



# AGENDA

## GOAL 1 ALLIANCE

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July 9, 2020

2:00 – 3:15 PM

[Virtual Meeting Click Here](#)

1. Call to Order
2. Presentation: Grand River Revitalization Governance DRAFT Report & Recommendations
3. Project Updates
4. Public Comment
5. Adjournment



# Grand River Governance Memo | DRAFT 06.28.20

## Introduction

This memo summarizes recent Organizational Leadership Committee (OLC) discussions, relevant information about other urban waterfront development efforts and current conditions in Greater Grand Rapids. It recommends a governance structure to implement the community's vision for a restored and revitalized Grand River corridor based on lessons learned as well as unique local challenges and opportunities.

Key questions posed by the OLC at the start of the project include:

- How do we create a governance structure that builds on Grand Rapids' long history of public-private partnerships?
- How can that experience help to shape a new kind of partnership that leverages the strengths of existing community-based organizations?
- How do we build a more inclusive team and still activate, redevelop and launch quickly?
- What effective strategies have been implemented in other cities that encourage equitable, inclusive development that addresses both environmental and social issues?
- What geographic scale should be the focus of a governance strategy? City, county or regional?
- How do we organize governance to effectively support near and long-term fundraising needs?

In 2015, the final report of an earlier work group considering governance models proposed the idea of a new nonprofit for the project, capable of coordinating leadership for fundraising, engagement, project management and stewardship. The group also recommended exploring the formation of a complementary recreational authority, as provided under Michigan law, to partner with the nonprofit with the potential of an added revenue stream.

Implementation of the 2015 proposal was recommended via an agreement between the City and the Trust for Public Land (TPL) giving TPL authority to form the new nonprofit - including taking responsibility for fundraising and project management. But the recommendation was not acted on since many believed that Grand Rapids' history of public-private partnerships better positioned it to locally develop a plan, without assistance from an outside entity.

This research report, prepared five years later, allows a second look at governance options, building on the previous effort. In the interim, the number of Grand River restoration and corridor revitalization project stakeholders - a broad set of community-based interests - has continued to grow and commit to the project, challenging project leaders to find a more inclusive version of a public-private partnership.

### ***Successful Governance Criteria***

***Effective*** with capacity to implement the mission

***Responsive*** designed to serve as quickly as feasible

***Transparent*** with information easily understood

***Equitable and Inclusive*** with opportunities for all stakeholders to engage and participate

***Sustainable*** with access to funding to execute operations

***Credible*** and value-added in the mind of the community

***Accountable*** to those who are affected by the decisions or actions

## Assessment of Existing Conditions

Over thirty project stakeholders were interviewed regarding project goals, key issues, next steps and ideas for governance strategies. (See Appendix A for list.) A set of relevant documents including plans, committee work, reports and other research was provided for review to give a picture of past and current efforts for the river.

Through interviews, site visits and background documents, additional observations were gathered:

- Committed stakeholders want to stay close to the project and have a voice in eventual governance and management strategies.
- Broad agreement exists for a structure that centers on DEI principles.
- The City acknowledges that it will need the collaboration of the private sector - its funding and entrepreneurial flexibility - as well as other local government partners.
- The City acknowledges that the river crosses jurisdictional boundaries - it is a regional opportunity that requires regional partnership to fully appreciate and harness.
- Funding streams should connect to developing a governance framework that is highly collaborative and flexible - and fully capable of delivering best-in-class programming, environmental restoration, operations and maintenance.
- No existing entity feels it has the mission, capacity or funding depth to lead the project but many existing organizations play important roles that could contribute to the ambitious project vision

Grand River: Governance Elements	
ENTITIES	ROLES
City	Plan/steward
County	Engage
DGRI	Fundraise
DDA	Fund
Community Partners	Build
GRWW	Operate
Rec. Authority	Program
New Nonprofit	Maintain
GEOGRAPHIES	MANAGEMENT CRITERIA
In-river	Capacity/skill
Trails	Mission/Values
Parks	Resources
Upland connections	Accountability
Impact Zone	Representation
County	Ability to Receive Mix of Funding Sources
Region	

## Models from Other Cities: Case Studies

In consultation with the Organizational Leadership Committee research was undertaken to identify case studies that fit the project's challenges and circumstances. Key criteria were devised for case study inquiry:

- Diversity, equity, inclusion (DEI) strategies
- Collaboration and partnership - including regional
- Start-up/sustainable funding and the role of philanthropy
- Roles and responsibilities for project management
- Evolution and the growth of collaborative efforts

Four case study cities were chosen based on their success with regard to the above criteria: Memphis, Detroit, Austin and Washington, D.C. Each included a nonprofit partner taking a lead role in project implementation with a public partner, sometimes in addition to a special taxing district or local government controlled corporation.

