

Friends of the Rouge

Strategic Plan 2025 - 2030



Prepared by
Together Together Consulting
togethertogetherconsulting.com



together together

**Friends
of the ROUGE**

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Overview

This strategic plan provides a roadmap for Friends of the Rouge (FOTR) to maximize its impact on the Rouge River watershed and the surrounding communities. Building upon a thorough examination of the organization's current state, including its strengths and challenges, the plan addresses key strategic questions to guide future direction. The plan emphasizes a community-centered organizational approach that uses science as a tool.

The planning process involved key stakeholders and utilized a strategic framework encompassing FOTR's mission, vision, values, and strategic goals. This framework guides the implementation of core mission activities, which include restoring damaged areas, protecting natural resources, and enhancing watershed accessibility. Supporting activities such as education, monitoring, and advocacy underpin these efforts.

The plan reflects a commitment to reevaluating and refining all core activities, incorporating both existing programs and new initiatives to further FOTR's mission. Ultimately, this strategic plan aims to ensure a clean, vibrant, and accessible Rouge River watershed that fosters a deep connection between the river and the community it serves.

The goal of the strategic plan is to:

**Reimagine and reposition
Friends of the Rouge as the main
steward of the Rouge River
watershed for decades to come.**

Strategic Planning Approach

Strategic Plan Focus

In the next 3-5 years, Friends of the Rouge has the opportunity to build and formalize its role as the main steward of the watershed, reimagining, rebuilding and repositioning ourselves to play that role more sustainably and formally. Our focus will be on resources (people, funding, leadership) and structure (org design, internal collaboration, systems).

The 8-month process deployed an intentional methodology and framework to guide the development of Friends of the Rouge's strategic plan.

Core Questions:

Visioning Phase

- What are the core needs of the Rouge River? And, which of these needs are we committed to meeting?
- In what ways should we be a connector to other organizations, and what ways are we the driver and owner of the work?
- What is the best way to restructure our programs to maximize collaboration, efficiency, and resources?

Strategy Phase

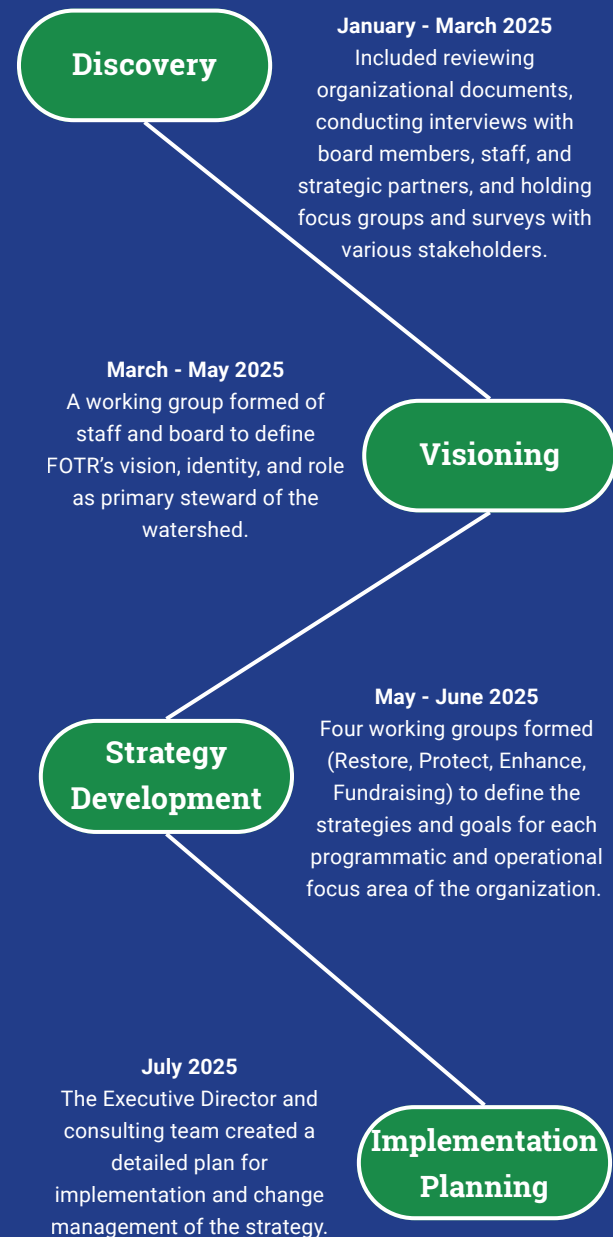
- What is the structure that supports the centralization of our funding and fundraising strategy across programs and unrestricted funding? What is a holistic approach to fundraising?
- How can we strengthen, centralize, and formalize community engagement across all program areas?
- How do we measure success?

Implementation

- What are the year over year priorities and goals needed to implement the strategy? What is the operational plan?



