



Three Rivers Communities Action Real-Time Strategic Plan

2018-2021

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About our Strategic Plan

This Three Rivers Community Action (Three Rivers) document is intended to

- Tell the story of Three Rivers in 2017 and the vision we have as we look forward to our future in 2021 and beyond;
- Illustrate our path in understanding the Real-Time Strategic Planning model while learning how to plan strategically in Real-Time;
- Document our initial Big Questions and our plans to address them;
- Be a living, working guide to planning that evolves continuously as we face new Big Questions, decide on strategies, implement them, and evaluate our success.

Our Mission

Three Rivers works with community partners to address basic human needs of people in our service area, thereby improving the quality of life of the individual, family and community.

Our Core Values

The group reviewed and discussed the list of core values identified during the all staff visioning session. Once the list was drafted, editing was delegated to a smaller group who met within a week of the kickoff. They took the ideas from the visioning meeting as well as materials developed as part of rebranding from a few years ago, and found significant alignment between the two. The group massaged the ideas until they had what felt like a reasonable list and reviewed and aligned the phrasing to ensure they could apply in both internal and external situations. They propose the following core values for board and staff approval.

At Three Rivers, we

- Respect** people we work with
- Embrace** diversity
- Inspire** mutual trust
- Listen** to community needs
- Seek** collaborative solutions
- Lead** with integrity
- Promote** empowerment and self-sufficiency

Our Vision

An editing committee is working on creating the Three Rivers Vision Statement.

Our Identity Statement

Three Rivers works with community partners to address basic human needs of people in our service area, thereby improving the quality of life of the individual, family and community. Note: Planners identified that the agency mission statement met the needs of an agency identity statement.

Background: Real-Time Strategic Planning — Process by David La Piana

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“The fact is, the world changes continuously and rapidly. It’s foolhardy to believe that strategies should not do so as well. Nonprofit leaders already know this, but traditional strategic planning has locked them into a process that’s divorced from today’s reality. That’s why plans sit on the shelf and why smart executives are always seeking workarounds in between planning periods.”

David La Piana’s *Real-Time Strategic Planning* is “a fluid, organic process that engages staff and board in a program of systematic readiness and continuous responsiveness. With it, your nonprofit will be able to identify, understand, and act on challenges and opportunities as they arise— not in six months when the “plan” is done.... Instead of a hodgepodge of unrelated goals and activities that ultimately lead to inertia or total chaos, you’ll learn to develop true strategies—coordinated actions that pull the organization in the same direction, toward the same ends.” lapiana.org

Why Three Rivers chose Real-Time Strategic Planning

Using a Real-Time Strategic Planning approach helps Three Rivers:

- Gain clarity and consensus about Three Rivers identity, identifying who and where we are now, and who and where we want to be in the future.
- Develop an understanding of how to address our current and future situation (develop organizational strategies) by continually scanning the environment and assessing the potential impact of any current or future trends, factors, or events in Three Rivers’ environment that may positively or negatively impact us.
- Learn about and use practical and tested tools, adapted to our nonprofit, that will help us address the trends, factors, and events, and develop the capacity to implement our strategy so we get where we want to be.

What we did to understand our current and future situation

In order to increase our understanding and develop our skills in Real-Time Strategic Planning, Three Rivers Leadership team members and representative staff from each department met in a retreat on September 29, 2017.

Intended outcomes for this retreat were:

- Gain clarity and consensus about Three Rivers identity
- Understand how you may address your current and future situation
- Learn how to use practical tools that help you address current and future trends
- Develop the ability to recognize and address on an ongoing basis trends, factors, and events in the external environment that may impact Three Rivers and its work

Leadership team members prepared background documentation to help facilitate many of these discussions.

A brief history and background of Three Rivers was presented. (appendix 1)

Summary of Needs Assessment highlights taken from the six focus groups, surveys of clients and partners and secondary research from Community Commons, which is a reliable federal database often used by Community Action Programs and Head Start programs.

