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# Greenway Foundation River Vision Implementation Plan Funding Report

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Report date: May 20, 2014

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## SUMMARY

The following report summarizes preliminary findings and recommendations to maximize external funding opportunities for construction activities related to the Greenway Foundation's (TGF) River Vision Implementation Plan (RVIP). These recommendations are intended to provide an overall assessment of funding potential and to make suggestions about which elements could help increase the number of external funding opportunities available to pursue.

We have provided our general conclusions regarding the project's overall funding potential, and a list of project components that will be the most compelling to funding agencies. In addition, the recommendations we've made outline steps to leverage and expand the project's funding potential. Examples of applicable grant opportunities for the Foundation to consider are included

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Greenway Foundation and the City and County of Denver began their partnership to develop the South Platte River Greenway 40 years ago. The River Vision Implementation Plan represents the most recent efforts to continue improvements in the South Platte corridor and a renewed vision for future improvements and development. The plan incorporates collaborative efforts between public entities, private organizations and the local community to achieve a "consensus-built" concept for the area.



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## GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The projects associated with the River Vision Implementation Plan have very strong funding potential. Specifically, the longevity of the overall project, its demonstrated successes (e.g. Confluence Park), and strong partnerships are all factors that make the RVIP projects sound investments for funding agencies. Furthermore, the inclusion of flood control, trash reduction, and distinct recreational activities could open up additional funding opportunities beyond those explicitly for park development and maintenance. Projects related to parks, trails, and recreational activities are typically among the most fundable types of capital projects. Most states offer a variety of grants, loans, and other incentive programs for these kinds of projects.

The project holds promise for even more expansive funding options if other project elements such as environmental education or demonstration and monitoring programs. In addition, the location of the project in a high-population, urban setting makes it a very strong candidate for a corporate funding strategy.

## RESEARCH METHODS

Chase Park Grants conducted comprehensive research into a wide-range of government, corporate, and private/foundation funding opportunities. Our research was based on the types of projects that are expected to emerge from the River Vision Implementation Plan, demographics of the area, and the broader regional goals as they pertain to this project. Thus, we searched for funders that focus on parks, open space and recreation, educational programming, water quality, and river restoration.

## FUNDABLE FEATURES

Based on our knowledge of current funding trends, Chase Park has identified several features of the RVIP projects that may be more “fundable” than others. The more The Greenway Foundation can emphasize these fundable features, the more likely its grant-seeking efforts will yield additional funding.

- Strong partnerships with reputable agencies. The RVIP boasts a broad cohort of established, well-known organizations. Not only does this demonstrate a high level of community support, it also enhances the possibility of direct connections to funding agencies.
- Established project with demonstrated success. The current efforts to revitalize Denver’s South Platte Greenway have been in play for nearly six years. In addition to the heavy involvement of

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other community stakeholders, the project has already obtained tens of millions in funding support. Furthermore, the demonstrated return on investment from earlier river corridor improvements is substantial. The longevity of the plan and its continuing progression speaks to the public's embracing of the project in the past and future.

- High profile project location. In terms of grant funding, urban projects are typically not as fundable as those in rural expanses. However, that RVIP projects are located in a highly populated area make it decidedly appealing for corporate funders that typically desire public recognition of their financial support.
- Recreational amenities. The proposed RVIP projects include an abundance of recreational opportunities including fishing, boating, kayaking, and cycling. This collection of activities can add appeal funders and broadens the types of relevant funding programs from those that primarily support specific recreation opportunities, to include others such as angling organizations and cycling associations.

In addition to emphasizing the most fundable elements of the project, The Greenway Foundation may also consider the recommendations listed below to capitalize on today's funding climate.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following section provides suggestions for leveraging project activities, maximizing competitiveness, and tapping into alternative sources of funding. These recommendations were derived using a combination of Chase Park's industry expertise, our review of technical materials, and funding-specific research we conducted for this project.

