Themes from South Platte Urban Waters Partnership Conversations
(As of 9/9/15)

Laura Sneeringer from CDR Associates held conversations with the South Platte Urban Waters Partnership Leadership Team, Advisory Committee and Coordinator in late August/early September 2015. The purpose of the conversations was to take a step back and check-in on people's perspectives about their vision for the partnership, what's working well, challenges and ideas for improvement. Themes are described below. The themes are divided into three sections: usefulness of partnership; substantive priorities/Work Plan; and operating structure.

Usefulness of Partnership

Most people describe the partnership as being a meaningful use of their time. However, a few people did question the usefulness of the partnership.

Is the S. Platte Urban Waters Partnership a Meaningful Use of Time? Describe why or why not?
   Yes
   - **Connects partners focused on related work.** It serves as a communication mechanism to share information and provides a forum to deepen relationships across organizations. Some people (but not all) believe status updates at meetings are a helpful mechanism for connecting.

   - **Leverages resources (e.g., technical expertise, funding).** It helps partners collaborate instead of compete. Small investments can turn into big impacts.

   - **Includes partners with significant expertise.**

   - **Education** is important role for many people (e.g., through presentations at quarterly meetings).

   - **Improved outcomes** as projects involve consideration of multiple perspectives.

   - **Unifying educational messaging** is valuable.

   - **The Water Quality Assessment project** has been very successful; it could serve as an example for other priority topics. The target outcome and action steps were clarified, there is a core group of partner champions that give a significant amount of time because they believe the final product is important, there is diverse representation bringing diverse perspectives (e.g., regulators and regulated), and technical expertise and some funding was leveraged.

   Maybe
   - **Niche is not clear.** It is not clear how the partnership's niche is different from other collaborative groups. For example, networking and connections occur through other collaborative groups. Clear focus areas are needed.

Substantive Priorities/ Work Plan

Almost everyone described the need for clarity on specific substantive priorities in order to re-engage partners and build financial sustainability. Partners have already developed a mission, goals, levers for impact, strategies and actions and subgroups through previous planning efforts. However, a narrowed focus and implementation details need to be further refined in order to be successful. People noted the importance of building upon previous conversations and not reinventing the wheel. Therefore, if the Leadership Team decides to refine focus it should first review summaries from previous discussions.

Impacts of not having a clear Work Plan
- ***Partners do not know how to engage and/or are disengaging.*** There is a sense is that everyone is doing their own thing instead of working together toward a bigger vision/goal. Some partners are disengaging because they don't feel like progress is being made.

- ***Difficult to fundraise.*** People are not likely to provide funding unless there is a compelling topic or project that they want to support, and they feel confident that the partnership will be able to complete the project. It is therefore important to also communicate accomplishments.

- ***Confusion on what to focus on.*** A wide range of input and ideas are being shared, which makes it very confusing to determine where to focus limited resources. People noted that it feels like the group is continually switching focus and therefore making little progress on any efforts.

- ***Less independence.*** If the partnership does not have clear priorities, it will end up chasing whatever funding/grants are available. This is not an effective use of time.

- ***Need to clarify niche.*** As described above, some people felt that it is difficult to differentiate what this partnership brings, compared to other collaborative groups.

Potential Criteria for Substantive Priorities/ Work Plan Areas
- Clearly defined need

- Tangible, meaningful expected outcome

- Outlined action plan and/or milestones to get to outcome

- Topic that at least a subset of partners are interested in

- Champion partner(s)

- Realistic to make progress in the near term - can identify funding, realistic time needed from volunteer partners and Coordinator, etc.

- Needs to have nexus to the mission of funding sources and be bounded by their policies (e.g., can't use federal funds to make regulatory changes)

Potential Work Plan Areas
- Water Quality Assessment

- Green Infrastructure via Natural Capital Grant

- Water Resources Center as part of Stock Show Redevelopment – any support that the partnership can bring to the Colorado Water Institute's efforts?

- Geomapping - many people weren't sure this was a good use of time unless there is a more compelling case for people to add data

- Public health education campaign to be more clear on what activities are and are not safe in the S. Platte

- Source water protection

How to Highlight Accomplishments
There are different perspectives on what is appropriate to highlight as S. Platte UWP accomplishments. The various perspectives include:

- The partnership should only take credit for projects in which the idea was outlined by the partnership and partners did all the work (e.g., Water Quality Assessment).

- The partnership needs to have some connection to the project, whether technical expertise, funding, etc. For example, perhaps there is a role to support the Water Resources Center even though the CSU Water Institute is leading the effort.

- It's ok to highlight accomplishments that any partner has made in the S. Platte Watershed.