Current business model — Identify Three Rivers current situation (appendix 1)

- Geographic area we serve
- Customers we serve
- Services/programs we offer
- Sources and distribution of funding — including past, current & future trends (appendix 1)
- Market awareness
- Definition of competitors
- Three Rivers key competitors — analyze and discuss the listed competitors, prioritize (appendix 1)
- Identify our market position

Three Rivers competitive advantage: What makes us stand out? What value do we offer?

Current and future trends and factors in the market that may impact Three Rivers (appendix 1)

— Share Trend Analysis, and add other trends; identify most important trends

Future business model (appendix 1)

- Geographic area we plan to serve
- Customers we will serve
- Services or programs we will offer
- Sources and distribution of funding

Draft Three Rivers' Identity Statement

Develop Three Rivers' Strategy Screen

Name Big Questions (opportunities or challenges) that Three Rivers is currently facing

Choosing one Big Question for practice: Name potential strategies, and test a strategy against the draft Strategy Screen

All-Staff session

All available staff participated in a half-day session on May 19. Using a combination of small group and large group discussions, staff identified best experiences and success stories at Three Rivers, named agency core values, and shared wishes for Three Rivers future and for their work teams.

Following the all-staff session, Jennifer Prinz gathered input from groups of drivers who were unable to participate on May 19th. Their input was incorporated into the summary report. The summary report was provided to the Strategic Planning Team to use during their planning sessions.

Work Completed at September 2017 Strategic Planning Kick-Off Retreat

Members of Three Rivers staff, including directors, managers and frontline staff, represented all departments in the retreat on September 29, 2017, to complete key activities for Real-Time Strategic Planning. Participants were: Amy Repinski, Amy Tudor, Chelsea Rislov, Clara Krause, Dawn Tommerdahl, Jane Adams Barber, Jennifer Prins, Jenny Larson, Kim Scanlan, Kindra Papenfus, Larry More, Leah Hall, Marin Rodewald, Megan Seger, Nichole Rude, Norma Ortiz, Ojoye Akane, Randi Callahan, Rosa Munoz, Sharon Wolf and Susan Strandberg. Nicole Pelzl provided note taking support.

Session leader: Brenda Holden

Market Awareness and Competitor Analysis

Purpose: To increase our understanding of the market and where Three Rivers is positioned in the market, leading to better decisions. We identified and discussed Three Rivers direct/substitutable and resource competitors.

Direct/Substitutable Competitors are organizations with the same programs for similar clients in our geographic area. Note that Three Rivers also considers many of these competitors as partners.

Resource Competitors may compete for funding, staff, volunteers including board members, and other resources.

See appendix 1 for the Worksheet on "Competitor Analysis" prepared by Leadership Team members.

Three Rivers Competitive Advantages

Questions we considered about Three Rivers advantages over its competitors:

"What makes us stand out? What value do we offer? What really distinguishes us from our competition, provides value and advances our mission?"

Current & Future Trends

Purpose: Trends Analysis helps us understand what is happening external to Three Rivers that could impact our future, especially our ability to be successful and sustainable. Awareness of the trends helps us make better real-time decisions about strategies to implement.

During discussion of trends by departments of Transportation, Head Start, Family Advocacy Services, and Community Development, all four departments anticipate an increasing need or demand for services. However, the Transportation Department is the only department anticipating increased funding. Head Start anticipates about the same funding from current funding sources, and Family Advocacy Services Department and Community Development anticipate decreasing available funds from current sources. Nontraditional funds will need to become part of the future. *See Worksheet on Trends Analysis, in appendix 1.*

The Directors provided an analysis of trends from each of Three Rivers departments. The following are notes from the discussion of each area.

Housing:

- Access to affordable, quality housing was a top priority need across all 3 data sources.
- Five of six focus groups named affordable housing a top need, including availability, accessibility, weatherization, repairs and financial assistance. Limited rental options available and land lords' ability to screen tenants create barriers.
- "Housing costs help (rent, utilities, taxes)" was the highest ranked need consumers may have within the next three months as identified in the community survey, and had many "critical need" responses from both partners and staff.
- Emergency shelter or short-term housing was identified as a one of the top ten critical needs by providers.
- Helping with home repairs was discussed in focus groups and 123 consumers identified this as a need they might have within the next three months.
- Affordability, no home, utilities, size, financial literacy.
- Housing market impacts direction that Three Rivers takes.
- This need crosses departments both in short and long-term needs.