### Create a Long-term, Diversified Funding Plan

To help guide the grant-seeking efforts for the RVIP, we recommend establishing a diversified funding plan that includes all partner agencies that participate in providing or obtaining financial support for RVIP projects. This process could be as simple as keeping a spreadsheet of funding prospects to pursue, including relevant information about the targeted prospects (e.g. name of funding agency, program name, grant purpose, estimated grant deadlines, maximum request amounts, website address). The creation and monitoring of such a prospect list in tandem with project phases and schedules will allow all partners to remain informed and apprised of key funder milestones, application requirements, and matching fund requirements. In some cases, maintaining a funding plan can even help keep the momentum of implementing the project, simply because the deadline dates require action and follow up.

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A more comprehensive approach is to create a grants calendar, which will establish priorities, tactics, and specific timelines for obtaining grant funds. A grants calendar will further streamline the overall RVIP funding strategy and help effectively manage the grant-seeking process so that ideal funding opportunities and deadlines are not missed. Considering the number of stakeholders involved with the Platte River projects, a grants calendar could also serve as a project management tool to avoid redundancy and overlap between organizations.

### **Develop Relationships with Key Funders**

By all accounts, there is already a robust group of funding partners associated with RVIP. Nevertheless, the project could benefit from increasing the diversity of these partners and developing strong relationships with those that have the most potential for ongoing funding support. Some ways to develop relationships with key funders may include (but are not limited to):

- ***Make use of the technical assistance*** provided by program officers. Not only will the information they provide be helpful for crafting a competitive grant application, but engaging them can help create additional “project champions” that advocate and promote the projects to audiences that otherwise may not be accessible.
- ***Apply for pre-construction grants*** (e.g. planning, design, or feasibility studies). This will help engage funding agencies early in the process, facilitate relationships with program officers and solidify opportunities to obtain funding for construction portions of the project.
- ***Engage program officers in early project stages*** by discussing plans before they are solidified. For instance, engaging funder representatives in community or stakeholder planning meetings can often generate enthusiasm and interest in a particular project. Often we see program officers/state representatives become personally invested in a project – advocating internally for its completion.

### **Focus on Disadvantaged Communities and Populations**

RVIP projects that will be most competitive for grant funding are those that benefit disadvantaged populations. In its consideration of grant pursuits, we recommend The Greenway Foundation focus primarily – if not solely – on those components that positively impact low-income, elderly, and/or disabled populations. For example, projects that occur in a low-income area could improve blight, increase economic development activities and promote healthier lifestyles – particularly if activities include involving youth. Such impacts are very appealing for funding agencies. Furthermore, in the previous example, TGF could target funding programs for economic and community development, such as the Colorado Department of Local Affairs’ Community Development Block Grant.

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## **Leverage Fundable Features**

There are two distinct ways that the fundable features of the RVIP project can be leveraged: to increase the competitiveness of grant applications and by opening up additional sources of funding for specific project components.

***Highlight Partnerships and Collaboration:*** In general, a project with solid community partnerships is more appealing to funders because it demonstrates collaboration and community support. In addition to its sizable and strong partnerships, some RVIP partners are also funding agencies. For example, the Colorado Water Conservation Board has grant programs that support water efficiency, watershed restoration, and flood mitigation. In these instances the funding agency has a personal stake in the completion and success of the projects and are more likely to award funding.