Operating Structure

There seems to be a fair amount of confusion on the operational structure, including if/how The Water Connection changes the mission and goals of the partnership and the role of various groups.

Clarity Needed on The Water Connection
While there seemed to be general support for transitioning to The Water Connection's operational structure, there is confusion over what the transition entails. For example, is it only changing the organizational structure or does it entail changes in the substantive topics that partners are focused on.

The rationale for operational changes includes:
- ***Financial sustainability.*** Transition to a non-federal entity due to concerns that the new administration will not want to support the previous administration's initiatives.

- ***Increase fundraising capability:*** Enable people to provide tax-deductible donations and the private sector to take advantage of tax credits when donating.

- ***Meet the original vision of the Urban Waters Federal Partnership initiative*** to provide seed funding to help develop locally-driven partnership efforts.

Roles/Expectations of Leadership Team
People described the following roles:
- Set strategic direction for the partnership.

- Help identify funding.

- Help with transition from a federal to local-led initiative (a few people thought this was the Leadership Team's only role).

- Be informed on status of various projects.

Roles/Expectations of Advisory Committee
People seem confused about the Advisory Committee's role and do not understand why there are two groups. Most noted that they should have the same roles as the Leadership Team. Their only additional role should be to help get federal funding in place.

Roles/ Expectations of Coordinator
People identified the followings tasks that would be helpful for the Coordinator to provide, many of which are already being completed. These comments are based on what's working well and areas of improvement for this partnership, and examples of coordinator roles on other collaborative efforts.

- ***Develop and continually refine a Strategic Plan/ Work Plan.*** The Leadership Team should set the direction (i.e., narrowed list of priority areas) and the Coordinator should outline how to

implement it. The Coordinator should: facilitate meetings to obtain guidance from Leadership Team and other partners; take the lead in developing a refined Work Plan, and bring implementation questions to the Leadership Team, when necessary.

Several people suggested that the Coordinator could conduct an inventory/ market analysis and make recommendations on priority substantive areas, based on cross-cutting missions/priorities of partners, needs/gaps in the watershed, and partners' expertise that can help meet the needs. This would make it easier for the Leadership Team to set a direction that is likely to be supported by most partners.

- ***Develop and implement a Business Plan*** that outlines operational needs and activities to meet them.

- ***Coordinate partnership meetings***. This includes scheduling, developing agendas, facilitating to ensure the group stays on track, and documenting key agreements and action items.

- ***Engage partners*** for various projects where there may have interest, expertise and/or resources.

- ***Support communication among partner members*** (e.g., share updates and funding opportunities).

- ***Support project-specific groups***, as requested. This could include helping the group refine its action plan, identifying additional partners and or funding to support efforts, following up with individuals to ensure they are completing action items, etc.

- ***Fundraise and build/maintain key relationships to support fundraising.***

- ***Attend other groups' meetings in order to find ways to coordinate*** and report to the Leadership Team on key status updates and potential opportunities.

- ***Coordinate funding proposals.***

- ***Develop public relations/ communications materials.*** Highlight accomplishments in order to help obtain additional funding.

- ***Develop required reporting documents for funders***.

- ***Serve as the face of the partnership.***

Miscellaneous Operational Comments
- ***Need to develop thoughtful agendas.*** For the most part, Leadership Team topics should involve questions that the full Leadership Team needs to provide input on and/or high-level status updates. Many people noted that often meetings focus on details that should be discussed offline with a subgroup of appropriate contacts. Some people noted that meetings are not focused enough on obtaining input. Also, agendas need to be more realistic as far as what is achievable within time constraints.

- ***Need to obtain closure on discussions,*** as people often feel like agenda topics are redundant of previous discussions.

- ***Clearer communication needed***. Many people noted instances when information was confusing. For example, as described above, many people do not understand exactly what is being recommended with The Water Connection. Also, some people would like more detailed information on what was learned at other groups meetings in order to identify opportunities.

- ***Transparency is important.*** Direct and open discussions are strongly encouraged. There is a concern that some people intentionally withhold information or do not share as much information as they could. Part of the problem is that planned agenda topics are not covered due to time constraints. One example of transparency issues is that more information on historical, current and future funding expectations is needed in order to develop operational plans.

- ***May need to refine components of the Team Charter.*** Confusion on different group's roles indicates that the Team Charter or other operational documents may need to be refined. This could include clarifying: needed representation for the Leadership Team to ensure it covers different types of partners (e.g., local government and non-profits) with various substantive expertise; level of participation that is expected and what happens if it's not met; what decisions the Coordinator and Greenway Foundation are empowered to make without Leadership Team involvement; and what consensus means to the group and what happens if they can't meet it.