Poverty, Income and Employment

- According to the consumer surveys, having enough money for meeting basic needs was identified as the third highest ranked need by consumers who might have this need within three months (153). Enough money for meeting basic needs was identified by 118 of 243 providers or staff (49%). One in five respondents also noted that household income had decreased in the past year, and for three out of five there was little/no change.
- Jobs with livable wages and having enough money for meeting basic needs was a high priority in focus groups and surveys. Providers listed job opportunities with higher wages as the 8th highest ranked need.
- Clients need jobs, we need employees. Perhaps clients could become employees.
- Background check – barrier across departments
- Job employment - support programs (housing, financial literacy, coaching, ESL, what can we do?).
- Programs for youth, start early, partner with other agencies. Prevention is important.
- Consumers are requesting more jobs than services – struggling to find employees.

Transportation

- Three of six focus groups identified transportation as a priority: needs for public transit, extended hours for swing-shift and weekend work, Head Start transport, medical appointment transit, and rides for students who cannot ride the school bus.
- Affordable car repairs and assistance to purchase a reliable car were rated highly by consumers who might have this need within three months. Access to transit to school, work, medical etc. was rated highly by providers.
- Consumer, personal transportation
- Vehicle repair – other agencies have more knowledge, opportunities to partner, need own vehicle – public transit runs certain hours, wait time, children needing to be in other locations
- Transportation can be a barrier in other Three Rivers departments beyond transportation.
- Education, child, and caregiver needs
- Lack of access to reliable, affordable daycare, along with limited supply of licensed providers, staff, part-time options and availability during evening hours, were described in the surveys and in focus groups.
- Over half of households with children surveyed said that community activities for children and families were a need, and one in four need services for a child with a disability.
- For survey respondent households with a person age 65+, need for caregiver supports was identified by one in three households and meals at home by one half. Community activities and respite care were also identified.

Affordable early childhood education and daycare:

- Families who don't qualify still need services, daycare affects staffing hours (can't work because of daycare).
- Full day early childhood education and daycare is needed to help address transportation barrier.
- Positive affordable youth activities are good for prevention.
- Create a mixed delivery program.
- Seniors – transportation, housing, chore services for elderly.
- Seniors are volunteering – future shortage of volunteers, keeps seniors in home longer.

Health and nutrition

Access to mental health services and supports was identified by one of six focus groups as one of their top three priorities. This was also the second highest ranked critical need by providers (150).

- Access to health care rated highly by both consumers (140) and providers (121) who responded to the survey. Help paying medical bills was ranked high by 120 consumers in the survey.
- According to the consumer surveys, local access to healthy food was identified as the second highest ranked need by consumers who might have this need within three months (164). Access to a food shelf

was ranked as one of the top ten needs by 124 consumers responding to the survey. Initial dental availability has increased.

- Food shelf – find out what the real needs are (hours, access, quality of food issue, culturally appropriate).

After reviewing the 2017 Three Rivers Community Needs Assessment and reported trends, the group identified interesting and additional trends to consider.

Agency Trends

- A lot of referrals (Olmsted) from other agency, word of mouth
- Aging population, increasing demands
- Cultural demographics – funders are interested
- Little growth in existing funding sources, new funding is very competitive and targeted
- Combination in housing that is affordable and level of wages – not affordable for households
- Lack of qualified staff, labor shortage for construction
- Issue of retention – keeping staff
- Space, training
- Positive – growing organization
- New trends – working from home, impact on policy and procedures
- Internal and external communication
- Diversity
- Advocacy is increasing (political climate)

Prioritized Trends

The group prioritized the following trends

- Aging population, increasing demands
- No/little growth in existing funding sources, and new funding is targeted and very competitive
- Lack of qualified staff across the board, labor shortage for construction

Future Business Model

Our Future Business Model looks ahead to where we want to go, based on: identified needs in our community and the people we work with; Three Rivers competitive advantage; other market conditions; trends in the environment. We considered what we learned from Three Rivers 2017 Community Needs Assessment, as well as the Vision Ideas developed during the All-Staff and Board Planning Session on May 19, 2017.