<b>Program Name</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Eligible Entities</b>
Colorado Watershed Restoration Grants	Provides funding for watershed/stream restoration studies and projects. The Program also provides support for flood mitigation.	Any Organization
Fish and Wildlife Resources Grants	Supports projects that mitigate impacts on fish and wildlife resources in and around waters affected by water diversion, delivery or storage facilities.	Water Operating Organizations and CWCB
Colorado Healthy Rivers Fund	Helps support local watershed organizations in their efforts to provide clean water, protect habitat, and improve recreation and accessibility.	Watershed Protection Groups
Water Conservation Implementation Grants	Funds projects that implement water conservation plan goals and programs from the applicant's CWCB-approved water conservation plan.	Entities with a CWCB-approved water conservation plan
Water Resource Conservation Public Education & Outreach Grants	Provides financial assistance to promote the benefits of water resource conservation through public outreach and education.	Public or Private Agencies

***Consider Corporate Sponsorships:*** As it stands today, the South Platte River corridor already sees considerable foot traffic. The planned improvements from the River Vision Implementation Plan will almost certainly increase pedestrian use of the area. The highly visible nature of the area lends itself considerably to sponsorship opportunities with corporations and local businesses.

Corporate sponsorships can be a more lucrative option than grants, especially for public outreach projects. Sometimes called corporate philanthropy or cause marketing, a sponsorship approach leverages recognition benefits to raise capital funds. In addition, corporate sponsorships can offer several benefits over traditional grant-seeking strategies. For example, compared to grants, sponsorships could offer:

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- Minimal reporting requirements
  - Fewer eligibility restrictions
  - More discretion with how sponsorship funds are spent
  - Opportunities to cultivate relationships with corporate funders to provide ongoing support.

Another benefit to employing a corporate sponsorship approach is that it can also provide access to a wider variety of funders than could otherwise be pursued. For example, using a sponsorship approach could enable the Greenway Foundation to pursue funding from corporations, corporate foundations, corporate giving programs and even individual donors – all while using a standardized sponsorship package (as opposed to preparing separate grant applications for multiple grantmaking agencies).

**Consider Grants for Specific Recreational Amenities:** The project has an abundance of potential recreational opportunities in an urban setting. Look for grant programs that support specific recreation activities such as the Colorado Parks and Wildlife Division’s Recreational Trails and Fishing is Fun Grants programs, the latter of which specifically supports improving fishing access in urban areas. In many cases new or improved physical structures such as restrooms, parking areas, and shade structures are eligible expenses. Specifically the Fishing is Fun Program will fund restrooms, angler access structures, parking, trails, and shade shelters as long as they are a specific benefit to anglers. Fishing is Fun will also support stream habitat improvements, fish reefs, and bank stabilization.

**Leverage Prior Funding Support:** The extensive financial support already acquired for RVIP projects is a substantial advantage in the eyes of other funding agencies. As in the private sector, grantmakers do not want to invest in risky projects; that other funding agencies have already invested makes it a safer bet. Simply put, this prior support can be capitalized on by referencing it in future proposals, and in some cases it can even be counted towards required matching funds. As new funding is secured from additional agencies, the investments and involvements should likewise be promoted.

The Greenway Foundation can also leverage funding it has received for other projects by capitalizing on previous the support given to the organization overall rather than specifically for

**HIGHLIGHT:**  
**FISHING IS FUN GRANT**

The Fishing is Fun program provides up to \$900,000 in matching grants each year to support projects that improve sportfishing resources and angling opportunities in Colorado. The most competitive projects are those that:

- ✓ are in urban communities
- ✓ increase angler use
- ✓ open new public access to fishing
- ✓ have a high percentage of matching funds

Most grantees provide an average 40% match. While there are no formal award limits, the average award is around \$85k. Previously funded projects have received awards ranging from \$2,500 to \$400k.

projects related to the RVIP. Create an inventory of all prior grants – regardless of how long ago they were awarded – that includes the funder, grant program name, program purpose, amount requested, amount awarded, and the outcome (e.g. whether the funded project was completed on time and grant requirements were met). This will serve as a starting point for identifying and prioritizing funding opportunities for RVIP. These agencies will always represent your top funding prospects, as long as the existing relationship is good.

**Revise and Resubmit SEP Application**

The Greenway Foundation previously submitted an application to Colorado’s Supplemental Environmental Program (SEP). Notwithstanding the outcome of that proposal, the planned water quality and habitat improvement goals outlined in the RISO are a good match with SEP program goals. Thus, we recommend that TGF revise and resubmit its application.

