FY18-22 STRATEGIC IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

2  Table of Contents
3  Strategic Plan Overview
   Who We Are
   Our Approach
   Our Impact
8  Functional Area Implementation Strategies
   Development
   Communications
   Programs
   Operations
   Finance
   Board/Governance
16 Appendix
   Initiative Area Strategies
   Draft Funding Matrix
   Draft Initiative Area Budgets
   Draft Budget
Delta Institute’s FY18-FY22 strategic planning process yielded an updated and clarified mission, vision, core values, and metrics, as well as a model for impact.

The plan was developed through a comprehensive board and staff planning process that occurred from December 2016 – October 2017. The strategic planning committee, comprised of Board and staff and with input from full Board, established several objectives to gauge our success:

- Go deeper than last strategic planning process into how Delta will maximize its impact based upon core capacities and opportunities.
- Utilize the process for board and staff to work together.
- Avoid technical, wonky, inaccessible language.
- Judge success of the process based upon:
  - We have deeply explored how Delta can maximize impact.
  - We have articulated the impact Delta will have in 5 years and the pathway for achieving it.
  - All staff and board are bought in to the vision, goals, and strategies.
  - All staff and board can tell the story of what Delta will accomplish.
- Get it down to one-page.
- Focus on people and places that have been left behind.
- Present a unifying vision.

We had an in-depth process that included:

1. **Opening up all the cupboards**: Reflecting on core skillsets, challenging assumptions we held around how we work and why.
2. **Looking In**: Reviewing programs, challenges, revenue trends, strengths, weaknesses, successes, failures, and opportunities. Staff led many of these tasks.
3. **Looking Out**: Reviewing external trends; engaging partners, funders, and experts to identify our unique role and new opportunities for impact; and testing if what we had identified in the “Looking In” phase aligned or conflicted with the external landscape. Much of this was led by consultant.
4. **Board-staff collaboration**: Board and staff came together: 1) in January to brainstorm; 2) in March to test a straw model and rubric; and 3) in July to discuss all the pieces together. Staff provided additional comments and perspectives on the draft plan in September. Our strategic planning committee met monthly to review, iterate, and build from the materials and insights gathered.

This implementation strategy is the organization’s approach to achieve our new strategic plan over the next five years. The document is intended to be a living document to be reviewed and updated annually as our work towards our mission and vision proceeds. Delta staff will also draft annual tactical workplans to achieve the strategies outlined in this strategy.
WHO WE ARE

VISION
Delta envisions a region in which all communities and landscapes thrive through an integrated approach to environmental, economic, and social challenges.

MISSION
To accomplish this, Delta collaborates with communities to solve complex environmental challenges throughout the Midwest.

CORE VALUES
Delta is...
Adaptive
Cooperative
Equitable
Passionate
Pragmatic
Transparent
Tenacious

We strive to embody these attributes in our internal organizational operations as well as how we work with our partners externally to advance our mission.
How we work and with whom
Our work is accomplished in partnership with Midwest communities, nonprofit partners, private business/landowners, and local, regional, and state public leaders. Our external and internal approaches are guided by our organizational vision, mission, and values.
Our hive structure

In FY18, Delta reorganized its internal operations to be more reflective of how we work and collaborate. Previously, programmatic staff maintained certain operational duties which caused work duplication. Going forward, Delta will strive to streamline operations by aligning such operational and administrative duties to relevant functional areas, such as development and operations.
1. LOCAL CHANGEMAKERS SUPPORT & IMPLEMENT EFFORTS TO PRESERVE & STEWARD NATURAL RESOURCES

- # of local cross-sector changemakers participating actively in efforts
- # of local communities participating actively in efforts
- # of local stakeholders/constituents engaged
- # of local barriers overcome to allow implementation (policy, political, financial, etc.)

2. CROSS-SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS CREATE SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTAL SOLUTIONS

- # of actionable local opportunities for market-based environmental solutions identified
- # of cross-sector partnerships developed
- # of resources & tools built for sharing
- # of practitioners gaining tools or training in new models
- # of sites adapting & using new solutions

3. URBAN & RURAL COMMUNITIES GROW STRONGER - ECologically, socially, & ECONOMICALLY

- $ new public funding invested in long-term sustainability and/or regeneration
- $ resources committed & invested by local partners for implementation
- # of policy or practice changes to support sustainability
- # of people with clean water, air, land
- #/% change in perception of people about opportunities in their community
FUNCTIONAL AREA
IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Challenge
Delta's current orientation around project-based funding has resulted in fragmented and restricted funding, requiring deep and constant engagement by project staff and creating barriers to increasing unrestricted funding.