One component of this model is funding. See Worksheets in Appendix 1 on Funding Sources and the Program Income & Expenses.

Building on Three Rivers Current Business Model developed early in the retreat, we focused primarily on the following areas:

Programs and Services Expansion:

- Legislature goal is to meet 90% of transit needs of public by 2025. Three Rivers has many areas that have been identified as 'needs' during gap analysis.
- As baby boomers age, many are in need of the volunteer (HART) program. Many seniors need assistance (grocery/shopping) making HART program vital to them remaining independent in their homes.
- Head Start for ages birth to five, including transportation.
- Homeless re-housing, prevention, senior and MNSure services continue to be a significant need across the region.
- A shift in service delivery from 'first come, first serve' to Coordinated Entry has had a significant impact on how services are delivered and how appropriate levels of service are determined.
- Homeless/crisis services experience an increase in demand when households experience other pressures via increased medical expenses, housing costs, etc. Three Rivers' success is dependent on its ability to perform well in the current CES, building positive relationships with landlords, local partners and ensuring staff are experts in case management.
- Need for affordable housing opportunities for low/modest income households in southeast Minnesota continues to be a key issue for communities.
- Home ownership assistance is in demand particularly for underserved populations such as low-income, households of color, single-parents and people with disabilities.

Funding:

- MNDOT funding has increased in recent years
- Funding for Non-Emergency Medical Transit has remained stagnant
- Federal Head Start funding is on a continuing resolution. Need coverage of cost to reach all areas served.
- Funding for family advocacy services across federal, state and local sources is either stagnant or decreasing. Opportunities for increased funding in crisis programming may be found by combining services (i.e. EAP Pro-Active). Funding to support PSH is dependent on housing development. Nontraditional funds will be part of the future mix.
- Senior needs are growing but funding is not.

- There is strong statewide competition for community development funding projects. Funding for housing projects in rural communities is limited given current state priorities.
- Funding to support home ownership fluctuates depending on the number of competitors, but interest from philanthropy is up a bit.

Other Trends Impacting the Agency

- Aging and maintenance needs of transit fleet. Local match requirements mandate local buy-in from cities/counties served.
- Ability to find and retain qualified staff across the agency.
- Lack of quality space to expand Head Start programs.
- Housing development and home ownership services are easily impacted by multiple variables in the community, housing market and the economy.
- As community partnerships change, certain projects/housing services become more viable. Understanding the opportunity cost of focusing on one/several ideas as funding cycles are approaching is important.

Three Rivers' Big Questions Work in September and October Work Sessions

Purpose: To identify what Big Questions face Three Rivers. Big Questions come from opportunities, as well as competitive challenges or business model challenges. The earlier discussions of business models (current and future) and trends are critical to identifying Big Questions. Knowing Three Rivers' position in the market and our competitive advantages is also important.

Most of Three Rivers' current Big Questions came from a review of the All-Staff and Board session summary as well as the needs assessment findings. After brainstorming a list of Big Questions, the list narrowed to four questions that were further refined during small group work.

Here are Big Questions that small work groups reported on during the September retreat.

- How does Three Rivers provide a positive, supportive work environment?
- How should we prepare for changing the funding environment to ensure stability for programs and the agency?
- How do we use technology to improve communications and efficiencies for clients and staff?
- How are our programs meeting the basic needs of diverse populations?

Additional Big Questions were brainstormed during the second work session.

- How do we make external communication a priority?
- What role should Three Rivers play in addressing car repair needs?
- How do we promote internal communication as a priority?

The Big Questions explored during the final work session focused on implementation of Real-Time throughout the agency.

