissolved in the early 2000s). An ongoing challenge is sustaining these supports through times of state budget reduction.

Role of Statewide NGOs

There are numerous national and regional NGOs that operate at a statewide scale with missions and/or initiatives to develop multi-benefit projects within Colorado; these NGOs serve in both lead and

supporting roles, with their participation bringing needed expertise, resources, and credibility in the conservation field.

Evaluation of River Network’s pilot project suggests that agricultural coordinators – working in smaller, local organizations – benefitted from support provided by field staff from statewide NGOs. Field staff provide the following benefits to on-the-ground project development:

- Provision of technical assistance – e.g., legal, engineering, and specific project development expertise, water rights and policy, and scientific research to support proposed concepts and actions.
- Access to alternative funding mechanisms, often not in the portfolio of small, community-based organizations. (e.g., organizational capacity to apply for and manage federal grants).
- Access to state and national network of conservation organizations and that can help to advance policy and other supportive initiatives.

Statewide NGOs report challenges working in some communities because they lack the local reputation and community trust to be immediately effective; there also are limits to staffing and funding, which forces prioritization of projects with which meaningful involvement can occur. As such, our recommended preferred model for project development and implementation success places a recognized and connected community-based organization in the lead, with the statewide NGO in a key but supportive role.

There are multiple models for statewide NGOs and community-based organizations to work together, with each offering various benefits and challenges important to consider when scaling or replicating projects and organizational/project coordination capacity; outlined in Table 2:

Table 2: Models for Local Capacity Partnerships

Models for Building Local Capacity	Benefits	Challenges
Statewide NGO field staff serve as lead project coordinator for local-level projects, supported by community-based organization(s) and local Conservation District.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide technical expertise, built-in organizational capacity, and resources. ● Those with longstanding reputations and relationships in communities can effectively leverage resources and make connections important to project success. ● Provide opportunity to engage local chapter volunteers (as applicable) for community support, fundraising. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Best operate in cooperation with local groups. ● Risk duplication of efforts/outreach with local organizations. ● May diminish small, rural organizations’ opportunities to build capacity (i.e., can perpetuate advantaged access to funding and project implementation by well-resourced organizations at the expense of smaller, local organizations).
Community-based organization serves as lead project coordinator for local-level projects, supported by statewide NGO field staff and local	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Local trust is in place, particularly when staff are hired from/live in the community served. ● Project lead is more “in touch, in tune” with local needs and politics, and can efficiently adjust project work accordingly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● NGOs have less control in project outcomes, risking misalignment with their own organizational, project and/or funding needs/expectations. ● Local employment challenges (affordable housing, competitive

Conservation District.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Project lead can rely on NGO partners for technical expertise, advice and (potentially) funding. 	wages); turnover in small staff is difficult.
Local Conservation District serves as lead project coordinator, supported by statewide NGO field staff and community-based organization(s).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conservation District taxing potential (funding source). ● Access to NRCS funds. ● Project lead can rely on NGO partners for technical expertise, advice and (potentially) funding. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Small, volunteer nature of most Conservation Districts does not support rapid scaling/replicability of projects. ● NGOs have less control in project outcomes, risking misalignment with their own organizational, project and/or funding needs/expectations.
Shared Positions: Federal/ state partners, local partners (e.g., NRCS, Colorado Parks and Wildlife, Town of Mancos), and local Conservation District cost-share a Project Coordinator employed by a statewide NGO or community-based organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Federal or state partner provides up to five years of stable funding for a lead position. ● NGO/local partner(s) provide(s) non-federal matching funds. ● NRCS partnership/employee structure allows access to federal funding for projects, including design. ● Community-based organization can leverage state or private funds for projects when federal funding is not a fit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Competing mission interests between partner organizations requires strong commitment, cooperation, and navigation. ● Reporting/oversight of employee by multiple organizations can create confusion and disagreement. ● Meeting matching fund requirements can be challenging. ● Some positions may have a limited scope (e.g., focus on project design and developing proposals versus implementing projects).

Recommendations

The interviews conducted, findings from the pilot project, and supplemental research conducted to produce this report all affirm that continued and expanded investment in both local project coordination and organizational capacity is critical to successful implementation of multi-benefit projects. Fortunately, the recent update of the Colorado Water Plan encourages and provides funding to develop multi-benefit projects. Massive federal investments also provide an unprecedented opportunity to finance these types of projects. The time to capitalize on these opportunities is now. There is also an opportunity to deeply consider equity in decision making and ensure that actions promote the ability for disadvantaged communities to also realize benefits of capacity building and water/conservation gains from multi-benefit projects.

