



REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

WHITE RIVER ADVOCACY COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT & EXECUTION

Issued by: Tourism Tomorrow & Hamilton County Tourism, on behalf of Partners for the White River

Date: February 27, 2025

Submission Deadline: March 17, 2025 9am EST

Contact: Brad Beaubien, Senior Director of Destination Development, Tourism Tomorrow

Email: brad.beaubien@tourismtomorrow.org

I. INTRODUCTION

The White River is one of Indiana's most vital natural resources, supporting a third of the state's population and its largest economic centers. Galvanized by the White River Vision Plan's vision of connecting people across Greater Indianapolis to a healthy and restored river, communities are investing in water quality, park and recreation, and economic development projects that strengthen the quality of life, place, and opportunity in the region. Still, the river and broader watershed faces mounting pressures from development, population growth, competing resource demands, and a challenging public policy environment.

Recognizing the need for coordinated action, **Partners for the White River** was formed—a coalition of environmentally-focused nonprofit organizations dedicated to protecting, restoring, and advocating for the White River and its watershed. Partners for the White River is an outgrowth of environmental grantees of the **Nina Mason Pulliam Charitable Trust**, which is funding this communication strategy. The coalition seeks to strengthen alignment on advocacy efforts, amplifying impact and broadening the audience supporting watershed stewardship beyond those for whom environmental protection is a priority. The Partners have a strategic plan, the executive summary of which is attached as an appendix to this RFP.

To facilitate more effective and unified advocacy **Tourism Tomorrow**, the nonprofit arm of Visit Indy, in collaboration with **Hamilton County Tourism**, is leading this communications strategy effort on behalf of the Partners. As stewards of the Discover White River platform, these entities bring expertise in regional destination marketing, stakeholder engagement, and public relations strategy, making them well-positioned to guide the coalition in developing a compelling and coordinated communications approach.

This RFP seeks a qualified consultant to develop and execute a comprehensive communications strategy that builds trust and aligns the voices of these organizations, strengthens advocacy efforts and outcomes, and drives meaningful engagement around the protection and restoration of the White River.

Communication Situational Awareness

Today, most of the Partners engage in environmental advocacy efforts. For many, doing so is a core function of their work, while for others it is more tangential or nuanced. These partners include:

- White River Alliance
- Conservation Law Center
- Hoosier Environmental Council
- The Nature Conservancy
- Friends of the White River
- Conner Prairie
- Indy Parks and Recreation
- The Parks Alliance of Indianapolis
- Hamilton County Tourism
- Tourism Tomorrow

In addition to individual efforts, three broader communication platforms exist.

- **Indiana Water Allies** works to coordinate water-related policy development and advocacy across the state and is primarily focused on state government-level advocacy. It contains several members of the Partners.
- **Indiana Water Summit**, its associated Research & Policy Forums, and its Working Group convene diverse members of the professional water community, public officials, and members of the public both in-person and online via a small handful of events and bi-monthly meetings to share research, water management and policy happenings, and work toward solutions.
- **Discover White River** works to tell the story of all things White River to the general public. It seeks to connect people to the collection of parks and attractions that collectively make up what is now being called the White Riverway, as well as to the plans, improvements, and partners working to implement the White River Vision Plan. The platform does not advocate, seeking instead to serve as the welcome mat that connects people to the place, activity, or passion related to the river that matters most to them.

II. Project Governance

1. **Project Management Team:** The project will be contracted by Tourism Tomorrow, Inc. and jointly managed in partnership with Hamilton County Tourism. These entities will assist the consultant in process development and is the decision-making body for all administrative tasks such as scheduling, budget, timeline, and reporting.
2. **Core Partners Group:** This group, consisting of the Project Management Team along with White River Alliance, Conservation Law Center, Hoosier Environmental Council, and The Nature Conservancy, is the decision-making body for all things related to the development and execution of the communication strategy.
3. **Full Partners Group:** The full list of partners serves to provide stakeholder input at key points during the development of the communication strategy.

III. PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The selected consultant will:

- **Facilitate collaborative discussions** to build trust among partners and establish up to three key environmental issues to address.
- **Develop a communications playbook** that enhances the long-term capacity for partners to engage in collaborative advocacy and communication campaigns.
- **Develop a unified communications strategy** for key issues that aligns messaging across all partners while identifying specific roles for both the collective partnership and individual organizations.
- **Define target audiences for each key issue**, prioritizing those with the highest potential for impact.
- **Create effective messaging and outreach tactics** that engage target audiences while remaining adaptable in politically diverse environments.
- **Develop customizable communication tools**, including talking points, social media content and templates, short-form videos, press releases, and advocacy materials for partners to use.
- **Oversee implementation of messaging strategies**, ensuring cohesion across digital, print, and earned media channels.
- **Provide ongoing strategic guidance** and collaboration frameworks to enhance partner coordination and long-term advocacy effectiveness.

IV. SCOPE OF WORK

Respondents are encouraged to propose a process, timeline, and sequencing of steps that they believe will be most effective in meeting the project objectives. While the scope of work outlines key phases and deliverables, firms do not need to follow the order exactly as listed, as long as all required elements are addressed. Proposals should clearly articulate the rationale behind the proposed approach and demonstrate how it will best achieve the desired outcomes.

Phase 1: Communications Playbook Development

- **Conduct partner assessments** to identify long-term coordination needs, challenges, and opportunities.
- **Research effective collaborative advocacy models** and recommend best practices for partner engagement and coordination among partners.
- Develop a structured **White River Communications Playbook** outlining guiding principles, roles, decision-making processes, content-sharing agreements, and communication protocols.
- **Provide templates, tools, and governance structures** to facilitate independent yet aligned communications.
- **Deliver a training workshop** and knowledge transfer session to ensure successful implementation and adoption of the playbook.

Phase 2: Communications Strategy Development

- **Conduct an in-depth landscape analysis of existing communication efforts**, strengths, and weaknesses across partner organizations and communication platforms.
- **Facilitate structured discussions and workshops** to establish common advocacy goals and align messaging priorities.
- **Identify up to three high-priority environmental issues** based on impact, feasibility, and partner alignment.
- **Define key target audiences** and segment messaging strategies to ensure broad and effective engagement.
- Develop a **strategic communications framework** that includes messaging architecture, campaign themes, audience engagement tactics, and a content strategy roadmap.
- **Establish a clear timeline, roles, and responsibilities** to ensure seamless coordination across partners.
- **Provide ongoing support in testing and refining communication strategies** to adapt based on feedback and performance.

Phase 3: Implementation & Content Development

- **Develop and distribute a comprehensive set of communication tools**, including:
 - Unified messaging toolkits for partners to customize and use.
 - Template-based social media assets, press materials, and advocacy resources.
 - Customizable stakeholder engagement materials for diverse audience segments.
 - Note a website is not a contemplated deliverable.
- **Produce up to five short-form videos** (1 to 3 minutes each) and supporting visual content to strengthen digital outreach.
- **Execute a multi-channel media strategy** encompassing earned, owned, and paid media.
- **Assist partners in leveraging media relations**, securing interviews, editorial placements, and op-eds.
- **Implement and oversee a robust monitoring and evaluation framework** that tracks engagement metrics, assesses media effectiveness, and refines strategies based on real-time data insights.

IV. PROPOSAL REQUIREMENTS

Interested firms or individuals should submit a proposal including:

1. **Company/Consultant Background** – Overview of experience in strategic communications, particularly in environmental advocacy and/or policy-driven campaigns.
2. **Project Approach & Methodology** – Description of the approach to developing and executing the communications strategy.
3. **Key Personnel** – Resumes or bios of team members assigned to the project.
4. **Relevant Experience** – Examples of past projects similar in scope, with measurable outcomes.
5. **Budget Proposal** – Estimated cost breakdown for each phase, and key steps within each phase. Note the total budget for this project is \$150,000, and it is desired that at least \$75,000 be committed to paid media implementation.
6. **Timeline** – Proposed project schedule with key milestones. It is suggested most of this work is completed and invoiced by December 31, 2025. Communication strategies and certain evergreen content should allow for implementation to continue beyond 2025 under the leadership of the Partners.

