



Refreshed Strategic Plan
2023-2026

2.10.2023

Leadership Message

With change comes transformation

If you spend time in or around rivers in any part of the country, you'll know there is one thing they all share: they are dynamic, ever-changing and diverse, ranging from slow moving blackwater rivers to small headwater streams to braided waterways. A river is different from one day to the next and from season to season. The rushing torrents of spring recede into rocky beds and peaceful currents of late summer and fall. Rivers remind us that there is strength in diversity and with change comes renewal and often, transformation.

At River Network, we are continuing to grow a culture of inclusivity and distributed leadership during our executive transition. Our board and staff have worked together over several months to refresh our Strategic Plan to guide us through this transition and beyond. In it, we have laid the foundation for the next three years with a clearer vision, shared purpose and actionable priorities, while leaving ourselves open to the opportunities that change brings.

What won't change is our commitment to equity and building a stronger network of diverse organizations and communities, working individually and collectively to ensure safe, affordable drinking water, healthy rivers, and climate-resilient communities. These issues have never been more essential and making real and lasting progress will take all of us.

Jumana Vasi, Board Chair



Katherine Baer, Vice President, River Programs



River Network Board and Staff

About This Plan

Building upon our three decades supporting community members and organizations working on the ground to protect waters across the U.S., the staff and Board of River Network developed this refreshed Strategic Plan to focus our efforts and clearly define our future for collective impact through a powerful, inclusive network. Guided by Due East Partners, our planning process began with engaging and learning from key constituents and voices, which gathered input from the following internal and external individuals:

- 19 staff + 17 Board members through an internal survey
- 20 key informant interviews representing partner organizations, members, and funders
- Network members through State of the Network Survey and at River Rally 2022

Led by our Strategic Planning Committee (right), River Network's full staff and Board participated in multiple planning sessions from February-November 2022. The result is a broadly owned, refreshed Strategic Roadmap (p. 12) with a new mission, vision, and principles, as well as three strategic priorities with corresponding strategies and performance measures for tracking the River Network's impact over the next three years. Recognizing River Network's leadership role and shared accountability for the health of water across the U.S. and the many people who call it home, our Roadmap concludes with three ambitious results that define the network's impact working collectively over time.

Strategic Planning Committee

- Katherine Baer
- Amy Boal
- Brenna Goggin
- Nicole Seltzer
- Kim Milligan
- Raj Shukla
- Jumana Vasi
- Rebecca Wodder

[Click here to meet our full staff and Board team](#)