Strategic Planning Process



Mission, Vision, Identity

For nearly four decades, Friends of the Rouge has evolved significantly. Initially conceived as a science-focused organization that also engaged with the community, FOTR has transitioned into a community engagement powerhouse that leverages science as a crucial tool for forging connections between people and the Rouge River. This shift reflects a deeper understanding of the intricate relationship between the health of the watershed and the vitality of the communities it encompasses, ultimately guiding the organization's mission, vision, and identity towards a future where a clean and vibrant Rouge River watershed is truly at the center of the community.

We advance our **mission** to restore, protect, and enhance the Rouge River watershed through stewardship, education, and collaboration....

...and **envision** a future where a clean and vibrant Rouge River is the center of our community.

Working at the confluence of community and the environment, our work:

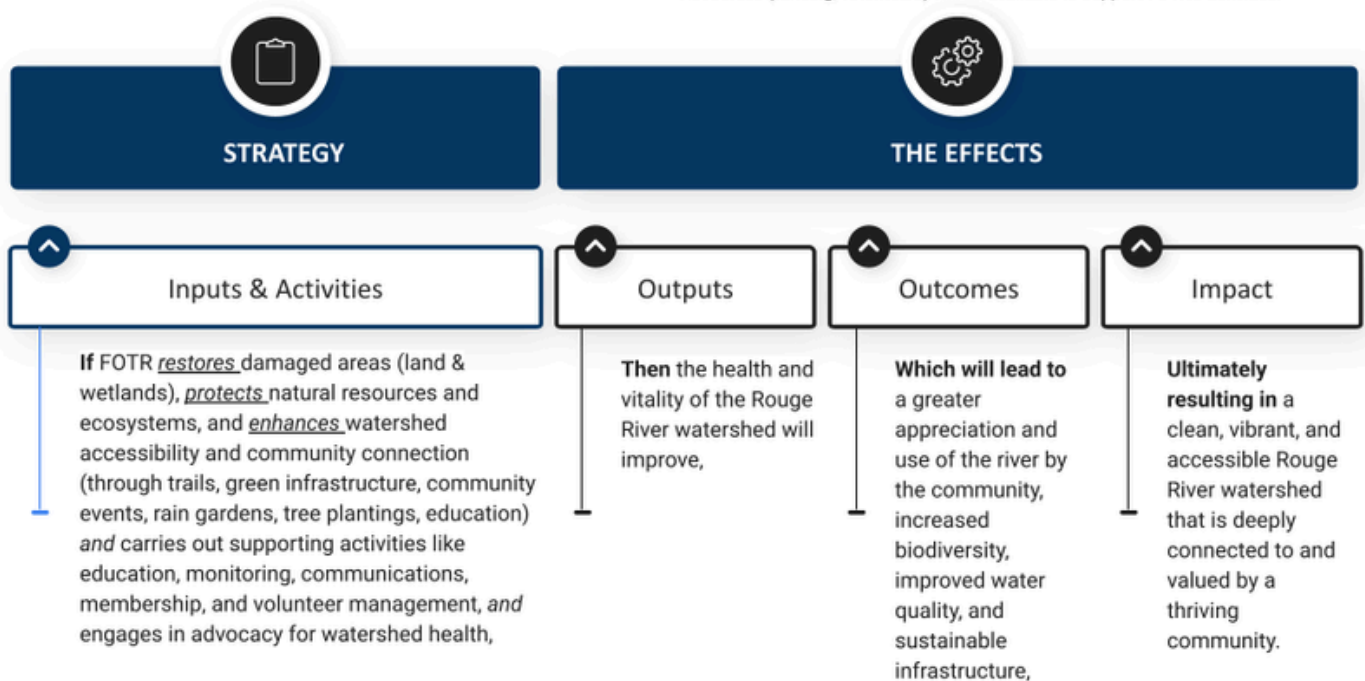
- **Restores:** Actively working to reverse damage
- **Protects:** Taking actions to safeguard natural resources, ecosystems, and biodiversity for current and future generations
- **Enhances:** Taking actions to improve the watershed's accessibility, sustainability, and connection with the community.

A Theory of Change is a comprehensive articulation of how and why a desired change is expected to occur in a particular context. It maps out the causal pathway from an organization's activities and interventions to its intended long-term outcomes, often illustrating the necessary preconditions, assumptions, and intermediate results

THEORY OF CHANGE

Underlying Assumptions:

- Community members are willing to participate in FOTR's programs and events.
- Advocacy efforts will influence policy and bring about positive changes.
- Restoration and protection efforts will have a measurable positive impact on the watershed.
- Resources (funding, volunteers) will be available to support FOTR's activities.



Our Role

The Rouge River watershed has many needs, and as primary stewards, we see ourselves as overseeing the work of keeping the watershed vibrant, accessible, and healthy. We know we can't do everything - so we need to have specific focus areas.