V. EVALUATION CRITERIA

Proposals will be evaluated based on:

- **Demonstrated expertise** in strategic communications and campaign execution.
- **Experience in environmental advocacy messaging**, especially in conservative political landscapes.
- **Quality and feasibility** of the proposed approach and methodology and its adeptness to build capacity with the Partner organizations.
- **Cost-effectiveness** and alignment with project budget.
- **Capacity to execute** across multiple communication platforms.

VI. SUBMISSION INSTRUCTIONS

Proposals must be submitted via email by **March 17, 2025 at 9am EST** to Brad Beaubien at brad.beaubien@tourismtomorrow.org.

All **questions** regarding the RFP should be directed to Brad Beaubien at brad.beaubien@tourismtomorrow.org by **March 6, 2025 at 5pm EST**. Responses to all questions received will be shared with all parties submitting any question.

All proposals will be screened for completeness by the Project Management Team and reviewed by the Core Partners Group. Shortlisted candidates may be invited for an interview or follow-up discussion with the Core Partners Group.



Partners for the White River

Strategic Plan 2025/2035

The White River Vision Plan united Central Indiana communities around a vision of a healthy, restored river that links neighborhoods, parks, open spaces, and cultural attractions—enhancing quality of life, place, and opportunity for all residents, while strengthening economic competitiveness and resilience across the region.

To bring this vision to life in a truly transformative way, coordinated action is needed now. The White River watershed, home to a third of Indiana’s population and its largest economic centers, faces mounting pressures from development, population growth, and competing water resource demands. Sustained regional collaboration and cohesive, cross-jurisdictional policies, programs, and investments are essential to safeguard the river’s health and foster prosperity, ensuring its shared benefits for generations to come.

The Partners for the White River are uniquely equipped to collaborate with communities, share technical expertise, create opportunities for public and business engagement, strategically direct philanthropic investments, and lead advocacy efforts for effective regional and statewide planning and policy. Together, right now, we can protect this important natural resource and our way of life that depends up on it.

A coalition of nonprofit organizations has united to form the Partners for the White River collaboration, dedicated to protecting and restoring the White River and its watershed. Together, these organizations are actively conserving and revitalizing the river, creating meaningful opportunities for Hoosiers to reconnect with their waterways and fostering a renewed sense of stewardship across Central Indiana.