Goal
Delta's total budget grows annually, while maintaining revenue diversity and unrestricted funding at approximately 15% of total.

Strategy
In recent years, Delta has grown its capacity for attracting and stewarding unrestricted support by: building out its individual donor program, including a monthly donor program; investing in a new donor management platform to assist with engagement, stewardship, and tracking; engaging its board of directors in building its network and donor base; and shifting to more donor-friendly messaging. Moving forward, Delta aims to:

- Hire a major gifts consultant in FY18-19 to develop organizational strategy for attracting and retaining major donors and unrestricted support.
- Hire a mid- to senior-level major gifts lead in FY19 to execute strategy and grow into a Director of Development role.
- Hire a grant writer to develop general operating and programmatic grant proposals.
- Continue to prioritize network-building, donor engagement/retention, and relationship-building with new/existing funders. Build upon board engagement in development.

Metrics
|$ Unrestricted funding | # Donors | $ Average gift amount | $ Average grant amount |

Risks
Changing Delta’s approach to fundraising will take time and resources, and the investment in the new model may take longer to pay off than our budget anticipates.
COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Challenge
Delta's tendency to communicate at the project level rather than the higher, big picture level limits our ability to effectively engage new audiences and connect our work to impact.

Goal
Delta’s expertise in initiative areas is recognized. Our brand is strong locally, regionally, and nationally, and there’s alignment in our internal identity and our external reputation. We have a larger and more engaged network of collaborators and supporters.

Strategy
In recent years, Delta has: improved its storytelling; strengthened its brand through a refreshed visual identity and website; increased its online presence and network of followers; created an annual calendar of engaging event programming; and elevated the quality of tools and resources. Moving forward, Delta aims to:

Create a unifying message platform that clearly and compellingly articulates Delta's purpose, impact, and brand.

Raise Delta's visibility and clarify its positioning through a proactive focus on engaging in strategic public relations efforts, participating at regional and national conferences, and producing engaging multimedia content and events.

Hire a digital communications staff person to bring a consistent and design-centered approach to Delta tools, resources, infographics, and case studies.

Metrics
# Conferences | # Press mentions | # Tools, resources, case studies created | # Event attendees | # Communities using tools | Growth in online following & engagement

Risks
Empowering the communications team to proactively drive the external conversation around Delta and our impact may raise potential issues with our highly collaborative work.
PROGRAMMATIC STRATEGY

Challenge
Delta has a strong but fragmented portfolio of work that has historically been project-centric. Fragmentation has led to an unclear narrative of impact as well as staff that are spread thin across projects.

Goal
All Midwest communities and landscapes thrive through an integrated approach to environmental, economic, and social challenges. Our work is organized into distinct initiatives that move our mission forward, clearly define our work, and articulate impact.

Strategy
In recent years, several impact areas have emerged in our work, and our role as solution providers and collaborators has been clarified. Our strategic plan cemented our vision and mission and set a clear impact framework.

Our programmatic strategy over the next 5 years is to reorganize our work around six initiatives that solve environmental challenges and support thriving communities and landscapes. Many of these challenges are interconnected, so while we will distinguish between them in our communications and fundraising efforts, much of our work will tackle multiple initiative areas. Like our other functional areas, the programmatic initiatives will also operate as hives.

Each initiative addresses a distinct environmental challenge, defines specific goals, and identifies clear strategies and tactics. Supporting these high-level strategies are annual workplans that lay out roadmaps for implementation.

In addition to the initiative areas, the program hive will also have two clusters of experts that will support work across the portfolio around Planning & Engagement and Policy, Research, & Analysis. As this technical expertise is needed in every initiative area, these staff will bring cohesion and consistency.

Planning & Engagement activities include effective partnership-building, community and stakeholder engagement, convening and facilitation, surveying and assessment mechanisms, and inclusive planning processes.
Policy, Research & Analysis is a portfolio of skillsets that are used in our systems approach to our work; collecting, analyzing, and visualizing data; mapping and modeling; creating quantification and analytical tools for our partners and stakeholders; understanding and translating policy and its implications for our partners, communities, and initiatives.

Moving forward, Delta aims to:

- Realign its programmatic staff into new initiative areas and technical skillset hives.
- Create five-year implementation and funding strategies for each initiative area.
- Add additional capacity in programmatic and expertise areas as outlined in initiative strategies.