Stewardship means responsibly, ethically, and sustainably supervising and caring for something. It's akin to a ship's captain who, while not performing every task, is ultimately responsible for the ship's overall successful journey.

Primary stewardship means:

- We feel responsibility for the watershed
- We have a specific lane, while also holding space for others
- We have the big picture view and knowledge of the watershed's needs

Primary stewardship does NOT mean:

- We are the only group doing work with/on the river
- We are solely in charge of the river/watershed
- We are involved in every thing that happens in the river
- We are the sole voice of the watershed's needs

Stewardship can take on various roles, including:

- Completing the work
- Connect to others (Delegate)
- Supporter (involved but not doing the work)
- Advisor/Guide (share knowledge and allow others to take the lead)
- Coordinator (coordinates while delegating the actual implementation)
- Educator/Subject Matter Expert
- Partner/Collaborator

Through this role, we maximize our superpowers, which we define as:

- Ability and experience in community engagement: lifting up the voices of the people impacted by the health of the watershed
- Knowledge of and expertise in the health of the watershed
- Connection to organizations and people
- Ability to empower people with tools, information, and opportunities to protect the watershed

Core Mission Activities

A key aspect of this strategic plan development was a thorough reexamination of Friends of the Rouge's core activities. This process involved questioning and exploring the fundamental reasons behind each activity and understanding how they collectively contribute to the organization's overall mission.

One key connection throughout all of FOTR's activities and programs is education. Every FOTR program has an element of education – Dry Dock events, paddle trips, and even volunteer activities provide opportunities to teach the public about the Rouge River, its challenges, and its importance.

This section details the key actions and programs through which FOTR fulfills its commitment to the Rouge River watershed. These activities are categorized into three primary approaches: restoring, protecting, and enhancing the watershed, encompassing a wide range of on-the-ground projects and community engagement efforts. Furthermore, the section highlights supporting activities that are essential to the success of these core mission endeavors.

The resulting reflection of core activities presented here includes not only existing programs but also some new initiatives that are integrated into the future vision. The implementation plan will subsequently outline the timeline and methodology for incorporating these new activities.

Core Mission Activities: Current, Paused, Future

Trails / Blue & Green Infrastructure

This program focuses on the development and maintenance of recreational trails, emphasizing the integration of blue and green infrastructure along the Rouge River. Key activities include organizing paddle trips and addressing log jams to ensure accessible waterways.

Community engagement and organizing

This activity aims to strategically engage Friends of the Rouge's members and volunteers, fostering a more coordinated and integrated approach to community involvement. It seeks to break down programmatic silos to optimize resource utilization and achieve multiple organizational goals.

Monitoring

Monitoring activities involve collecting data on the health of the Rouge River through methods like bug hunts and fish surveys. This data supports conservation and advocacy efforts, while also engaging the community in understanding river health.

Rain Gardens

This program leverages FOTR's technical expertise to design and install rain gardens, primarily for municipalities, to manage stormwater and improve water quality. A core challenge lies in securing long-term funding and engagement for ongoing garden maintenance to ensure program sustainability.

Tree Plantings

This core activity involves organizing tree planting events, often in collaboration with municipalities, to enhance the Rouge River watershed. Success is driven by strong community volunteer engagement, though scalability is limited by the labor-intensive nature of the work.

River Education Program (REP)

Currently paused, this initiative provided environmental science learning to students through classroom instruction and hands-on outdoor experiences. Future plans involve redesigning the program with an "A La Carte" service model, focusing on experiential learning, STEM exposure, and environmental stewardship.

Advocacy

FOTR's advocacy efforts primarily focus on influencing local ordinances and legislation related to land and wetland preservation and supporting green/blue infrastructure budgets. This involves empowering residents to advocate for the watershed and potentially engaging lobbyists for broader impact.

Workforce Development

This program was designed to address a specific need within the community, aiming to connect participants with relevant work opportunities. Key challenges include understaffing, unclear goals, and issues with participant retention and job placement.

Land and Wetland Conservation

This area of work involves identifying and protecting parcels of land within the watershed to preserve natural areas and prevent harmful development. FOTR works with partners to conserve land, exploring models like community land trusts and converting available land into wetlands or native plant gardens.

Priorities and Goals

This five-year plan addresses key areas for growth and development, with an anticipated period of significant change and new initiatives in the initial three years, followed by a phase of stabilization and refinement. This section outlines the strategic priorities and overarching goals that will guide our organization's efforts through 2028. Each strategic priority is supported by specific goals designed to build capacity, enhance impact, and strengthen our organizational identity.