Case study research was focused this time on *strategy delivery* - how project leaders in other cities used engagement, partnerships, DEI principles and cultural awareness to build a more collaborative

*Washington, D.C.'s 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge project is grounded by an Equitable Development Plan with four goals around housing, workforce development, small business incubation, and arts & culture. Project leaders embed equitable development into design and implementation plans.*

implementation process; and, how community capacity could be leveraged to sustain improvements over time. (See Appendix B for more detail on case study findings.)

A critical component in each of the case study projects is the interwoven sources of public and private funding that support them - and the role that private philanthropy played in launching and supporting engagement and programs.

Core principles of equity, resilience and collaboration resonate in the case studies. These characteristics show how governance models are becoming more like networks - with broad and deep community connections nimble enough to meet different project needs. Collaborations welcome many partners but good facilitation allows them to effectively partner. The case studies also showed how conservancies - or nonprofit partners - played that role.

## Governance Considerations

As this most recent review set of case studies showed, the option of a new nonprofit working with the City, County and others remains a viable one - as does the idea of a new recreational authority.

Case study lessons point to the value of embracing the idea of a *public-private-community* partnership - with the role for a nonprofit in this scenario including both project implementation and a distinct role as a facilitator for a team of project implementers and community voices.

A second relevant lesson from the case studies is the role of private foundations as a key partner in project start-ups, building the capacities of the team, especially local community-based organizations for effective participation in a collaborative implementation effort.

*In Memphis, private funding supported equity planning, activation and the Riverfront plan. In Austin, foundations supported early community engagement in the park as well as art and cultural opportunities, with major funding for a new amphitheater.*

*Throughout its formation process, the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy's goal was to develop among this group, a collective sense of ownership, accessibility and responsibility.*

*The Memphis River Parks Partnership embedded community leaders on its board and created a full-time staff position for community engagement. It also trained 50 ambassadors to volunteer as project representatives creating an ongoing community conversation that could inform project design and development.*

Grand River Governance Scenarios		
	Opportunity	Constraint
City/DDA	Existing agencies with demonstrated capability and accountability	Neither entity has mission, capacity or flexibility to meet region-wide project goals
New Nonprofit	Flexible with fast start-up, managing multiple funding sources; coordinating multiple stakeholders	Requires strategic recruitment of broad-based leadership, capacity-building and accountability mechanisms
Recreational Authority	Provides a forum for public agency collaboration through a flexible single-purpose entity	Creation and funding likely to take 2-3 years; MI case studies show value of nonprofit partner

Civic spirit is a valuable asset, but it can be difficult to tap into in a way that makes citizens a partner in effective governance. Building a structure to welcome these voices requires sophistication at every stage of organizing. In Grand Rapids, project leadership now involves a larger group of community stakeholders who want to be involved as well as public and private organizations that are willing to collaborate.

What has yet to take shape is a facilitator for this team. In the case studies many of those interviewed believed that without the leadership and coordinating role of their conservancies, the public wouldn't have had an understanding of the project to support the initiative - and decisions would have been made by a smaller group of people.

For the Grand Rapids/Kent County community, these discussions are the first time that project leaders have considered this corridor, from Riverside to Millennium Park, as a singular economic-social-recreational asset not unlike the Arena and Convention Center.

## Governance Structure Recommendation

### DEVELOP A PUBLIC-PRIVATE-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP

A public-private partnership remains a core idea for this project's governance but recommended with a model that reflects more inclusion of community-based interests. Public agencies, including the City and County - and potentially other municipalities - could be part of a network with private organizations, including many of the current stakeholder organizations.

