



LOWER MINNESOTA RIVER WATERSHED DISTRICT

Executive Summary for Action

Lower Minnesota River Watershed District Board of Managers Meeting
Wednesday, May 16, 2018

Agenda Item

Item 5. C. - MN River Congress Request

Prepared By

Linda Loomis, Administrator

Summary

The Minnesota River Congress is approaching all of its partners in order to raise matching funds to obtain a grant from the McKnight Foundation. The Congress has received McKnight grants in the past, but has expressed concern that the Congress has not been able to get additional funds from other organizations.

The LMRWD has supported the River Congress since 2014. We have attended, presented and sponsored the Congress. LMRWD sponsorship has been \$100 for each Congress since the 4th Congress in July 2015. President Shirk was on the action board for a period of time and I have attended meetings of the action board occasionally. The LMRWD has had a table at the networking fairs that precede the Congress.

A proposal from the Congress to address how they might raise funds is attached. They are asking partners/sponsors to make a larger financial commitment.

Attachments

MN River Congress proposal

Recommended Action

No recommended action

Minnesota River Congress Funding Situation

Submitted by Ted L. Suss for January 17, 2018 Action Board Discussion

For each of the past three years, including the current year, the Friends of the Minnesota Valley has applied for and received a \$25,000 grant from the McKnight Foundation to partially support the Minnesota River Congress. The funds in addition to McKnight have mostly come in the form of in-kind contributions of time and expenses from the participants and partner organizations. Some funds have been raised through the sale of tickets and exhibit tables. However, those funds do not flow through Friends of the Minnesota Valley and thus do not show up as “other funds” to operate either the MRC or support of the friends.

When I applied for the second year of funding, the funding officer inquired about other financial support and our plans to make the MRC self-supporting in the future. This inquiring carried an implication that other funding would be desirable to McKnight.

Last year, when I applied for the third year of McKnight funding, the funding officer implied rather strongly that McKnight did not like to be the only funder of an organization or a major project. Based on my conversations from one year ago, I feel continued McKnight funding is unlikely unless we find supporting dollars. I can and will submit another application, but I feel it is somewhat wasted effort without changes in our fiscal operations.

I feel we would need to show revenues from MRC activities equal to the McKnight application amount.

One possibility would be to run all revenues and expenses from the congress meeting through Friends. I don't know how much this would be, but it would be a start.

Another possibility would be to solicit individual donations. If every Action Board member contributed \$100, we would have about \$3500. Maybe we could do that and then pay mileage for meeting attendance. One way to sell individual memberships would be to give each member two tickets to each of the two Congress meetings. If we sold 100 that would be \$10,000 and would increase our attendance at the congress meetings.

There must be close to 100 units of government in the Minnesota River Basin, I am talking counties cities, and perhaps watershed districts. If each paid between \$100 and \$500 at an average of \$200 that would be \$20,000, of course collecting from that many is unlikely.

There are a number of other groups, chambers of commerce, service organizations, corporations, community foundations that might contribute anywhere for \$100 to \$500.

Another possibility might be to ask each of our partner organizations to contribute \$250 in return for which they would get a free table at each of the two congress meetings and two free tickets to each congress. If this money was paid up front, we could have it in-hand at the time of the grant application. The money would be spent back on MRC activities.

The difficulty implementing any of these ideas is they take time and work. Not things I have to give.

Of course, there is always the chance we could find another foundation that might grant a larger amount. Quite frankly, If we had a \$10,000 grant from another source and \$10,000 of real money, not in-kind, from various sources. I think McKnight would be much more amendable to continued funding.

Another concern is being able to report real progress on our mission and goals to potential funders, including McKnight. Getting together for meetings is not high on a funder's criterial list unless getting together is to accomplish some meaningful goal.

Questions:

- 1) Can MRC continue to operate in a meaningful way without the McKnight funding
- 2) Can we put together a funding plan, ASAP, that has a realistic expectation of implementation?
- 3) Who is going to lead the fundraising effort