Strategic Priority #1: Update and Expand Fundraising Strategy and Funding Operations

Why This Priority is Critical

Our organization currently operates with a fundraising approach that limits our growth potential and strategic impact. By shifting to a centralized strategy, we can:

- Scale our impact: Secure larger, multi-year commitments that enable long-term planning and execution
- Build sustainable capacity: Create reliable revenue streams to support dedicated fundraising staff and infrastructure
- Establish market positioning: Develop clear relationships with funders and avoid duplicating efforts with existing organizations
- Enable strategic growth: Move from reactive to proactive funding that aligns with our mission and vision

Without this foundational shift, we risk remaining under-resourced, limited to innovate, and unclear about our unique value proposition in the funding landscape.

Strategic Priority #1:

Update and Expand Fundraising Strategy and Funding Operations

Goal 1: Build Scalable Fundraising Infrastructure

Targets:

- Hire new Development Director (by Q4 2025)
- Create fundraising team organizational chart with 18-month hiring timeline
- Improve donor management systems and prospect tracking tools for greater effectiveness and efficiencies
- Clarify and strengthen integration between fundraising team and program managers through change management strategy

Goal 2: Build a Comprehensive Fundraising Plan

Target: Create a holistic fundraising plan with targets for each revenue stream and a plan of action to meet those goals (by Q1 2026)

- Develop ways of tracking revenue that take into account pass through funding, operational costs, and funding sources
- Incorporate ways of tracking funding across programs

Goal 3: Secure Initial Capacity Funding

Targets:

- Raise \$500,000 over 2-years (2025-2027) to hire dedicated fundraising staff and add programs capacity
- Strengthen strategic funder network by establishing relationships with 15-20 qualified major gift prospects and 5-10 foundation partners by mid-2026.

Success Metrics

Dollar amount raised toward capacity building goal
 Number of qualified prospects in pipeline
 Clarity score on organizational positioning (stakeholder survey)
 Fundraising team headcount growth
 Integration effectiveness between fundraising and program teams

Strategic Priority #2: Build Capacity and Leadership for Core Mission Activities & Programs

Why This Priority is Critical

Our organization has grown organically, but our operational infrastructure hasn't kept pace with our mission scope and community impact potential. Currently, we need:

- More strategic program leadership: Key programs operate in silos, limiting effectiveness and growth
- Decision-making frameworks: Without clear criteria, we risk mission drift and resource dilution through ad-hoc program additions
- Leveraged human capacity: Interns and volunteers are underutilized, missing opportunities to multiply our impact
- Governance excellence: Board structure and engagement don't match our organizational needs for fundraising, leadership and growth trajectory
- Focus: Critical functions like monitoring, advocacy, and community engagement lack dedicated focus

This capacity gap prevents us from maximizing our conservation impact and limits our ability to respond strategically to community needs and opportunities.

Strategic Priority #2:

Build Capacity and Leadership for Core Mission Activities & Programs

Goal 1: Operationalize Strategic Decision-Making Framework

Target: Implement consistent criteria for evaluating new and existing programmatic opportunities across the organization, including services for hire, workforce development, events, and other core activities.

- Adapt decision-making criteria as a tool to be used throughout the organization
- Train leadership team on framework application and create approval process (RAPID)
- Apply framework to current program portfolio and pending opportunities

Goal 2: Build Functional and Effective Board Governance

Target: Restructure board composition, expectations, and committee function to support organizational growth

- Conduct board skills assessment and identify gaps in expertise/networks/participation & engagement
- Recruit 2-3 new board members with targeted skills (fundraising, marketing, legal, community connections)
- Restructure committee system with clear charters and participation expectations
- Implement board development program and annual retreat

Goal 3: Execute Strategic Staffing Plan

Targets:

- Add 3-6 key positions to support core mission delivery and organizational growth
- Complete organizational restructure analysis (role audit) and create new org chart
- Prioritize position additions based on funding availability, programmatic vision, and strategic impact

Success Metrics

Number of programmatic opportunities evaluated using decision criteria

Intern retention rates and project completion metrics

Volunteer engagement hours and activity coordination success

Board meeting attendance and committee participation rates

New position hiring timeline adherence

Staff satisfaction and retention in expanded structure

Measurable increase in program delivery capacity and community impact

Strategic Priority #2:

Build Capacity and Leadership for Core Mission Activities & Programs

Strategic Positions to Add Immediate Priority (Phase 1 - 2026)

Position	Description	Timeline
Development Director	Replace exited Development Director, with a focus on a leader who can build the fundraising strategy needed to execute this plan	January 1, 2026
Director of Programs	Oversee strategy for all programmatic areas, acting as the connective point between programs, volunteerism, and community engagement. - In 2026, this person will take on the special project of re-developing the REP and setting it up for launch in 2027. - This person would manage Volunteer Coordinator, in addition to the Program Managers.	Ideally August 2026, funding dependent
Community Engagement Coordinator (part time)	- Cover current tabling events and prospecting for new opportunities - Supporting Program Director - Support annual Rouge River Day (ongoing) - Work with Volunteer Coordinator and program managers to execute and standardize events	Summer 2026, funding dependent

