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# Rio Grande Water Fund

**New Mexico, USA**



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# RIO GRANDE WATER FUND

**PHASE** Design

**COMPONENT** Multi-Stakeholder Governance

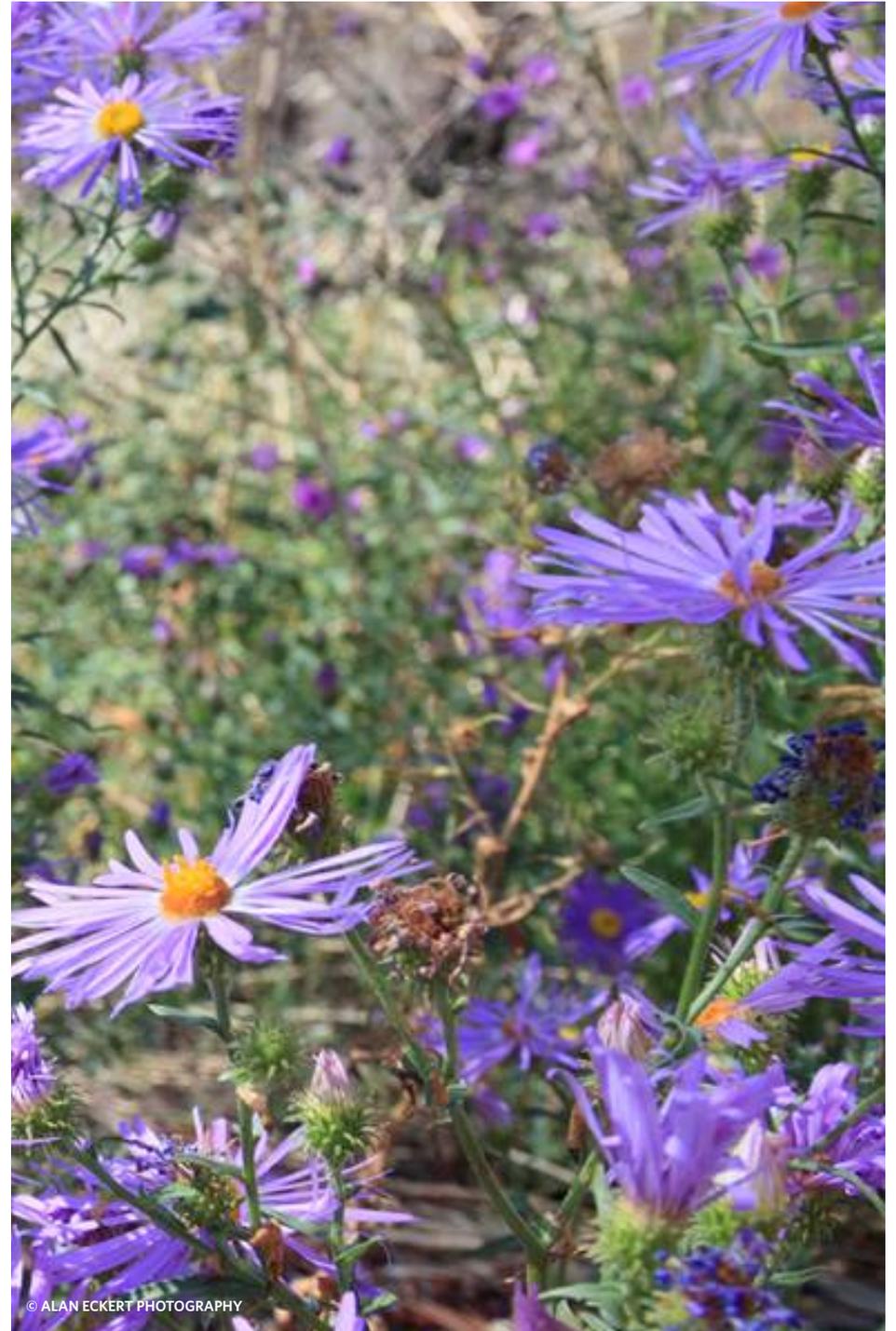
**STEP** Communications Strategy

## **How many people collaborated to complete this step for this water fund?**

Five people were involved in developing a communications plan for the Rio Grande Water Fund, all of whom work for the Conservancy. In addition, the signatories to the Rio Grande Water Fund charter (of which there are 47) formed a Communications and Networking Working Group to facilitate communications within the partners organizations. Finally, we involved more than a dozen partners in the specific communications activities -- for example to interact with media at the launch event or interview with a reporter.