Opportunity for Scaling Capacity

Colorado specifically is positioned to implement multi-benefit projects at the community and river basin level for a variety of reasons including readiness in planning and unprecedented funding opportunities. State and local investments in SMP/IWMPs and basin implementation plans have identified and, in some cases prioritized, multi-benefit projects that are often ready for implementation. The Colorado Water Plan estimated that 1,800 projects costing \$20 billion are forthcoming throughout Colorado’s nine river basins.

Of the projects, 50% are multi-purpose/benefit projects (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023d, p. 153). Additionally, 14 completed SMP/IWMPs as of May 2023 have identified 350 projects that have an estimated cost of \$280 million (River Network, 2023b). Project proponents estimate that project funding would come from a mix of local, state, and federal sources.

Fortunately, given the multi-governmental response to drought across the West, there are ample funding opportunities to implement these projects. The State of Colorado is poised for ongoing investments in multi-benefit water projects through the 2023 Water Plan and securing large-scale federal funding for multi-benefit projects is more realistic than in previous years given the recent passing of the federal Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act / Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) and Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). With dedicated funding for water conservation and habitat restoration, it is the goal of many statewide NGOs and governments, including the State of Colorado, to garner as much of the federal funding for Colorado as possible. While there is ample opportunity to secure funding for multi-benefit projects, the time for local capacity investments is now. Federal funds are anticipated to be allocated by 2026, and time is needed to build local capacity to succeed with applying for and implementing those funds.

Equity Considerations

Equity is currently at the center of national conversations on how resources are distributed to on-the-ground practitioners and communities. Rural communities face greater rates of poverty and smaller tax bases than urban communities, which results in limited resources available for communities and any projects they pursue, multi-benefit or otherwise. Further, rural economies tend to lack economic diversity and be heavily reliant on natural resources, e.g., agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation. As extreme drought and catastrophic wildfires become more common, rural communities are more vulnerable to climate change (U.S. Global Change Research Program, 2018), making implementation of multi-benefit projects more difficult to achieve, but also more important to address.

Philanthropic giving reports show that environmental investments consistently lag other causes, that rural communities, with few exceptions receive less funding than urban areas, and Tribes are severely underfunded as compared to non-Tribal communities.

- Nationally, only three percent of contributions (individuals, foundations, bequests, and corporations) go to environmental causes (Giving USA Foundation).
- In Colorado, the “environment and animals” category was granted approximately \$41M of \$816M (5%) in 2016 (Philanthropy Southwest, 2016). The report does not account for investments made by out-of-state foundations.
- Rural investments in Colorado were \$68M in 2016 (across all causes) as compared to \$548M in urban areas (Philanthropy Southwest, 2016)
- Only one-tenth of one percent (.1%) of foundation philanthropy is awarded to Native American community-based organizations in Colorado and 15 of the top 20 foundations in Colorado do not provide any funding for Native organizations (First Nations Development Institute, 2022).

These structural issues with philanthropy exacerbate the capacity challenges rural communities face including their ability to access funding and increased competition for limited resources. As such, equity

considerations are woven throughout the recommendations as they are paramount to helping rural, low-capacity communities advance multi-benefit projects.

Recommendations for Colorado Water Conservation Board

- 1. Invest in Capacity.** Grant making is CWCB's most effective tool for supporting capacity building, while also advancing progress on equity goals for local communities (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023b). The following recommendations are provided to build on existing Water Plan Agency Actions (e.g., 2.2 and 4.6) and can advance capacity-building investments while maximizing the impact of CWCB grantmaking.
 - a. Provide consistent and durable funding to sustain capacity in local communities beyond the current programs designed to leverage federal funding opportunities.** While the current Federal Technical Assistance grants are a great start, they are limited (i.e., slated to conclude in 2026) and do not provide an adequate amount of capacity funding as compared to other desirable programs (e.g., OWEB capacity grants total \$4M per year).
 - b. Advocate for capacity funding among peers.** CWCB's leadership should advocate with private funders (statewide foundations, water conservancy districts) to fill funding gaps in basins and communities throughout the state. CWCB should coordinate with other key players such as NGOs to tell a collective statewide story of success. It is beyond the scope of this memo to identify specific funding mechanisms for capacity, and River Network looks forward to further discussion with CWCB and other statewide NGOs on this point.