Medium-term (Phase 2 - 2027)

- **REP Manager:** Dedicated leadership for environmental education and community programming. Will inform the re-launch of the strategy and program. Lead and point person of REP, reporting to the Director of Programs.
- **Advocacy Manager:** Based on groundwork laid by Executive Director in 2026, hire a Manager to oversee policy engagement, coalition building, and legislative outreach
- **Development** (additional support): Based on ambitious fundraising goals, FOTR should consider adding another person to support the strategy

Long-term (Phase 3 - 2028-2029)

- **Data/Monitoring Specialist:** Systematic data collection, analysis, and reporting for conservation impact
- **Communications/Marketing Manager:** Full time hire to cover professional messaging, social media, and community outreach
- **Conservation Program Manager:** Build out habitat restoration, land protection, and technical conservation work

Strategic Priority #3: Formalize Education and Community Engagement Across all Programs

Why This Priority is Critical

FOTR currently operates with significant community engagement activities, but they exist in programmatic silos due to funding constraints and capacity limitations. This fragmented approach:

- **Limits impact potential:** Events and volunteer activities aren't strategically leveraged across all programs
- **Creates inefficiencies:** Ad-hoc planning and execution waste resources and miss engagement opportunities
- **Underutilizes volunteer capacity:** Volunteers aren't integrated systematically across monitoring, education, and events
- **Weakens mission alignment:** Without central coordination, activities may not consistently advance organizational goals
- **Reduces sustainability:** Lack of formal processes makes programs vulnerable to staff turnover and resource constraints

Community engagement is central to FOTR's mission of connecting people to the Rouge River. By formalizing and integrating these efforts, we can maximize every interaction to build stewardship, advance education, support fundraising, and strengthen our community impact.

Strategic Priority #3:

Formalize Education and Community Engagement Across all Programs

Goal 1: Develop Integrated Community Engagement and Events Strategy

Target: Create systematic approach that aligns all community-facing activities with organizational mission and goals

- Define audience-specific engagement goals for members, volunteers, students, corporate partners, and general public
- Create Community Engagement Strategy document with clear objectives, target audiences, and success metrics
- Define one singular owner (current or new hire of Community Events Engagement Manager) to own CE strategy across programs, with timelines, outputs
- Transform events from ad-hoc activities to strategic engagement opportunities that achieve multiple organizational goals.
- Create comprehensive annual event calendar integrating all programs
- Develop event templates and standardized planning checklists, including accessibility consideration and communication, for each event type
- Implement "triple-goal" framework ensuring every event advances:
 - Community connection to Rouge River
 - Education and watershed awareness
 - FOTR mission support (fundraising, volunteer recruitment, partnerships)
- Implement centralized event planning process with cross-program integration
- Seize opportunities to optimize current events
- Centralize all community communications through Bloomerang donor and volunteer platforms
- Integrate event information into all organizational communications

Goal 2: Formalize and Integrate Volunteer Management Across All Programs

Target: Transform volunteer management from separate function to core component of all program activities

- Expand and strengthen Volunteer Coordinator role with cross-program oversight to make connections across programs
- Implement Bloomerang Volunteer system to track hours, skills, and engagement across all activities
- Clarify and create defined volunteer roles for each program area:
 - Monitoring program support
 - Event crew leadership (paddle trips, dry docks)
 - Education program assistance
 - Restoration activity coordination
- Develop standardized volunteer recruitment, training, and recognition processes
- Membership: Expand the definition of membership to include volunteers as a way to acknowledge their time and get them onto the ladder of donor engagement

Strategic Priority #3:

Formalize Education and Community Engagement Across all Programs

Goal 3: Relaunch Rouge River Day

Target: Celebrate the River and FOTR's main steward role by re-launching the Rouge River Day in 2026 to re-engage the community in a broad way

- Integrate fundraising strategy into the event
- Use as an opportunity to test engagement strategy and event strategy across programs
- Launch key messaging about FOTR's stewardship of the river
- Consider using external resources for event planning and coordination
- For 2026, consider a smaller version of the event, or a design that doesn't require a lot of staff time

Success Metrics

Annual volunteer hours across all programs (target: 25% increase)
 Event attendance and engagement quality scores
 Volunteer retention rates and cross-program participation
 Community engagement survey results and stewardship behavior changes
 Event revenue generation and cost-effectiveness ratios
 Corporate partnership development and renewal rates
 Social media engagement and community reach expansion
 Integration effectiveness between programs and events

Strategic Priority #4:

Realign and Expand Program Areas

Why This Priority is Critical

FOTR has established strong foundational programs and built community trust, creating opportunities to expand our conservation impact and organizational sustainability. However, growth without strategic direction risks:

- **Mission drift:** Taking on work that doesn't align with core conservation values
- **Resource dilution:** Spreading capacity too thin across incompatible activities
- **Reputation risk:** Entering areas without proper expertise or clear value proposition
- **Financial instability:** Pursuing revenue without understanding true costs and sustainability

Strategic program expansion allows FOTR to leverage our established expertise and relationships to deepen conservation impact while building diverse, sustainable revenue streams. The 2026-28 timeline provides an opportunity to build necessary capacity and decision-making frameworks before launching new initiatives.