A Growing, Transformational Network

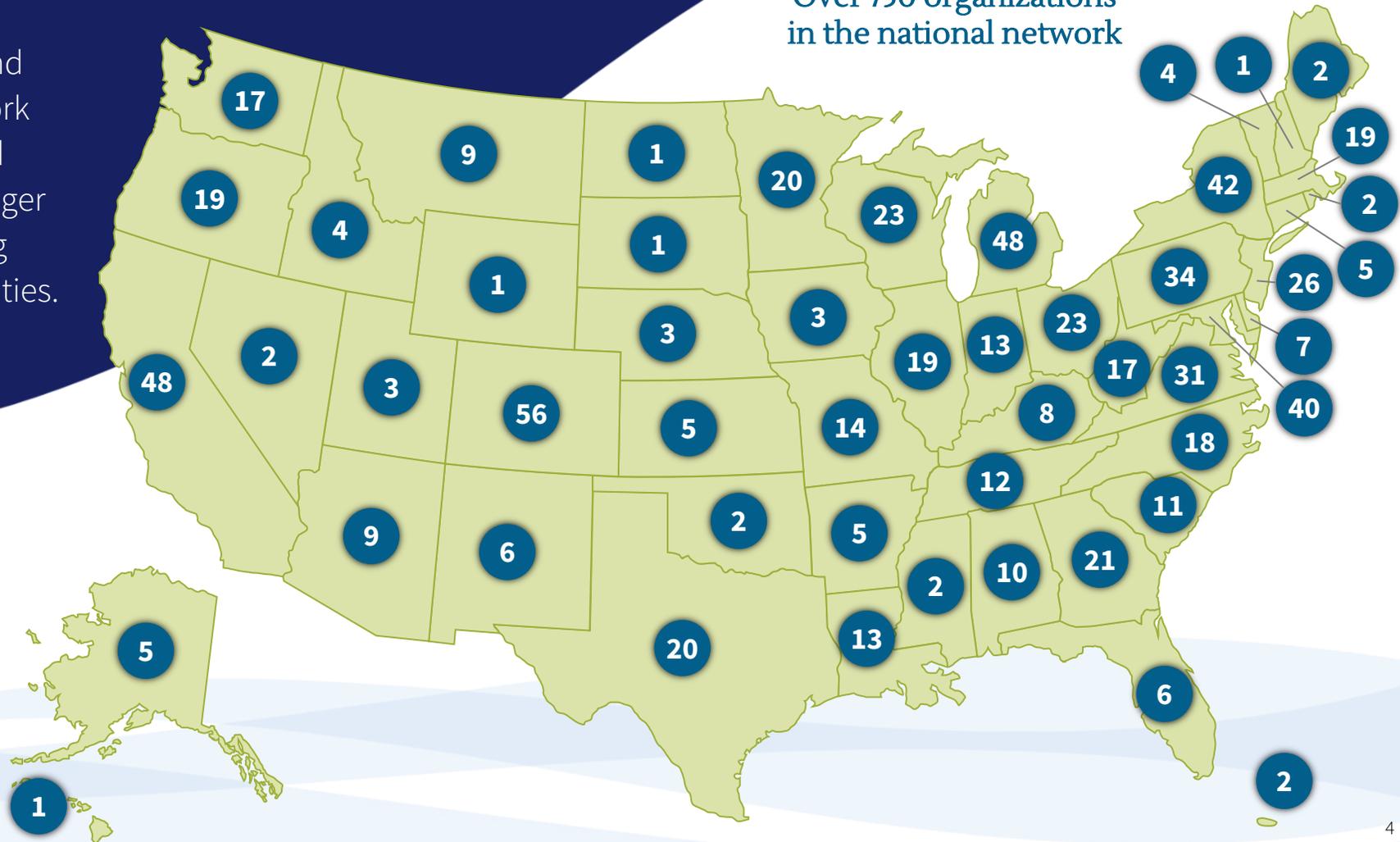
Network members are organizations and individuals who engage with River Network through learning sessions, peer calls, and other programs in order to become stronger advocates for healthy rivers, safe drinking water, and climate-resilient communities.

Visit our [website](#) to learn how to become a member.

Shared Results:

- Healthy, Resilient Rivers
- Safe, Affordable Drinking Water
- Climate-Resilient Communities

Over 750 organizations
in the national network



Why This? Why Now?



More than
2,000,000 Americans
live without basic access to safe
drinking water and sanitation (DigDeep)
and nearly **9 in 10 voters** believe
that access to safe, affordable water
is a human right. (National Poll)

Communities will experience
**increased intensity of droughts
and risks of flooding** in many parts of
the country as the **impacts of climate change**
continue to affect the water cycle.

(US National Climate Assessment)



**2/3 of the US relies
on streams and rivers**

for our drinking water (Pew) and still
over half of our assessed rivers
are considered polluted.
(Environmental Integrity Project)

Freshwaters make up
Less than 1% of Earth
but are home to **29% of critically
endangered species** and once supported
28% of extinct species.
(Freshwater Life)



*Healthy rivers are valuable
for local economies:*
boating, fishing, and other river-related
activities accounted for more than
\$30 billion in US annual gross output.

(PEW)

Vision

A powerful and inclusive movement that ensures abundant clean water for all people and nature to thrive.

Mission

Grow and strengthen a transformational national network of water, justice, and river advocates.

The Network's Focus and Impact

We Believe:

- Joy and hope for our planet flows through our rivers.
- All living beings share a common home and a fundamental right to clean water.
- People, places, and nature are interconnected and must adapt to survive in a rapidly changing world.
- Equitable and enduring solutions start with community – created with, by, and for the people most impacted.

How We Work

River Network strengthens organizations and leaders to improve and protect their waterways, create climate-resilient communities, and ensure equitable access to safe, affordable drinking water.

River Network accomplishes this locally and nationally by responding to the capacity and training needs of organizations and communities, and by synthesizing, elevating, and activating proven and promising practices from the field.

River Network shares challenges, learnings, and successes from the field, catalyzing organizations to apply them for healthy rivers and clean drinking water.

River Network equips and connects advocates at the local, state, and federal levels to advance and implement policy, increase investments, and build power for greater collective impact and action.