Table 2. SEP Settlements 2009-2012			
Year	Settlements	Amount Awarded	# of Projects Funded
2009	28	\$3,209,859	44
2010	24	\$2,353,005	32
2011	24	\$1,719,805	30
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>\$7,282,668</b>	<b>106</b>

The Colorado Department of Health and Environment (CDPHE) recently revised its program priority and evaluation criteria as well as the application process. Prior to piloting these changes in 2012, the number of SEP projects funded had been declining along with the total amount awarded (see table 2), despite the number of settlements remaining constant. Although the Department received 40 applications requesting more than \$7.3M during the 2012 pilot period,

awards continued to decline with just eight projects funded for a total of \$1.2M. While we cannot positively determine the reason for this trend, we can conclude that competitiveness for funds is increasing.

One change to the SEP program that may be of particular interest to TGF is that eligible projects must be implemented in either Denver or Adams County. The geographic restriction is further prioritized by area with the “Tier 1” priority requiring that projects must provide “direct benefits” to northeast Denver where several projects in the River North Greenway Master Plan occur.

**Consider Implementing a Demonstration or Research Project**

The types of water projects that are most fundable include any that incorporate green infrastructure for water quality or habitat improvement purposes, such as stormwater management interventions, flood mitigation, or installations of other best management practices (BMPs). Greenway Foundation may want to consider incorporating a demonstration and research

component, which would allow it to pursue grants specifically intended for research and development (R&D) activities that contribute to new knowledge.

The RVIP includes activities for ecosystem restoration, water quality improvement, habitat creation and improvement, river stability, and litter removal. The use of emerging technologies will not only make the projects more competitive

Table 3. R&D Funding Opportunities		
Funder	Program Name	Max Grant
Water Research Foundation	Current Research RFPs	\$150k
Water Environment Research Foundation	Unsolicited Research Program	\$175k
Environmental Protection Agency	Wetland Program Development – Region 8	\$350k
Dept. Of the Interior – US Geological Survey	Water Resources Research National Competitive Grants Program	\$250k

for typical environmental and water quality improvement grants, it opens up the potential for R&D funding programs such as those outlined in Table 3.

### Environmental Educational Programming

Incorporating educational elements into the design of the project might prove to be a worthwhile endeavor, especially if the community is lacking outdoor educational areas for local youth. For instance, the installing interpretive signage promoting the use of bioremediation to improve water quality, which would not only benefit local visitors, but also provide a unique place for school field trips and science excursions. See table 4 for a list of potential environmental education grant programs.

Table 4. Environmental Education Grant Programs		
Funder	Program Name	Website
US Environmental Protection Agency	Environmental Education Modal Grants	<a href="http://www2.epa.gov/education/environmental-education-ee-grants">http://www2.epa.gov/education/environmental-education-ee-grants</a>
Xcel Energy Foundation	Focus Area Grants – Environmental Education	<a href="http://www.xcelenergy.com/About_Us/Community/Corporate_Giving/Foundation_Environment_Focus_Area_Guidelines">http://www.xcelenergy.com/About_Us/Community/Corporate_Giving/Foundation_Environment_Focus_Area_Guidelines</a>
GOCO	LPOR Mini Grant	<a href="http://www.goco.org/grants/apply/local-government-and-mini-grants">http://www.goco.org/grants/apply/local-government-and-mini-grants</a>
Weyerhaeuser Foundation	Weyerhaeuser Giving Fund	<a href="http://www.weyerhaeuser.com/Sustainability/People/Communities/CommunityInvestment/GivingFund">http://www.weyerhaeuser.com/Sustainability/People/Communities/CommunityInvestment/GivingFund</a>
National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF)	Connecting Youth to the Outdoors Grants	<a href="http://www.neefusa.org/grants/connecting_youth">http://www.neefusa.org/grants/connecting_youth</a>