Strategic Priority #4:

Realign and Expand Program Areas

Goal 1: Establish Land Conservancy Program

Target: Launch formal land protection and stewardship services to expand conservation impact beyond restoration activities

- Conduct feasibility study including legal requirements, insurance needs, and partnership opportunities (2027)
- Develop partnership agreements with existing land conservancies for knowledge transfer and potential collaboration
- Create land conservancy program framework including target properties, protection mechanisms, and stewardship protocols
- Hire Conservation Program Manager with land protection expertise
- Launch pilot land conservancy projects with 2-3 priority properties

Goal 2: Expand Advocacy Capacity and Impact

Target: Build systematic policy engagement to address watershed threats and advance conservation at regional and state levels

- Finalize advocacy goals with the Board Advocacy Committee, lobbyist and others
- Develop advocacy strategy focusing on watershed protection, development impacts, and environmental justice
- Hire Advocacy Manager/Director with policy and coalition-building experience
- Launch systematic legislative engagement and coalition participation
- Establish advocacy program evaluation metrics and community engagement integration

Goal 3: Redesign and Launch the Rouge Education Program

Target: Create cohesive, impactful educational school-based experience that builds deep connection to Rouge River stewardship, and connects all other programs

- Conduct comprehensive evaluation of current REP including participant feedback, educator input, and learning outcome assessment
- Redesign curriculum with clear learning progression, hands-on watershed experiences, and stewardship action components
- Consider pursuing a status outdoor REP classroom or environmental education center that is a hub for REP and all other programs. Could also consider working with an existing site like University of Michigan Dearborn Environmental Interpretive Center
- Hire dedicated REP Program Manager to oversee redesign implementation, volunteer management, and program delivery
- Launch pilot redesigned program with 3-5 partner schools for testing and refinement
- Full program launch with educator training, marketing materials, and impact measurement systems

Strategic Priority #4: Realign and Expand Program Areas

Goal 4: Plan Workforce Development Program Transition

Target: Develop sunset strategy for workforce development activities while preserving valuable components and relationships

- Evaluate current workforce development program impact, costs, and alignment with core mission
- Identify program elements that support environmental careers and conservation workforce development
- Develop transition plan that preserves valuable partnerships while redirecting resources to core conservation work
- Implement sunset strategy with partner organizations taking over non-conservation elements

Goal 5: Pause Services for Hire

Based on the strategy sessions and discovery, it is clear that there's a need to pause the FOTR Services for Hire under Restoration. These activities are unsustainable due to funding, staffing, and logistical challenges, and they are not efficient or strategic, leading to wasted effort and resources.

Note that this is a pause, rather than a termination of this workstream altogether. The Executive Director wishes to revisit this down the road, specifically with a defined expectations, capacity plan, and the right staffing and systemic infrastructure. In particular, the Services for Hire work needs a clear business model – including terms and conditions and contracts – as well as dedicated people who can own this work.

Reasoning Behind These Considerations:

- **Capacity and Sustainability:** It's clear that there is a market for the services for hire activities. However, the way FOTR has approached the work has not actually made any revenue and has caused some reputational damage because of lack of capacity and business acumen.
- **Mission Impact:** These activities are not having the desired impact on FOTR's mission.

Success Metrics

Land acres protected or under stewardship agreements
 Policy advocacy wins and coalition leadership roles
 REP program participant numbers and revenue generation
 Workforce development program transition success and partner satisfaction
 Overall organizational financial sustainability and mission impact integration
 Staff capacity utilization and program quality maintenance across all areas

Strategic Priority #5: Shift the Narrative and Build Organizational Identity

Why This Priority is Critical

FOTR currently lacks the marketing capacity to effectively communicate our role as the primary Rouge River steward, limiting our ability to:

- **Secure sustainable funding:** Funders don't fully understand our unique value and comprehensive impact
- **Build strategic partnerships:** Potential collaborators may not recognize our leadership role in watershed conservation, such as the RRAC
- **Mobilize community support:** The public doesn't associate FOTR with Rouge River stewardship at the level our work deserves
- **Support coalition efforts:** Our visibility in regional environmental coalitions doesn't match our actual contributions
- **Attract volunteers and advocates:** People don't know how to engage with our mission or understand impact opportunities

Without strategic marketing and narrative development, FOTR remains the "best kept secret" in Rouge River conservation, undermining our ability to scale impact, secure resources, and build the community support necessary for long-term watershed protection.