Creation of two new entities could give structure and added leverage to the partnership:

- A *recreational authority* which can offer a forum for regional participation in an independent entity focused on the river corridor; and,
- A *nonprofit* at the center of the team which could act not only as a project manager but as the centralized backbone organization facilitating project partners together in a network, aligning them and allowing them to move farther, faster.

### CREATE A FORUM FOR A REGIONAL FOCUS: RECREATIONAL AUTHORITY

In addition to being community-centered, Grand River corridor revitalization stakeholders also see the value of a broader geographic perspective, recognizing the impact and opportunity that the river corridor vision provides. As one community leader commented, "...have we zoomed out enough?" The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy, for example, envisions links that are not only local and regional but ones that will eventually link to the state trail system.

One place to start thinking regionally is with creation of a regional recreational authority. A recreational authority provides a forum for public agency collaboration along with both short and long term funding potential for sustainable management.

A recreational authority provides the City and County more flexibility to access multiple funding sources, including State funding, and creates an independent single-purpose entity for regional cooperation throughout the life of the project.

A regional perspective, coordinating projects upstream and downstream of the urban core and City, leverages opportunities for broader impact and return. Coordinating Grand Rapids and Kent County river corridor plans - and potentially adjacent municipalities - with other regional park and trail plans, such as those of Ottawa County, could further a regional greenway system and maximize each agency's environmental, economic and social returns on investments.

These kinds of regional collaborations that promote, not only linked physical investments but inclusive economic growth strategies, are long-term efforts focused on the economy of the future but represent the importance of thinking big without slowing down initial efforts.

Over a dozen recreational authorities now exist in Michigan. Their ability to collect multiple private and public funds - including state grants and voter-supported millage funding - offers another revenue stream for long term management. Many of these authorities work collaboratively with private nonprofits to supplement public funds with private ones. (See Appendix C for more background.)

#### [CREATE A NEW BACKBONE NONPROFIT](#)

A true collaborative and inclusive effort needs a 'quarterback' to manage project implementation and sustainability - which will require staff and budget capacity. At a practical level, there needs to be a way to build engagement across three sectors - government, community, and philanthropic. One entity needs to have capacity for convening and consensus-building, with a vision, mission, by-laws and action plans to support the network.

The diagram below lays out a strategy for moving forward with a team of partners. Leadership from the City, County, DGRI, a new recreational authority and a new nonprofit supported by community stakeholders could quickly leverage a mix of funding streams and jump-start project implementation - while exploring ways to build capacity over time.

*Traverse City and Garfield Township created a Recreational Authority in 2003. In 2004, Township and City voters approved a millage to fund their projects. The projects were financed through a 20-year GO Bond, after which the recreational authority will dissolve and the parks will revert to the City and Township. Plans for the parks were more ambitious than the operational millage could support so the Authority partnered with the Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy to augment the millage with private funding.*

#### ***Building a Board of Directors***

*Start with a small number of committed founders*

*Get the skills and expertise needed for starting a new organization*


*Develop goals and an action plan that clarifies what needs to be done*

*Solicit additional members based on mission and goals*

*Use committees to extend reach and broaden inclusion*

*Develop a network model to facilitate work with partners*

## Grand River Partnership: A Shared Vision for the Grand River

THE PARTNERS	THE PROCESS	OUTCOMES
<b><i>New Nonprofit</i></b> <b><i>BACKBONE SUPPORT</i></b> City County DDA DGRI GRWW Community-Based Stakeholders Other municipalities <b><i>New Rec Authority</i></b>	<b>EXECUTIVE TEAM</b>  <b>WORK GROUPS</b> <b>SUBGROUPS</b> <b>GUIDING DOCUMENTS</b> GR Forward River for All GRWW Plan Green Grand Rapids City/County Park Plans Vision Principles MOUs Equity Plan Framework Plan	<b>PHILANTHROPY &amp; FUNDING</b> Seed funding Capital funding O & M  <b>AWARENESS &amp; ENGAGEMENT</b> Project website Community conversations Public events  <b>PROJECTS &amp; PROGRAMS</b> Capital Projects Education Art & Cultural

### BROADEN COMMUNITY INCLUSION

Each of the case studies reflects the importance of aligning and engaging with people who will use or be affected by these public park projects. In each case study, key stakeholder groups were identified and approached early and often to ensure a broad understanding of the project, to gain feedback and to solicit ideas, especially around site design, operation and programs.