In addition, investment in watershed coalitions and conservation districts could have the additional benefit of built local capacity to respond to natural disasters, which aligns with a key recommendation from the 2013 Colorado flood recovery efforts by CWCB and Colorado Department of Local Affairs. The investments that were recommended at that time ring true for multi-benefit project development today, and include training, resources, and peer-learning on organizational and project coordination capacity skills and knowledge (e.g. project management, conflict resolution, river dynamics, fiscal management, permitting, etc.) (Blazewicz, Jagt, & Sickles, 2019, p. 31).

- 2. Measure Grant Program Results.** Measurement is valuable to informing adjustments that keep programs effective and setting the stage to help replicate programs elsewhere. CWCB is in a unique position to measure program results while in the early stages of the Local Capacity and Technical Assistance grants and regional program coordinator positions to understand how well they are working to support local capacity and leverage federal and state dollars (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023a). Implementing an evaluation process will provide CWCB with the ability to track commitment to equity and recognize and address the rural-urban divide in its programs, policies, and engagement (Colorado Water Conservation Board, 2023b, p. 5) (Water Equity Task Force, 2022). In finding the balance in ensuring that reporting provides appropriate and needed information without burdening grantees/project implementers, the following actions are recommended:
 - a. Set and track clear and real-time metrics for Local Capacity and Technical Assistance grants starting in 2023, including data gathering of and reporting on:**
 - i. Amount of federal, state, and private dollars leveraged because of Technical Assistance and Local Capacity grants awards.

- ii. Qualitative/quantitative impact of the work of regional coordinators in helping communities access state funding (e.g., number, and geographic locations of applications supported by regional coordinators, testimonials from applicants on the value of the coordinators).
 - iii. Data on the type and size of organizations receiving grant awards, and how funds have contributed to growth over time.
 - b. Commit to public reporting.** Public reporting on an annual cycle for all grant programs, like the progress tracking outlined in the 2023 Water Plan for Water Plan grants which is based on Water Supply Reserve Fund Annual Reports.
 - c. Conduct a systematic equity evaluation of all funding programs.**
 - i. Identify/determine any themes or patterns in terms of what organizations/communities are/not being awarded and why. This evaluation could use Colorado EnviroScreen, a tool that identifies communities with the greatest environmental health risks statewide (Colorado Department of Health and the Environment, 2023). Additionally, ensure that program effectiveness metrics are careful to consider that all communities are different, and it may not be possible to compare their outcomes.
 - ii. Understand what, if any, alignments CWCB could make with the Justice 40 Initiative to track performance toward the 40% of funding benefits flowing to disadvantaged communities, for example waiving matching requirements for communities identified in the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool (U.S. Council on Environmental Quality, 2023).
- 3. Enhance Funding Access.** Those involved in this study largely recognize and appreciate CWCB’s efforts to expand access to its grant programs and multiple other resources and understand the limitations in play for a state agency. It is important for CWCB to continue and build upon its investments, with the following actions recommended as additional opportunities to further reduce funding barriers and address equity concerns:
- a. Reduce/eliminate grant matching requirements** as much as possible, with an eye to ensuring that requirements align with the diverse type and size organization/community CWCB desires to have involved in seeking and receiving funding.
 - b. Consider alternatives to reimbursement-paid grant awards,** which can present a major barrier for small community-based groups that lack large or flexible cash reserves.
 - c. Encourage community inclusion on Basin Roundtables.** As emphasized by the Water Equity Task Force, Basin Roundtables play an important role in supporting project coordination and capacity as a direct result of who they elect to serve on the Roundtable and what they fund (Water Equity Task Force, 2022). Roundtables are conveners of cross-sector water users, often initiators and/or supporters of watershed planning processes, and the first funder for many projects through Basin Water Supply Reserve Account funding. Modified Basin Roundtable makeup – e.g., membership term limits, balance of elected versus appointed seats, diversity requirements based on community composition, consideration of diversity, equity, and inclusion imperatives in funding – is likely to result in greater inclusivity of community members and open doors to collaborative and cross-sector multi-benefit project opportunities.