Three Rivers Strategy Screen

Purpose: A Strategy Screen is a tool for determining in advance the criteria to use as we decide whether to adopt a new strategy that answers a Big Question facing Three Rivers. Having and making use of a custom Strategy Screen avoids crisis-mode, poor decisions when a quick decision is needed. Developing the tool increases awareness of what is important to Three Rivers and how well optional strategies line up with Three Rivers' values.

We drafted Three Rivers' Strategy Screen at the September retreat. During the retreat, we divided into three groups to try out the strategy screen as groups worked on Big Questions.

As we worked with it during subsequent planning sessions, we modified it to better fit our organization. The Board of Directors reviewed the questions on the strategy screen at their October 18th meeting and offered suggestions to the planning group for their session following the board meeting. At the end of the October 18th session, more recommendations were provided. The latest version of the strategy screen was reviewed at the October 27th session. (See Appendix 3)

The questions to be used to compare potential options/strategies include:

- Does it support our mission? (if not, do not proceed)
- Does it build on our unique strengths or position?
- Does it create opportunity for collaboration?
- Is there an identifiable funding source?
- Do we have or can we get/build the capacity for this?
- Have the tradeoffs been identified?

Board Awareness

Brenda Holden presented a PowerPoint to the board of directors who attended their October 18th regularly scheduled meeting. This presentation included an overview of the needs assessment process, some highlights from the Needs Assessment and an explanation of Real-Time strategic planning. Board members weighed in on the Strategy Screen as they considered how they might use the tool in the future. Board members were invited to participate or observe any of the visioning and strategic planning meetings that fit their schedule.

Implementation Planning

The final session focused on next steps in implementing Real-Time throughout the agency. Jenny and Jennifer prepared for this session by using Real-Time process as they explored the following Big Question: *How can Three Rivers implement the Real Time Strategic Planning process to maximize engagement and outcomes?*

The large group discussed the two options presented as well as the review using the strategy screen. Everyone agreed that the more organic option was the best choice, where an ad hoc committee leads the process.

They shared their 'givens' with the group as well as the two options/strategies they explored using the strategy screen.

Their givens for implementation include:

- Ideas/big questions can be generated from anyone/anywhere
- "Big" and "little" questions and opportunities should be screened
- Tracking and documenting our successes is required (and helpful!!)
- Alignment and efficiency across the agency is necessary to maximize outcomes and manage costs
- Effective implementation of work plans requires resource allocation and responsibility/ability of implementation team

Small groups worked on details of implementation. Here are their notes.

Training process and tools:

Toolkit – paper items finished by January 1, technology items finished by June 1 or to be determined.

- Youtube video with overall explanation
- Interactive webinar/virtual meetings
- Cheat sheets with examples
- Make exciting and fun
- Rename "strategic planning" i.e. PAT (Planning All Together)
- Completed worksheet/draft
- Sharepoint

The Big "HOW"

- Cross department teams
- 2 reps for consult departments (locations)
- Supervisory meeting – agenda category
- Internal publicizing about tool itself – informational only
 - Supervisor meeting (all staff meeting)
 - Email to staff
 - 5 minute blurb/video – informational from Jenny or Jennifer to share with all staff
 - Use Infographics

Formal training plan, so everyone is trained the same "Train the trainer" by Dec 31, 2017

Implementation Team Logistics:

Who is on the team – screening team recommended

1. Someone with knowledge of issue
2. Someone affected by issue
3. Decision maker

4. Diverse perspectives/temperament
5. Person who benefits

Logistics:

- Identify the convener.
- Supervisor needs to approve time/resources or management team
- Management approves scope of process and approves the workplan
- Have some back-ups
- Who does the follow-up? Dedicated staff

Master tracking discussion:

- Dedicated staff is needed
- Use a calendar for tracking
- Manage the volume
- Central data keeper- what we have already tried
- Management team to track

Selecting issues for implementation

- Keeping master list of questions
- All staff – ¼ to generate and vet the ideas

Guidelines for participation in the implementation

- Ability to say yes or no
- People should be encouraged to participate and supported by supervisors and management team
- Up front agreement on the time expectation
- Move forward even if someone misses a meeting
- Keep records
- Bring input/feedback from other stakeholders
- Use technology when possible
- Can we afford food?