Strategic Priority #5:

Shift the Narrative and Build Organizational Identity

Goal 1: Develop Comprehensive Organizational Identity and Brand Strategy

Target: Create cohesive brand identity that positions FOTR as the leading Rouge River stewardship organization

- Develop more consistent practices in ways we're communicating and marketing the organization
- Conduct organizational identity audit including current messaging, visual identity, and stakeholder perceptions across the programs. Consider a marketing firm for this
- Develop brand strategy document including mission positioning, key messages, visual identity guidelines, and voice/tone standards
- Create comprehensive style guide and messaging toolkit for consistent organizational communications at events, tabling, volunteer and community engagement opportunities

Goal 2: Build Strategic Marketing and Communications Capacity

Target: Establish dedicated marketing infrastructure to support all organizational priorities

- Establish an internship to deepen our brand and align our messaging to main steward
- Expand Communications/Marketing capacity with environmental nonprofit experience
- Implement professional marketing tools including design software, social media management platforms, and analytics systems
- Develop content calendar and production workflows for consistent, high-quality communications
- Create marketing budget and resource allocation framework supporting fundraising, advocacy, and program goals

Goal 3: Establish FOTR as Primary Rouge River Stewardship Authority

Target: Build widespread recognition of FOTR as the go-to organization for Rouge River conservation and expertise

- Increase role in coalition groups like RRAC
- Launch "Rouge River Stewardship" campaign highlighting FOTR's comprehensive conservation work and unique expertise
- Develop thought leadership content including policy briefs, restoration case studies, and watershed health reports
- Secure regular media coverage and expert commentary opportunities on Rouge River and watershed issues
- Create partnership messaging that positions FOTR as lead organization in collaborative conservation efforts
- Consider developing a student capstone project to get started in 2026

Strategic Priority #5: Shift the Narrative and Build Organizational Identity

Goal 4: Enhance Coalition and Partnership Visibility

Target: Increase FOTR's profile and leadership recognition within regional environmental coalitions and partnerships

- Continue to position FOTR as primary steward of watershed in coalition groups like RRAC
- Audit current coalition participation and identify opportunities for increased visibility and leadership
- Develop coalition communication strategy that highlights FOTR contributions and expertise
- Secure speaking opportunities and leadership roles at regional environmental conferences and events
- Create co-branded materials and campaigns that showcase FOTR's role in successful coalition initiatives

Success Metrics

Brand recognition surveys showing increased association of FOTR with Rouge River stewardship