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy was created as an organization that could represent a broad cross-section of public and private organizations including private property owners, businesses, churches, nongovernmental organizations, foundations, unions, financial institutions, law firms and more.

Both in Austin and in Detroit, projects adopted a philosophy of working ‘with and for’ citizens and other stakeholder groups - and both adopted goals of creating a connected community/constituency. Substantial resources and time were devoted to ensuring local ownership and a connected community.

Importantly, these community partnerships catalyzed philanthropy: In Austin, the Moody Foundation made the largest grant for parks the city had ever seen; in Memphis, the Hyde Foundation provided funding to advance the master plan in a way that engaged and welcomed people to the river.

## Suggested Next Steps

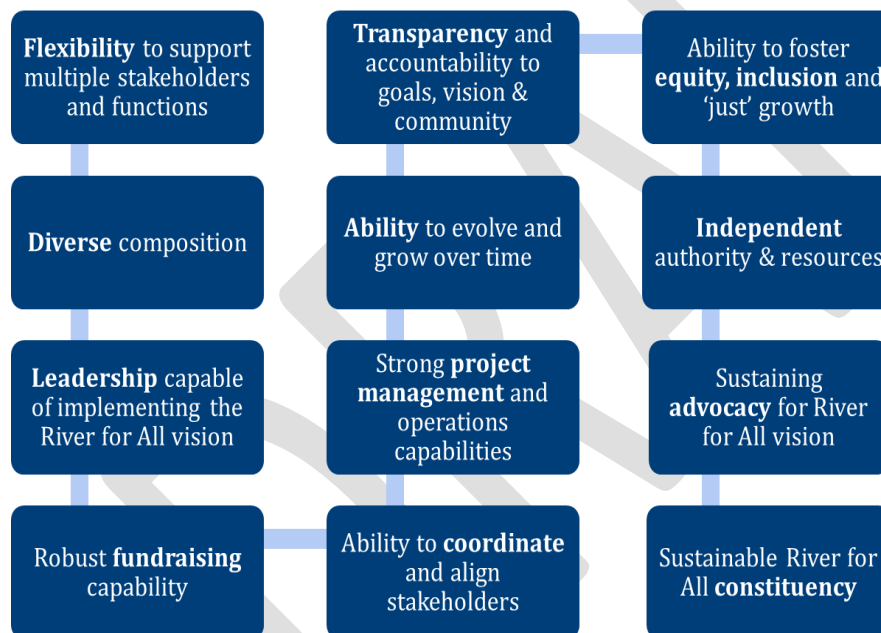
### 1. AFFIRM GOVERNANCE PRINCIPLES

Charters, MOUs and work plans help to address how collaborating partners will work together and address their challenges, but the fact is that all the issues and challenges a partnership will face are not known at the outset. In addition to guiding documents, a set of principles that defines team culture will enable 'collective seeing, learning, and doing' over a changing future.

The OLC in a series of recent meetings set forth a set of draft principles that represent community values for implementing the Grand River vision. These principles - as they are refined with a broader community view - will underlie a partnership culture throughout the project's development and management and will make the partnership more resilient.

*"To create a River for All that honors both the history and the future of our river by embedding racial and economic equity principles in all that we do both in the water and along the river banks. We understand that all river-related decisions today will have an immense generational impact on the residents of our city."*

*--City of Grand Rapids'  
Equitable Grand River  
Restoration Initiative*



Further, guiding principles will close the gap between strategy *design* and *delivery* and drive decision-making - acknowledging that strategy delivery is just as important as strategy design. To make guiding principles work: make them public, walk the talk and enforce them.

As these principles get reviewed and refined, the OLC may want to consider a new principle in the context of Covid-19 that emphasizes a new model of resiliency - connecting issues of economic development with social capital, public health and the role of public parks and the riverfront.

## 2. DEVELOP A PLAN FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

All of the case studies showed the value of developing principles and plans in a formal DEI document - which seems particularly important in shaping opportunities for wealth creation in the post-pandemic context. DEI is not an overnight solution. In the case of the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge project, leaders spent a year reaching out to the community to develop principles, goals and a way to measure progress.