Initiative and Expertise Hives
Each initiative has additional detail on the environmental challenge, goal, strategies, and tactics to guide implementation in the appendix.
OPERATIONS STRATEGY

Challenge
While Delta is highly effective in its operations and internal controls, we’re challenged by having multiple operating systems which complicates processes and duplicates work efforts. Delta has reached its functional capacity for its current office space.

Goal
Delta has standard operating procedures that makes our operational functionality more uniform. Delta is in an office space that supports its functional and event needs.

Strategy
To support Delta’s operational growth, we need to streamline operational systems and HR policies. We also need to build internal infrastructure to align with programmatic initiative areas while ensuring institutional knowledge retention. Moving forward, Delta aims to:

- Streamline operating systems and reduce work repetition and duplication.
- Continue to make strategic staffing additions and adjustments that allow for systematic growth, including hiring an entry-level operations assistant in FY20.
- Secure new office space by third quarter of FY19.
- Streamline HR policies and procedures that mitigate risk and ensure institutional knowledge retention.

Metrics
Favorable results from annual staff survey | HR survey results

Risks
Selecting an operating system that fails to solve Delta’s need to reduce duplication of work. Accelerated staffing growth and loss of institutional knowledge. Missteps with strategic hires in Development will delay the programmatic growth outlined in strategic plan.
FINANCE STRATEGY

Challenge
While Delta has maintained strong financial and internal control practices over the years, we continue to be challenged with fragmentation due to a lack of staffing.

Goal
Delta will continue to strengthen the financial reporting and oversight of the organization. Delta will distill the organizational business model that will allow for clear understanding and articulation to internal and external stakeholders.

Strategy
Moving forward, Delta aims to:

- Create a five-year budget based on implementation plan that outlines a detailed growth plan.
- Continue to make strategic staffing additions and adjustments that allow for systematic growth.
- Complete an annual financial and compliance audit.
- Achieve streamlined financial reporting and business model definition.

Metrics
Timely monthly and annual financial reporting | Annual audit with no material weaknesses

Risks
Deficiencies in accurate and timely financial reporting would result in possible financial stress and mismanagement. Decreased funding is a definite risk if Delta has an audit with material weaknesses reflected.
Challenge
The pathway to impact laid out in the strategic plan will require significant board engagement around development and communications. In recent years, board survey feedback has pointed to this as an area for improvement, so a concerted effort must be made to set up the board for success.

Goal
Board members have a clear understanding of their role and are inspired and engaged in executing their board responsibilities. The board is actively supporting Delta’s resource development and partnership-building efforts.

Strategy
The Delta board is high-performing and brings a diversity of expertise and experience to our organization. Moving forward, Delta aims to:

- Convene an ad hoc Strategic Plan Implementation committee to create an effective framework to evaluate progress towards our strategic objectives.
- Host annual board retreat and strategic plan review.
- Continue to develop a robust and diverse board that augments board expertise and perspectives.

Metrics
Board participation & engagement | Board annual survey results | Framework creation & review

Risks
Without board engagement and support, there’s a risk that implementation will not achieve desired level of impact and that Delta might drift from its strategic objectives. Over-engagement in details of programmatic work may distract from fiduciary and governance responsibilities.
APPENDIX

INITIATIVE AREA IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES
1. RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

Communities throughout the Midwest are dealing with vacancy & environmental stressors, which limits investment & degrades environmental & economic health as well as quality of life.

Often communities most impacted lack the capacity & resources to effectively address these challenges. When planning & redevelopment efforts occur, local residents are often not empowered to meaningfully engage in or lead them.

Goal
Local stakeholders are inspired and empowered to engage in planning and redevelopment efforts, and in doing so, recognize their capacity as changemakers.

Delta’s partner communities retain and recognize the economic, environmental, and social benefits of our collaboration, and the tools and resources that are co-created as outputs of our collaboration are used by local changemakers and adapted and spread for wider impact.

Positioning & Strategy
Since its inception, Delta has leveraged its technical, planning, and engagement expertise to empower communities to tackle challenges like brownfield redevelopment, coal community transition, and poor air quality. We’ve done that by facilitating stakeholder dialogues and creating and sharing practical, actionable tools and resources. In 2016, we secured a significant, multi-year foundational investment in aggregating and refining our tools and resources for resilient communities. Moving forward, we aim to:

Build capacity of agencies to engage in sustainable development with better tools and strategies.

