

Colorado Foundation for Water Education 2015-2018 Strategic Plan

Introduction

Over the past 13 years, CFWE has built a membership of both water professionals and interested decision-makers across the state, a suite of publications and programs known for their quality offering a balance of diverse perspectives, and a reputation as the place where Coloradans convene with their peers to find the knowledge and skills needed to advance the conversation. Recently, CFWE's staff and Board of Trustees updated the organization's strategic plan. Below is our vision moving forward, a new set of strategic goals, and the implications and opportunities the plan holds for CFWE's members and supporters.

CFWE's legislative charge is "to promote a better understanding of water issues through educational opportunities and resources so Colorado citizens will understand water as a limited resource and will make informed water decisions." This mission is as relevant today as it was when we were founded by Colorado's General Assembly in 2002. Colorado's population continues to grow, conflicts over water management decisions are prevalent, and the State's water planning process is shining a light on the challenging water-related decisions that lie ahead. This dynamic has expanded the ranks of those paying attention to water-related issues. It also contributes to a strong sense among CFWE's constituents that tough decisions are on the horizon.

It is within this context that CFWE leaders met to discuss the organization's future and how to best remain relevant and provide value not only to our members, but to all Coloradans.

Informed Decisions

CFWE must be more than a collection of publications and programs. Our work, as called for in our founding legislation, should be guided by a strategy that helps Coloradans make "*informed water decisions*." We must draw an intuitive line between programs that "promote a better understanding of water issues" and the making of "informed water decisions." For us, informed water decisions are ones that consider the larger context and tradeoffs of various options, rely on an array of information from qualified sources, and incorporate involvement from diverse views and perspectives.

Colorado is at a turning point when it comes to water. We must foster current efforts to get beyond an atmosphere of partisan debate and disagreement that perpetuates win/lose scenarios. Colorado’s future generations deserve better. They deserve that we take the harder path where the trade-offs of alternate courses of action are openly examined and well understood, where civil debate moves the discussion past positions to implementable solutions, and where uncommon allies work together.

CFWE has an important role to play in creating this future for Colorado. Our commitment to education that considers diverse perspectives and facilitates important dialogue has earned us the reputation as the place where Coloradans convene with their peers to find the knowledge and skills needed to advance the conversation. CFWE’s staff and Board of Trustees are excited to begin using our strengths and capabilities to facilitate a welcoming, transparent environment for conversations about water.

Moving Forward: Strategic Goals

The below strategic goals are CFWE’s commitment as to how the organization will leverage its resources to accomplish measurable change. The table below summarizes our commitments (what we must do in order to realize our vision) and our strategic goals (what we commit to accomplish in 2015-2018). The CFWE staff and Board will consider, in early 2015, the strategies and tactics we will pursue to accomplish these goals and set metrics to gauge our progress and impact over time.

Commitments	Strategic Goals
<p>Ensure that decision-makers of today and tomorrow facing complex and important water resource decisions have the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFWE will increase our stakeholders’ awareness of the diverse array of quality information that exists on at least 6 topics • CFWE’s educational programs will, when appropriate, help decision-makers understand water’s relevance to diverse public policy challenges by examining water through a wider lens and presenting the complexities and tradeoffs of alternate courses of action • CFWE will increase the amount, quality and effectiveness of water education in Colorado through targeted professional development opportunities for interested educators

Commitments	Strategic Goals
Ensure diverse perspectives are incorporated into water conversations by connecting decision-makers with myriad peers, stakeholders and citizens in a low pressure environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFWE will engage decision-makers at the local, regional and state level as active members • CFWE will make it easier for the water-interested public to be more deeply involved in water issues by increasing access to relevant information and highlighting and/or creating opportunities for engagement • CFWE’s educational programs will create a welcome environment for diverse decision-makers and members of the public to interact with water professionals
Stabilize program growth and further diversify and stabilize revenues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFWE will strengthen its overall financial health and fund a reserve account equal to 3-month’s fixed expenses • CFWE will ensure that staff capacity and resources to implement desired programs are adequate
Ensure a robust and effective, yet efficient, organizational governing and advisory structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CFWE will examine its governance and advisory structure and adjust as needed to support achieving strategic goals

Implications for CFWE Members

CFWE owes so much to its members and supporters. We commit to working with them to accomplish the challenge this plan outlines to chart a course that leads to a future where all water decisions engage uncommon allies, openly examine the trade-offs of alternatives, and rely on civil debate to develop implementable solutions.

CFWE foresees three major implications of these strategic goals for members and supporters:

1. CFWE’s educational focus will widen to examine water’s role in a diversity of public policy issues
2. An increasingly diverse and growing CFWE membership
3. More opportunities to be involved in CFWE’s work at all levels

Program Focus

CFWE built its reputation on high quality, easily digestible water information. Our print publications are some of the best available resources to understand the basics. CFWE will continue to update these basic resources, but will also supplement them with educational programs that examine other public policy issues through a lens of water. We will tackle issues of concern to local communities such as land use, economic development, rate setting and conservation, environmental health and recreation by illustrating the water nexus and examining the trade-offs of different paths.

This will help community leaders and water professionals connect the dots between issues that may have been siloed in the past, and will also lead to broader appeal and applicability of CFWE's work.

Fostering a Welcoming Environment

This plan calls for engaging more members of the public and decision makers (e.g., Chambers of Commerce, local and regional business and municipal leaders, economic development corporations, etc). Over time, this will change the make-up of CFWE's membership (although not as much as you might think – in the past 2 years, 25% of our event participants have come from one of these groups).

We know our current members will welcome these new audiences and freely offer expertise and insight to them. Together we will set a precedent for the professional water community as to how we can create welcoming and effective decision-making processes.

CFWE members and supporters will see: more people valuing water's role in their lives, thereby creating support for long-term investment; diverse groups participating in decision-making processes leading to stronger partnerships and more collaborative decisions; and the breakdown of silos between the professional water community, local leaders and the general public.

Active Involvement

We have received innumerable calls in recent years from members asking how to volunteer and until now the opportunities have been limited. Moving forward however, we see myriad possibilities for members to be involved in CFWE's work on a voluntary basis. For starters:

- Identifying decision-makers in your area and finding ways to connect them with CFWE (e.g., coordinating a visit or speaking engagement, offering CFWE content for their newsletter, etc.)
- Referring members of the water-interested public to CFWE as their “first stop” to learn more about water
- Encouraging decision-makers to invite diverse stakeholders to the table for decision-making processes (and welcoming members of the public to same)
- Sharing stories of successful local decision-making processes or of uncommon partners coming together
- Promoting involvement in CFWE “bridge building” opportunities like Water Leaders, Water Fluency, tours, and other events

We believe that by expanding volunteer opportunities, CFWE can provide more value to Colorado communities, provide additional avenues to increase involvement in water issues, and give our members a meaningful way to help CFWE with its mission.

Final Thoughts

These new strategic goals are not a sea change for CFWE. They give us clarity of purpose for the next three years and help us more fully occupy the niche we’ve created for ourselves. CFWE wants to be the first place that Coloradans gather to learn, connect with peers and get the tools needed to advance the conversation. With your help, we can get there.