Recommendations for Statewide NGOs

NGOs are recommended to continue their work and investment in capacity building, technical support, and fundraising support for local community initiatives to advance multi-benefit projects. Opportunities for enhancements include:

- 1. Be strategic to identify statewide needs and capacity building approaches.** This includes coordinating on what communities to work in, clearly identifying roles within communities, and coordinating around fund development for capacity positions. Choose the right model for capacity building local partners. For example, cost-shared conservation positions are included in the IRA's \$1 billion fund allocation for NRCS technical assistance. Partnering with organizations that already use this cost-shared position model and/or have the capacity to implement this model could potentially be a good fit for those funds.
- 2. Coordinate metrics and evaluation to collate initiatives and tell a statewide story of success.** Establish a reporting structure to share and consider evaluation metrics and progress internally and externally. Evaluation methods should be developed to conduct a robust analysis on the benefits that people are claiming from multi-benefit projects to help share lessons and advocate for future investments. Adequate funding for measuring and evaluating capacity investments should be incorporated into scopes of work rather than lumped in with grant reporting requirements.
- 3. Facilitate access to funding.** Many rural and less resourced organizations are vying for funding for multi-benefit projects but may lack the capacity to write and manage grants. NGOs or regional public entities can support the application process, distribute grants via block grants, and/or administer unprecedented grant funds from BIL and IRA to benefit the work of smaller less resourced organizations (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, 2022). The recent TNC-supported U.S. Bureau of Reclamation WaterSMART application for the Upper San Juan Watershed Enhancement Program and River Network's Wild & Scenic Rivers Stewardship Partners Funding (River Network, 2023c) are examples of this type of support. Even if NGOs do not serve a fiscal agent role, they can help local communities navigate funding opportunities and connect dots between projects to scale initiatives.
- 4. Be intentional with outcomes and meet organizations "where they are."** Statewide NGOs should plan to balance their intended outcomes with the specific capacity needs, influencing factors and anticipated challenges faced by the communities in which they invest (i.e., where is the community/organization on the spectrum of capacity), not just working with organizations that have fewer challenges or are further along in their capacity development. NGOs also need to be mindful of developing expectations and metrics that accommodate these considerations (e.g., measuring success based solely on money raised does not provide an apples-to-apples comparison among communities). As this pilot project demonstrates, organizations may achieve different levels of success depending on where they start and what influencing factors are at play. Additionally, more investigation is needed into the potential for Conservation Districts to take on capacity building initiatives given the variability in their resources and organizational capacity throughout the state.
- 5. Develop local funding sources.** NGOs are well positioned to help local communities think through and potentially implement durable financial strategies (e.g., water funds, tax initiatives, and advancing policy recommendations to state and federal funders); the Yampa River Fund, initiated by The Nature Conservancy (TNC), is a great example of this type of effort. After TNC helped start this Fund, its management was transitioned to a local community-based organization.
- 6. Convene peer learning and provide training and mentorship.** Entities that are supporting multi-benefit capacity building should establish and support peer-learning and information exchange

among local organizations, and train and mentor local capacity building hires. Investment in the Colorado SMP Peer Learning Network has proven important to producing effective SMPs (River Network, 2021). Given the success of the PLN and its role identifying multi-benefit projects, River Network is positioned to take this on as a continuation for organizations that are past the planning stage.

Recommendations for Private Funders

There are many lessons learned from funders who have previously invested in capacity building initiatives that only realized short-term successes. These experiences, combined with interviewee feedback, offers the following recommendations for private funders:

- 1. Provide consistent and durable capacity funding to sustain capacity in local communities.** Foundations are in a unique position in that they have more flexibility to support project coordination and organizational capacity support, including for mentorship, peer learning, equitable and inclusive practices, and other important activities that may be more difficult for governmental agencies to support. Provide multi-year and continuous funding commitments that meet the needs of individual organizations. Implementing models, such as trust-based philanthropy (which promotes values-based and multi-year funding relationships; (Trust-Based Philanthropy Project, 2023) and is complementary to capacity investing).
- 2. Replicate regional technical assistance programs throughout the state.** Continue capacity and technical assistance programs (e.g., Colorado River District Accelerator Program) – and replicate them in geographies that do not currently have them – and extend support beyond the current federal funding opportunity to ensure that future funding is continuously in queue.
- 3. Be realistic in terms of timing and expectations.** Be mindful of making strategic capacity investments that set the stage for long-term sustainability of programs where conservation outcomes may take years to be realized. The LOR Foundation, as an example, focuses on supporting specific underserved communities for limited increments of time, hiring local community program officers to help prioritize and direct funding based on identified and evolving community needs (LOR Foundation, 2023). This concept resonates when discussing the need for ongoing relationship building and partnership frameworks as essential elements of project success.