Empower local changemakers to engage and use tested strategies to improve their community by sharing tools, resources, and data to support their engagement and decision making.

Translate technical knowledge into accessible, user-friendly tools, resources, and case studies that real people can use to help solve complex environmental challenges in their community.

Tactics
Near-term: Hire 1 FTE with community expertise; develop strategy to build our work in Chicago; invest in our ability to develop and share tools.

Mid-term: Implement Chicago strategy; build upon existing community relationships; get tools in hands of more practitioners.

Long-term: Expand our network of partner communities across the Midwest; deepen impact.
2. GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

Aging infrastructure, resource constraints, & more frequent heavy rainfall from climate change strain many Midwest communities’ ability to proactively address flooding & associated environmental & economic impacts.

While green infrastructure (GI) is a powerful solution, practitioners are hindered by challenges related to: planning, siting, design, connecting to natural systems & gray infrastructure, financing, maintenance, & monitoring.

Goal
Barriers to widespread use of green infrastructure throughout the Midwest are removed, and local changemakers are empowered to implement green infrastructure, reduce economic risks and costs to communities, and improve environmental quality and quality of life.

Positioning & Strategy
Delta has been working directly with communities to plan and implement green infrastructure with a focus on how to integrate into gray infrastructure planning. We understand our region’s water systems, the challenges faced by resource-constrained municipalities, and the tools needed for planning and implementing successful green infrastructure solutions. We have a strong funding and project base to build from. Moving forward, we aim to:

Build knowledge base and system map of GI drivers, incentives, and disincentives that shape how land managers use or don’t use GI and how outside forces, like insurance, financial markets, and permitting, may exert undue influence and inhibit implementation.

Empower local practitioners to cost-effectively plan, install, and maintain green infrastructure solutions by sharing tools, resources, model policies, and best practices to support their decision making.

Translate technical knowledge into accessible, user-friendly tools, resources, and case studies that real people can use to help solve complex environmental challenges in their community.

Tactics
Near-term: Invest in staff resources to manage projects; increase pipeline of demonstration projects.

Mid-term: Scale up engagement in existing GI communities; continue to compile learnings into practical tools, templates.

Long-term: Share comprehensive template for communities to follow to make long-term planning more efficient & cost effective; raise visibility of our tools regionally and nationally.
3. SUSTAINABLE BUILDINGS

CITIES, AND IN PARTICULAR COMMERCIAL & RESIDENTIAL BUILDINGS, CONTRIBUTE SIGNIFICANTLY TO MIDWEST GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS AND WASTE RESOURCES.

TOOLS & PROGRAMS EXIST TO REDUCE THE CARBON FOOTPRINT OF BUILDINGS AND IMPROVE SUSTAINABILITY OF OPERATIONS, BUT THEIR UPTAKE BY DECISION MAKERS HAS LAGGED & IS NOT ACHIEVING THE SCALE NEEDED FOR REAL IMPACT.

GOAL

Barriers to implementing current best practices are removed through the sharing of products and services that empower building managers and homeowners to manage their spaces more sustainably.

Adoption rate of sustainable behaviors in the Midwest increases, supporting a participation shift beyond the innovators and early adopters to include the early majority of consumers and building managers.

POSITIONING & STRATEGY

Over the past decade, Delta has been on the leading edge of implementing sustainable best practices in buildings, and we’ve deepened our understanding of consumer motivations with respect to energy reduction. Our experience working with iconic and difficult buildings in Chicago has given us unique perspective on the barriers and opportunities in achieving sustainability in homes and buildings. We have a stable base of earned income to build from, and we’re building local and national partnerships to attract private and public funding. Moving forward, we aim to:

Shift from a one-off building approach to a more visionary and systemic approach to increase uptake of sustainable operations and maintenance practices across the commercial and residential building sector in Chicago and other metropolitan areas across the Midwest.

Translate our knowledge and findings into accessible, user-friendly tools, resources, and case studies geared toward the early majority decision makers.

Engage and empower early majority audience with suite of products to mainstream sustainable practices.

TACTICS

NEAR-TERM: Audit our current tools and resources; learn more about early majority and develop an engagement strategy.

MID-TERM: Implement engagement strategy; aggregate, revise, and repackage existing tools and create new ones geared toward early majority audience.