These efforts create a connected and inclusive movement for equitable access to healthy waters and climate-resilient communities for people and nature to thrive.

We are committed to continuing to embrace and advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and justice in all areas as we work to achieve our mission.

Equity: We recognize the differences in individual experiences and support people based on their needs and the identities that they hold. River Network works to eliminate barriers that only those with marginalized identities experience so that everyone is able to access resources.

Diversity: We center racial equity in all of our work and we actively engage and welcome a multitude of identities in all of their forms, including class and income, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, learning style, people with disabilities, and more.

Inclusion: We welcome, involve, and value all perspectives, voices, styles, and identities, with special attention to racial power dynamics. We foster inclusion by building internal structures and processes that promote a sense of belonging. We encourage inclusion throughout our network by validating the inherent worth and dignity of all people with an expectation of mutual respect.

Justice: We recognize the impact of white supremacy culture and the weight of past injustices and support efforts to dismantle systems of oppression. Our continued work includes expanding access to resources and opportunities so that all individuals and communities can live a full and dignified life.

Results for People and Nature

1 Healthy, Resilient Rivers

Healthy rivers sustain people and natural systems, and are vital assets for the communities through which they flow. Yet **many are threatened by pollution, habitat destruction, depletion, and climate change**, especially in low-income and communities of color. Successfully tackling these threats requires an integrated, equitable approach at multiple scales. This includes addressing river corridors, floodplains, and upstream and downstream connections. River Network advances these approaches by strengthening local organizations' abilities to develop diverse coalitions, lead advocacy efforts, promote best practices, and leverage funding to achieve resilient and accessible rivers.

Results for People and Nature

2 Safe, Affordable Drinking Water

Drinking water is fundamental to our health and well-being. However, across the country, access to clean, safe, and affordable drinking water – **two thirds of which comes from streams and rivers** – is not guaranteed. By equipping groups nationwide with the knowledge and capacity needed to advocate for equitable access to clean drinking water and influence decision makers at the federal, state, and local levels, we can advance the human right to water and ensure sustainable drinking water access for all.



Results for People and Nature

3 Climate-Resilient Communities

Communities across the US face increasing risks of flooding, drought, and other weather-related natural disasters whose impacts disproportionately affect low-income and communities of color. **Local, grassroots, community groups are key** to contributing their expertise, leveraging power and influence, and serving as effective local and regional agents for change, ultimately building more equitable, thriving, and climate-resilient communities with and by the people who are most impacted.

RESULTS



Healthy, Resilient Rivers



Safe, Affordable Drinking Water



Climate-Resilient Communities

PRIORITIES

1

Grow the capacity of organizations and coalitions throughout the network

2

Expand and connect a more diverse and powerful network

3

Activate the network to advance equitable water policies and practices

4

Develop a strong, inclusive, and nimble organization (River Network)

STRATEGIES

- Center equity, diversity, inclusion and justice internally and externally
- Nurture and expand relationships with frontline communities and community-based organizations and work together on intersectional issues

- Provide organizations with tools, research, communications, and hands-on technical assistance, skill-building, and training
- Support groups to launch and scale emergent policies, projects, and practices
- Expand funding for the network by supporting collaborative fundraising and brokering funder connections

- Connect and convene the network through peer learning and topic-based working groups
- Share information and translate complex issues for collective action at scale
- Catalyze the network to grow a more inclusive movement

- Identify, promote, and build support for policies that align with the shared priorities of the network
- Connect organizations to policy resources and provide advocacy and campaign skill-building

- Develop an adaptable staffing structure and grow funding to respond to the needs of the network
- Attract, retain, and develop staff and board talent that reflects the diverse network we serve
- Increase collaboration across departments and programs
- Grow our capacity to share the network's impact and stories

VISION

A powerful and inclusive movement that ensures abundant clean water for all people and nature to thrive

MISSION

Grow and strengthen a transformational national network of water, justice, and river advocates

WE BELIEVE...

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- People, places, and nature are interconnected and must adapt to survive in a rapidly changing world
- Equitable and enduring solutions start with community – created with, by, and for the people most impacted

A scenic view of a river flowing through a lush forest. The river is in the foreground, with white water rapids and rocks. The forest is dense with green trees and bushes. In the background, a rocky mountain rises, partially covered in forest. The sky is overcast.

Joy and hope for our planet flows through our rivers.

www.rivernetnetwork.org