Closing comments from participants:

- I learned a lot and I have a better understanding of strategic planning, needs assessment and how they go together.
- I liked how everybody worked together – everybody is represented. That was the most important piece.
- I always liked team concept – when there is not just one person declaring what will be done and who will do it. This way everyone feels they have some input and what happens in the end
- I think that with the nature of our business to spend time – waste time. Never been a waste of time.
- Breaks down silos and shifts that view.
- Individually our programs are good at collaborating. This proves that we can do this as a whole group too – makes sense we are good at this.
- Really nice to all work together instead of just teams in our own departments.
- Learning more about the process and working with other people that I don't work with as closely is good.
- I don't like team work and don't believe in teamwork – I like to dictate. What I love about this is some structure to teamwork so it isn't a time drain (my main objections) It gives a context for teamwork and has results.
- Excited to see what the big questions will be in the future.
- I love teamwork but what I really like about this version is being mindful of incorporation people of different department and viewpoints. Sees people who see things differently. Mindful planner makes a big difference.
- Excited about momentum and plan to keep it moving. Lot of time see this is great and doesn't get followed through. Excited we have a plan to move forward.
- Not liking team things – they are often epic waste of time and we have the same conversation a year from now. I can see how things can be accomplished and even more can be accomplished.
- Excited to see what happens next.
- I really enjoyed this – don't have the opportunity to mix with others. Opportunity to see different personalities interact together. Never had the opportunity to work with Amy – Amy keeps the energy up. I like Kendra's point of views. Very real. I think now when the hard work starts. This was very seamless, flowed just great. See what happens in the real world.
- I think for those of us who have worked for Three Rivers for a while, this is a long time coming. Now we have real channels for planning putting good ideas forward, testing. That has been missing. Three Rivers is a good organization but not often good about promoting our organization or working in new directions or happens by accident. This allows us to have real channels and have real opportunity for people to get involved.
- Jenny – thanks for Donna and Nicole for their support. Keeps us going. Shout out to Jennifer for her work. Shows me we need someone who is assigned to this to keep it going. She didn't let anything drop between meetings. Thanks Brenda – it is not easy to come into a crazy organization and come in and get

us this far. Really looking forward to the next stage – the messiness and come up with cool things we can do internally and externally. Possibilities are endless.

- Jennifer – really appreciated getting to know all of you better. I don't get to work with all of you often. To see all perspectives come together to make this better. I appreciate how relentlessly practical Brenda is. Strategic planning can get pie in the sky – she keeps us being practical and looking at real implications. Ties together questions about what really is the value.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Retreat Pre-work

This appendix includes a set of worksheets completed by Three Rivers Leadership Team members in advance of the Kick Off Real-Time Strategic Planning Retreat, to provide background as a starting point for the planning team's discussions.

- History of Three Rivers Community Action Program
- Current business model for the four major departments
- Trends analysis for the four major departments
- Competitor analysis for the four major departments
- Source and distribution of funding for the four major departments

Appendix 2. Three Rivers 2017 Community Needs Assessment

This appendix includes all reports provided during the Needs Assessment process including:

- Three Rivers Needs Assessment Summary Report (includes focus groups, visioning report and secondary data)
- Three Rivers Visioning Report (all staff work session)
- Three Rivers Agency Wide Secondary Research (Data gathered through Community Commons federal data base)
- Three Rivers Head Start Secondary Research (Data gathered through Community Commons federal data base and two focus groups)

Appendix 3. Tools, Templates, Cheat Sheets and PowerPoint

This appendix includes templates, handouts, cheat sheets, and PowerPoint.

- Strategy Screen template (10.27.2017)
- Work Plan template (10.27.2017)
- Real-Time Cheat Sheet for implementation
- Overview of Real-Time Strategic Planning
- Beyond Mission and Vision: Definitions of other components of your strategic plan