The first step is to decide what a DEI strategy means for the Grand River project, e.g., including all voices in planning and managing the project, providing opportunities for realizing wealth out of the project's creation of value including new jobs and businesses, programs that address community interest and cultural diversity, culturally honoring minority- led voices and leadership development - and other ways to truly integrate equity into organizational strategy.

An Equity Plan will need to define equity, determine goals and identify metrics to track progress and accountability. The outcomes of this process can then drive the creation of the new nonprofit backbone organization and the agreements among partners.

## 3. DEVELOP A FRAMEWORK PLAN

Once the river corridor revitalization vision is grounded in principles - including an underlying equity plan - a framework plan can help shape direction and options for moving forward and guide investment decisions. The plan is the next step for turning the community-driven vision into reality, with action steps for implementation that become the basis for the partnership to shape roles and responsibilities, determine funding priorities and begin to develop project sites.

It provides a methodology for directing action steps toward meeting the vision, ensuring implementation in a timely and accountable way. A good framework plan strategically positions the partnership to make ongoing decisions that maximize impact with a process for *how* to plan rather than determining a strict set of guidelines.

The Waterloo Conservancy and City of Austin completed their Creek Corridor Framework Plan over nearly a year of research, design, and stakeholder coordination. It set up the foundation for their design work by establishing a plan for each element of the creek, trails, and parks.

As a capital planning tool, a framework plan can provide guidance to project partners, ensuring that as portions of programs and projects are initially implemented, the linkages and other objectives of the strategy are realized over time - beyond individual components and toward the creation of a regional corridor.

#### 4. TAKE STEPS TO CREATE A NEW RIVER CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION NONPROFIT AND A RECREATIONAL AUTHORITY

The first steps in creating a new nonprofit will be to affirm its purpose and by-laws, determine a founding board of directors and develop a mission and vision for the organization. Included here is a draft purpose statement developed in recent OLC meetings.

As the riverfront implementation plan initially launches and the team gets organized, a backbone nonprofit can prioritize guiding vision and strategy and align activities of the partners. It can focus on key external activities such as building public will, advancing policy and mobilizing funding. As the Detroit case study showed, nonprofit leadership and partnership will evolve over the stages of a park project:

- *Predevelopment* - Developing a vision and project feasibility; mobilizing constituents and launching the project.
- *Design* - Project planning for acquisition, construction, funding, programming and management - creating the road map.
- *Implementation* - After the planning stage, a different set of insights can guide effective implementation through fundraising and project management, ensuring that value is delivered for all.
- *Management* - Developing a framework for sustainable management of the site through O&M, security, programing, community outreach and communication.

Simultaneously, the partnership can take steps to explore the creation of a recreational authority, working with the City and Kent County to prepare Articles of Incorporation that describe the purpose of the new entity, its geographic focus, participating local governments and board characteristics.

It will require a comprehensive community wide planning process that could be integrated into framework planning - developing a steering committee that could confirm interest and purpose, explore community support and evaluate options for moving forward.

#### 5. EMBED COMMUNITY VOICES

There are a number of different ways to embed community voices in a project partnership - through board membership or board committee membership; advisory councils; formal MOUs which detail specific action agendas; or, a combination of these.

##### *Grand River Nonprofit Draft Purpose Statement*

- *Provide consistent community leadership to implement the vision*
- *Provide effective ongoing project and team management*
- *Coordinate/collaborate with partners, stakeholders, vendors, neighbors*
- *Redevelop publicly-owned riverfront properties*
- *Raise capital and operational funding as needed*
- *Plan, construct and develop parks and trails in the corridor*

The Detroit Riverfront Conservancy chose to initially put all interested stakeholders on its board and then divided the team into different working committees where members could provide their interest and expertise. As time has evolved, many of the early board members have stepped down or moved into committee roles to carry out specific actions around plans they helped to create.

Austin's experience - the first board of its conservancy had only three members - shows that engagement and partnerships often occur by project phase:

- visioning and the development of a framework plan
- implementation through policy work, site design, construction
- engagement through programs, events, cultural experiences
- performance monitoring of project goals and impact

Clearly defining 'why' project leaders are reaching out to the community, and describing how their input can influence decision-making can help identify the appropriate mechanism for engagement; it can also help interested community members understand what they are a part of so they can make an informed choice about getting involved.