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Participant Interviewing Process and Questions

River Network conducted interviews with key informants February through March 2023 to explore the importance of scaling up local capacity. These interviews focused on lessons learned (River Network, 2023a) and recommendations to CWCB and other funders regarding best practices for scaling up this work (River Network, 2023a), other key informants).

Interviewees

- Funders
 - Anna Mauss, Chief Operating Officer, Colorado Water Conservation Board
 - Amy Moyer, Director of Strategic Partnerships, Colorado River Districts
 - Courtney Shaff, Monitoring and Reporting Manager, Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
 - Dan Omasta, Regional Program Officer, Great Outdoors Colorado
 - Stephanie Page, Deputy Director/Technical Services Manager Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board
- Statewide NGOs
 - Aaron Derwingson, Water Projects Director, The Nature Conservancy
 - Alex Funk, Director of Water Resources and Senior Counsel, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
 - Hannah Holm, Associate Director for Policy (Southwest Region), American Rivers
 - Nicole Seltzer, Colorado River Basin Program Director, River Network
 - Orla Bannan, Healthy Rivers Strategic Engagement Manager, Western Resource Advocates
 - Richard Gytenbeek, Colorado River Outreach Coordinator, Trout Unlimited
 - Shannon Wadas, Associate Director, RiversEdge West
- Pilot Project Participants
 - Gena Hinkmeyer, Agricultural Coordinator, Community Agriculture Alliance
 - Gretchen Rank, Executive Director, Mancos Conservation District
 - Jeff Clyncke, Agricultural Coordinator, Community Agriculture Alliance
 - Michele Meyer, Executive Director, Community Agriculture Alliance
 - Patrick Stanko, Agricultural Coordinator, Community Agriculture Alliance
 - Sensa Wolcott, Agricultural Coordinator, Mancos Conservation District

Interview Questions

River Network is preparing a white paper on scaling up local capacity for identifying, designing, coordinating, and implementing multi-benefit projects throughout Colorado, based on lessons learned from its two-year Colorado Water Plan Grant-funded project, “Piloting Multi-Benefit Agricultural Project Coordinators.” River Network is exploring potential programmatic, policy and/or structural changes/opportunities for the State of Colorado and large NGOs that can position Colorado organizations to be successful moving forward.

1. Describe your work supporting landowners/building local capacity to develop multi-benefit projects? What types of projects are you focused on and why?

2. Do you have a plan or strategy that guides your work? E.g., Stream Management Plan/Integrated Water Management Plan. Do you feel it has helped you in your work?
3. Would you consider your work successful? What are your key indicators/measures of success?
4. What are your enabling factors? Besides money?
5. What are the current challenges or barriers?
6. What personal skillsets and knowledge are needed for developing multi-benefit projects at the local level?
7. How is your funding for this work structured?
8. Would you consider your funding sustainable? Why?
9. What does success of scaling up local capacity for multi-benefit projects look like (e.g., funding, partnerships, etc.)?
10. Assuming we can scale up this capacity work, what challenges would you expect over time?
11. What recommendations do you have for CWCB and other funder/large NGOs that are looking to scale up/expand this work to other places throughout Colorado? E.g., programmatic, or structural
12. What are structural policy changes at the state level that would allow for scaling and sustaining of capacity at the local level? And what considerations are there for these changes?
13. What other examples of supporting landowners/building local capacity to develop multi-benefit projects? Is there anyone else you think we should interview for this paper?
14. Is there anything you want to share?

Pilot Project Participants Only

1. Would you have been able to unlock federal funding and do additional project implementation without the support from the agricultural coordinator?
 - a. If yes, how did this project lead to leveraging federal funds?
2. Is there value in continuing this investment?
 - a. If yes, what would a permanent coordinator position look like and mean as compared to a temporary position?

CWCB Only

1. Have you seen an uptick in the quality and number of applicants that propose multi-benefit projects? Or are you seeing more and larger scale multi-benefit projects?
2. How are outcomes of CWCB's federal technical assistance grants being monitored, and does more need to be done?