## **How much time was required to complete this step?**

5-6 weeks



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# PROCESS

The following steps were outlined by TNC staff who led the development of the Rio Grande Water Fund:

- 1. Schedule a meeting with marketing team**  
develop short-term and long-term goals for water fund communications. Determine available resources and measures of success.
- 2. Work with partners**  
meet with partners to integrate cross-promotional activities for Rio Grande Water Fund into communications plan.

- 3. Develop strategies and activities, including brand identify:**  
includes identification of audiences, creation of key talking points and water fund messages, and media outreach.
- 4. Develop detailed timeline covering all phases - planning through implementation - and assign responsibilities.**

# SYNTHESIS

The Nature Conservancy created and implemented a comprehensive marketing and communications plan for the Rio Grande Water Fund that resulted in increased visibility of the project and fundraising support. The plan extended over a 12-month period with the aim of increasing fundraising potential and build support for the Rio Grande Water Fund with multiple audiences. Our strategies included:

- Raising awareness among water users about where their water comes from;
- Sharing stories from a diverse group of people who will benefit from the creation of the fund



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# SYNTHESIS

The communications plan covered a variety of tactics and strategies utilizing as many marketing channels as possible to create a truly integrated promotion that could be sustained over time.

Tactics and strategies included:

- Creating talking points and a message blueprint that could be used by the Conservancy and partners advocating for the water fund;
- Taking an inventory of visual assets early on to ensure we had the right images to tell our story
- Identifying new ways to tell the story in an engaging manner, such as through an infographic and short video
- Highlighting the water fund in Conservancy print publications that are disseminated throughout the state,
- Creating digital assets including web features, slideshows, Facebook and twitter postings and video components.
- Pitching the water fund story to local, regional, and national media outlets raising the visibility of the project and the partners involved.
- Pitching the water fund story internally to various communication vehicles—staff news, philanthropy update, etc.—to raise visibility and share best practices
- Amplifying education and outreach component of the water fund by sharing partner programming through our New Mexico e-news and water fund Web site.
- Coordinating a public launch of the fund, which took place in summer 2014 and included media, water fund partners, key influencers such as New Mexico legislators and cabinet secretaries, and local and regional officials. Raising awareness among water users about where their water comes from;
- Sharing stories from a diverse group of people who will benefit from the creation of the fund

# LESSONS LEARNED

## Lesson #1

A catalyst event can be very helpful to bring the community together. For example, prior to our pre-feasibility stage in Santa Fe, a large wildfire in the neighboring community of Los Alamos served to focus public awareness on the threat of wildfire to Santa Fe's drinking water, and to educate the public about ways to mitigate that threat. A separate and even more damaging wildfire was the catalyst for the Rio Grande Water Fund, and this time the fire had a direct and measurable effect on drinking water for both Albuquerque and Santa Fe.

## Lesson #2

TNC's conservation campaigns team and expertise in public opinion research and polling can be very helpfully applied to water funds. We ran two polls ourselves, and partnered with a local university for a third willingness to pay study. The poll results confirmed water users support for water fund payments and provide information that elected officials value.

## Lesson #3

Stakeholder engagement is a critical part of the feasibility study phase of water fund development. The complexity of the geography should dictate the extent of stakeholder engagement. For example, in Santa Fe we worked with 17 partners, and for the more complex Rio Grande Water Fund, our feasibility study included more than two dozen stakeholder interests.

## Lesson #4

A strong scientific baseline for water fund activities is crucial to interest potential investors. In both Santa Fe and for the Rio Grande basin, the need for large-scale restoration of headwater forests is well established in the scientific literature, and that helped investors and stakeholders alike grasp the need for a Water Fund without question.

## Lesson #5

Written agreements are necessary as part of water funds at some phase, but our experience is that the actual agreements are pretty simple and it is not necessary to over-think the institutional arrangements at the feasibility stage.

## Lesson #6

Sharing water fund example from other places is very helpful to introduce water users, elected officials, stakeholders and community leaders to the concept.