Engagement materials and project plans should provide detail on what it will take to move the project forward. Creation of a framework plan, an organizational business plan and an action plan that specifies roles and responsibilities can provide those interested in being a part of implementation with ideas for how they can participate.

Public involvement and citizen empowerment are critical; think in terms of data and information management and transparency. Residents need to be treated as full partners. Being consistent at outreach and communication will help establish trust and accountability with those for whom the project is designed to benefit most.

Emphasizing community engagement in all phases of the project will require a significant time commitment. This has already begun to occur in the Grand River project as project planning teams have grown in size and diversity since the early days of the riverfront project.

Establishing a source of funding for engagement as we saw in the case of the 11<sup>th</sup> Street Bridge Park in Washington, D.C. can increase the quality of the overall engagement effort. The robustness of public and community participation in planning and decision making will require support to enable and prepare community-based leaders.

Leadership becomes particularly important when the governance challenge is integrated across interdependent organizations: it has to combine strong, purposeful action with the mobilization of support from a disparate range of authorities and constituencies - while being intentional about embedding equity and inclusivity into all of its work.

## **6. DEVELOP ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION TEAM**

Resist the temptation to collaborate on an action plan before formalizing the nuts and bolts of all of the relationships; determine the best structure to achieve goals given the assets of each partner. The specific structures that worked in the case studies are not easily transferable. What can help however are the logics of organizing that can be tailored to local conditions and that can inform decisions about the individual skills and expertise, structures and processes, and organizational cultures that need to be designed, enabled, and managed. (See Appendix D for more detail on suggested roles and responsibilities.)

Develop clarity about roles, aligning interests and capacities:

- Identify the unique advantages of each partner; do an audit of what each partner is good at.
- Allocate responsibility according to strengths of each partner, ensuring that resources are dedicated effectively & efficiently.
- Develop a clear distribution of responsibility and explicit agreement on milestones without straitjacketing partners.

## **7. NEGOTIATE MOUS WITH THE CITY, COUNTY, DGRI AND OTHERS**

An action plan along with roles and responsibilities for the partnership will underlie agreements between partners. For the Grand River project it is likely a series of agreements will be needed between the City and the nonprofit to support strategy; and, between the nonprofit and DGRI to support capacity.

On a practical level, partners from the case studies found that MOUs are helpful tools - between a public agency and a nonprofit and between partners. Writing them allows partners to identify their goals precisely and lay out what each group will do to meet them. It also provides a written record so that all can keep track of progress in meeting the mutually-agreed-upon goals and make adjustments as needed.

An umbrella MOU or series of cooperative agreements, will help establish how the partners will work together by developing and formalizing the partners' direction in a way that,

- Maintains/respects each partner's skills, experience and assets
- Addresses issues of governance and process
- Provides a strong basis for actions and activities that are collaborative and benefit the river and the community; and,
- Holds each partner accountable

One-Year Project Timeline	2020	2020	2021	2021	2021
	Qtr 3	Qtr 4	Qtr 1	Qtr 2	Qtr 3
Affirm Governance Principles					
Incorporate New Nonprofit					
Outline Project Roles & Responsibilities					
Create Stakeholder Network					
Create Work Groups/Task Forces					
Sign MOUs/partnership agreements					
Develop an Equity Plan					
Develop a Framework Plan					
Form Rec Authority Steering Committee					

## Conclusion

An array of Grand Rapids private and non-profit organizations - including philanthropic interests and community-based organizations - have unique assets and perspectives that can contribute to this public project. Part of the formula for how to shape a governance partnership among them relies on structures that facilitate effective collaboration across sectors; another part is a culture of experimentation.

In the last 40 years, Grand Rapids' approach to public-private partnerships has contributed new models for private sector participation in building and maintaining civic projects. Building on that experience, the Grand River vision can enable a different model of partnership, broader with entities systematically working side-by-side. Developing this will take,

- An innovative philanthropy that sees itself as a kind of R&D
- Substantive engagement efforts that match people and organizations with specific issues that they care about
- A culture and a structure that allow experimentation
- A government that sees itself embedded in a broader civic network of stakeholders

There is no single magic bullet method to achieving success, given that each project is unique and has distinctive assets and challenges, but there are strategies that consistently appear as part of successful collaborative efforts, some of which are highlighted above in the hopes they may create a foundation for the Grand River governance strategy.