LONG-TERM: Share branded suite of products and services; invest in additional staff expertise.
4. WASTE REDUCTION

Midwestern states generate more waste per capita than other regions & have lower recycling rates. With lower landfilling costs, the region doesn’t face immediate pressure to reduce waste, & consumer education & attention around waste is lacking.

Most communities incur opportunity cost by not embracing more effective strategies for municipal solid waste, construction & demolition waste, biomass & hazardous waste.

Goal
Waste stakeholders at a facility, local, and regional level are empowered to embrace a sustainable approach to material management that improves diversion rates, protects environmental and public health, and maximizes economic opportunity.

Communities achieve environmental, economic, and social benefits by leveraging waste-based economic development strategies.

Positioning & Strategy
Over the last decade, through our research and analysis of regional waste trends and opportunities and leading work around building material reuse, Delta has built expertise and become a regional thought leader around waste. Moving forward, we aim to:

Build capacity of local governments, regional bodies, facility managers, and other waste stakeholder agencies to adopt policies that foster sustainable waste management.

Share research, tools, and resources around sustainable waste management best practices, educational initiatives, waste-based economic development, and procurement with waste stakeholders.

Mobilize resources to empower weak-market communities to achieve environmental and economic benefits via waste management strategies.

Tactics
Near-term: Aggregate and refine past waste tools and resources; develop outreach strategy to share tools with prospective partner communities.

Mid-term: Execute outreach strategy; replicate and expand our waste work to other geographies across the Midwest; develop strategy and tools for weak-market communities.

Long-term: Disseminate tools aimed at empowering weak market communities to benefit from improved waste management services and waste-based economic development.
5. **REGENERATIVE FOOD SYSTEMS**

Agriculture is a major driver of our Midwest economy, but our current food system is not sustainable and is increasingly exposed to climate risks.

Farmers can play a critical role in feeding our communities while restoring land but face complex risks and barriers.

**Goal**

A new food economy, oriented around healthy land and healthy people, takes shape, connecting farmers to the rest of the value chain. Financial barriers and risks are reduced and clear cost-benefit frameworks exist, enabling farmers to implement practices that yield improved soil health and water quality as well as more nutritious food. The narrative around regenerative food systems shifts from niche to mainstream.

**Positioning & Strategy**

Over the last decade, Delta has designed and implemented programs focused on value chain coordination, ecosystem service valuation, and market-based conservation mechanisms. We’ve built a broad, national network of partners and funders in this work. Moving forward, we aim to:

**Create** tools, mechanisms, and models that mitigate risks and present clear frameworks to support the implementation of more sustainable practices and cropping patterns.

**Mobilize** investment into regenerative farming systems.

**Align** market actors across the value chain to build demand for food produced using regenerative farming techniques.

**Tactics**

**Near-term:** Aggregate and refine tools and resources for target audiences; develop strategy to disseminate tools; build upon existing collaborative efforts; continue to build new partnerships.

**Mid-term:** Execute strategy to share tools and resources; integrate our work with other relevant regional and national networks; position Delta with new audiences, including impact investors and policymakers.

**Long-term:** Direct investment into the new food economy; scale programs and models for increased uptake of regenerative food systems.
Across the Midwest, natural & working landscapes play a critical role in protecting soil & water resources, but stewardship of these lands is under-resourced, inconsistent, and unsustainable.

There are insufficient resources to effectively steward our lands, and the costs will only increase as ecosystems are stressed by risks associated with climate change.

Goal
Additional resources are directed to soil and water stewardship, enabling more land to be sustainably managed. These resources support comprehensive, long-term management strategies that account for climate change impacts.

Positioning & Strategy
Delta has years of experience developing innovative models to support working lands conservation, and in recent years, Delta has explored how similar approaches might provide long-term, sustainable support to natural areas. This work has resulted in broad partnerships, improved decision support systems, and funding mechanisms.

Moving forward, we aim to:

Create mechanisms that unlock capital and resources to increase acres of land being stewarded throughout the Midwest.

Build the investment case to direct funding toward healthy soils and watersheds.

Develop programs and mechanisms to mitigate risk associated with implementation of stewardship.

Increase the capacity of landowners, public agencies, and quasi-public agencies to plan for better land management.

Tactics
Near-term: Spread our current conservation approaches into new geographies; share tools with more practitioners and stakeholders; use these opportunities to grow work in this area.

Mid-term: Implement and scale conservation finance strategies in additional watersheds throughout the Midwest.

Long-term: Share new funding opportunities and market mechanisms for implementation of large-scale conservation activities throughout the Midwest.