Media mention frequency and positioning as expert source

Website traffic, social media engagement, and newsletter growth rates

Fundraising support: donor acquisition and retention rates

Volunteer recruitment and retention improvements

Coalition leadership opportunities and partnership requests

Grant success rates and proposal quality feedback

Stakeholder survey results on organizational visibility and reputation

Implementation

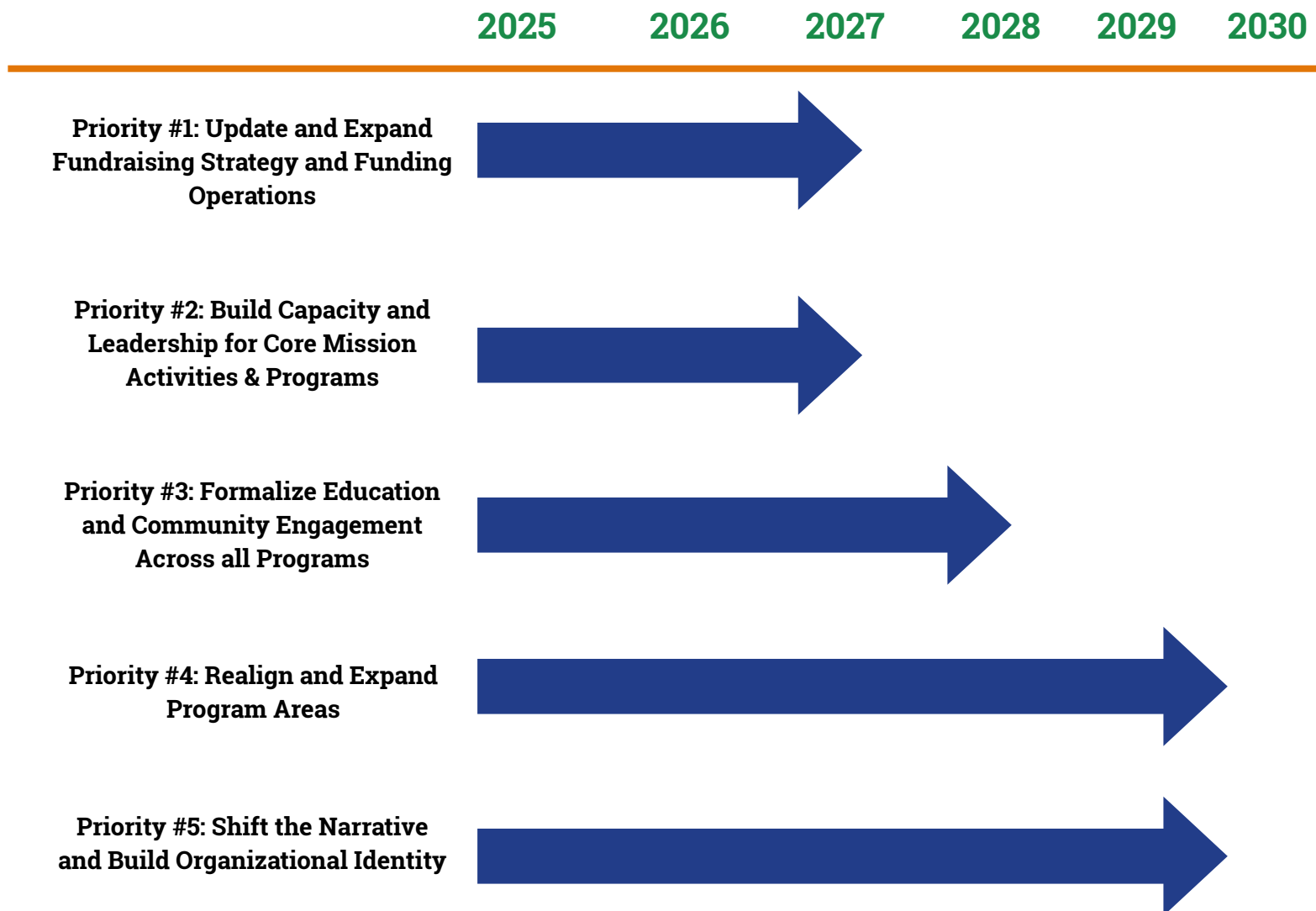
The successful implementation of this strategic plan hinges on a phased and deliberate approach. The immediate next steps include:

- **Develop Operational Plan:** Translate the strategic goals and objectives into a detailed year-over-year operational plan, outlining specific activities, timelines, and responsible parties for each program area and supporting function.
- **Restructure Programs and Teams:** Begin the process of restructuring programs and teams to foster greater collaboration and efficiency, aligning with the "integrated" mindset shift. This includes evaluating staffing levels and investing in staff development where needed.
- **Formalize Community Engagement Strategy:** Develop and formalize a comprehensive community engagement strategy that centralizes efforts across all program areas, ensuring inclusive outreach and engagement with diverse communities within the watershed.
- **Implement Holistic Fundraising Strategy:** Initiate the development and implementation of a diversified fundraising strategy, focusing on identifying and cultivating major donors, refining development efforts, and seeking unrestricted funding opportunities.
- **Establish Measurement Framework:** Define clear metrics and a framework for measuring success across all strategic goals and objectives, allowing for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of the plan.
- **Enhance Organizational Infrastructure:** Invest in strengthening organizational infrastructure, including human resources, systems, and leadership development, to support the strategic growth and evolution of FOTR.
- **Strengthen Public Presence and Branding:** Begin efforts to enhance FOTR's public presence and establish a stronger organizational identity through targeted marketing and branding initiatives.



Implementation Timeline

In partnership with Together Together, the Executive Director created a comprehensive tool for monitoring and managing the various activities undertaken to realize the FOTR strategic plan for the 2025-2030 period. Below is a very high level overview of the timeline of big picture priorities taken from the implementation plan.



In Closing

This strategic plan provides a comprehensive framework for Friends of the Rouge to continue to be a community-centered organization that effectively stewards the Rouge River watershed for future generations. The planning process, rooted in extensive discovery and stakeholder engagement, has illuminated key strengths, opportunities, and areas for growth.

By embracing these strategic shifts and diligently executing the outlined next steps, FOTR will solidify its position as the primary steward of the Rouge River watershed, ensuring its health, vibrancy, and accessibility for decades to come, and fostering a profound connection between the river and its community.

As we look to the future, the opportunities for Friends of the Rouge are boundless, brimming with hope for a cleaner, healthier Rouge River and a more connected community. This strategic plan lays a strong foundation, empowering FOTR to deepen its roots within the community, expand its vital work, and inspire a renewed sense of stewardship for this precious natural resource.

Together, we can realize the vision of a thriving watershed that benefits everyone, ensuring a legacy of environmental vitality and community well-being for generations to come.

Thank you!

Emalee Rodriguez,

emalee@togethertogetherconsulting.com

Evelyn Ontaneda,

ontanedaconsulting@gmail.com