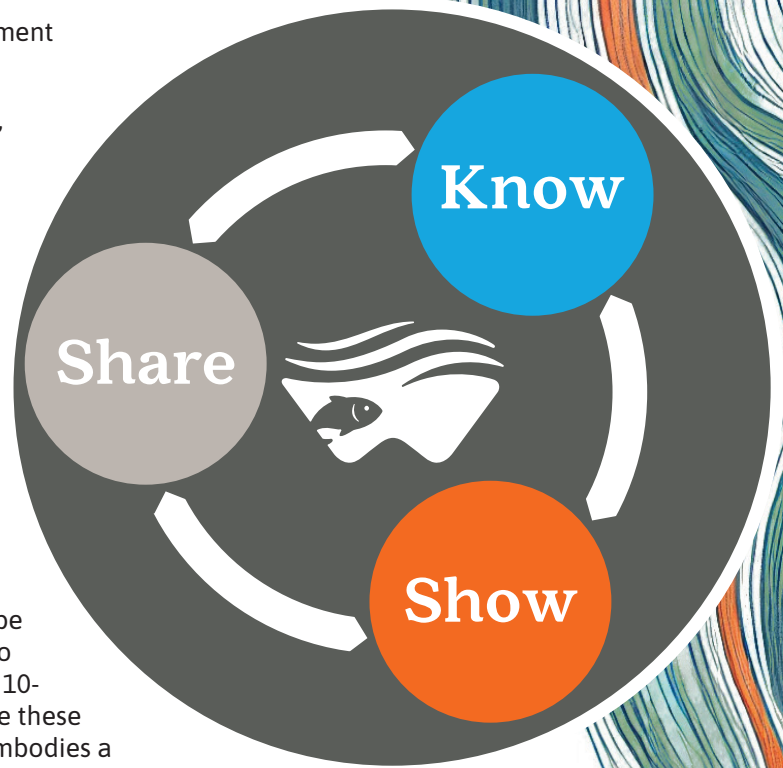
Our Vision & Values

The Partners for The White River Initiative brings together diverse organizations to protect the river's health and realize its full value as a source of clean water, recreation, economic vitality and natural habitat.

- We believe**
- The White River is a free-flowing entity with intrinsic value.
 - The White River is our history and our future.
 - People are part of the ecosystem and key to its sustainability.
 - Community and equity must underpin all activities.
 - Place investment must model best management practices.
 - Connection is borne through seeing, feeling, touching, and understanding.
 - Every Partner's work enhances another Partner's work and lives in a physical place to ensure a 'know-show-share' connection.

How We Work

Achieving meaningful progress on critical issues like water quality, sustainable water management, quality of life, and quality of place demands strong, coordinated leadership and unified programming. It is not enough for ten partner organizations to merely align their efforts; every action must be strategic, synchronized, and prioritized to maximize impact. To this end, the Partners for the White River have developed this 10-year Strategic Plan, committing each organization to integrate these shared goals into their own plans and operations. This Plan embodies a unified commitment to a shared vision for the river's future.



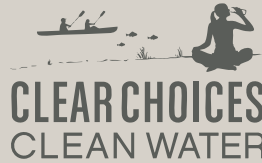
Together We've Already Accomplished



The Discover White River unified brand shares the story of everything going on related to the river in Central Indiana.



The White River Report Card measures the health of the land, water, and communities within the White River watershed.



The Clear Choices Clean Water campaign drives stewardship through personal pledges that inspire individuals to take action.



The Indiana Water Allies coordinate water-related policy development and advocacy across the state.

Our Goals & Objectives

A Guide water and habitat management to safeguard the river's natural functions, adequate water supplies, and a climate-resilient future.

Drive development of comprehensive state and regional water plans by implementing a statewide water monitoring strategy, conducting usage studies, and setting strategic priorities in collaboration with diverse stakeholders

Conduct workshops and develop tools to support the implementation of green infrastructure and floodplain protection and reconnection.

Protect and restore wetlands and forested areas by identifying strategic properties, collaborating with agencies and landowners, and advocating for protective measures.

B Steward water quality to improve river health and quality of life of residents.

Promote and expand agricultural best management practices (BMPs) by securing grants and incentives, establishing demonstration sites, addressing adoption barriers, and coordinating action plans with conservation partners and policymakers.

Leverage water monitoring to identify hotspots, track watershed changes, guide partner activities and best management practice (BMP) implementation, and increase citizen engagement and knowledge through interactive opportunities.

Confront septic systems' impacts on river health by training inspectors, collaborating with health departments, drafting supportive legislation, and educating property owners and legislators.

C Invest in places and projects to educate and draw people to the river year-round.

Co-locate educational programs and public engagement in prominent facilities where Partners can showcase their work, enabling stakeholders to observe, interact, and learn through firsthand demonstrations.

Implement targeted restoration of wetlands and river habitats, manage invasive species, and protect unique natural areas through land acquisition and conservation, including in areas designated for capital project investments.

Coordinate studies and secure funding to expand river access, develop additional boat ramp locations, and remove or modify low-head dams.

D Advocate for holistic, sustainable, river-protective partnerships, programs, and policies.

Coordinate and advocate for protective water policies, practices, and funding by building strong relationships with state and local officials, enhancing their understanding of the river's importance, and gaining their support.

Expand environmental justice initiatives by increasing programming, education, and engagement opportunities for racially, ethnically, and economically underrepresented communities.

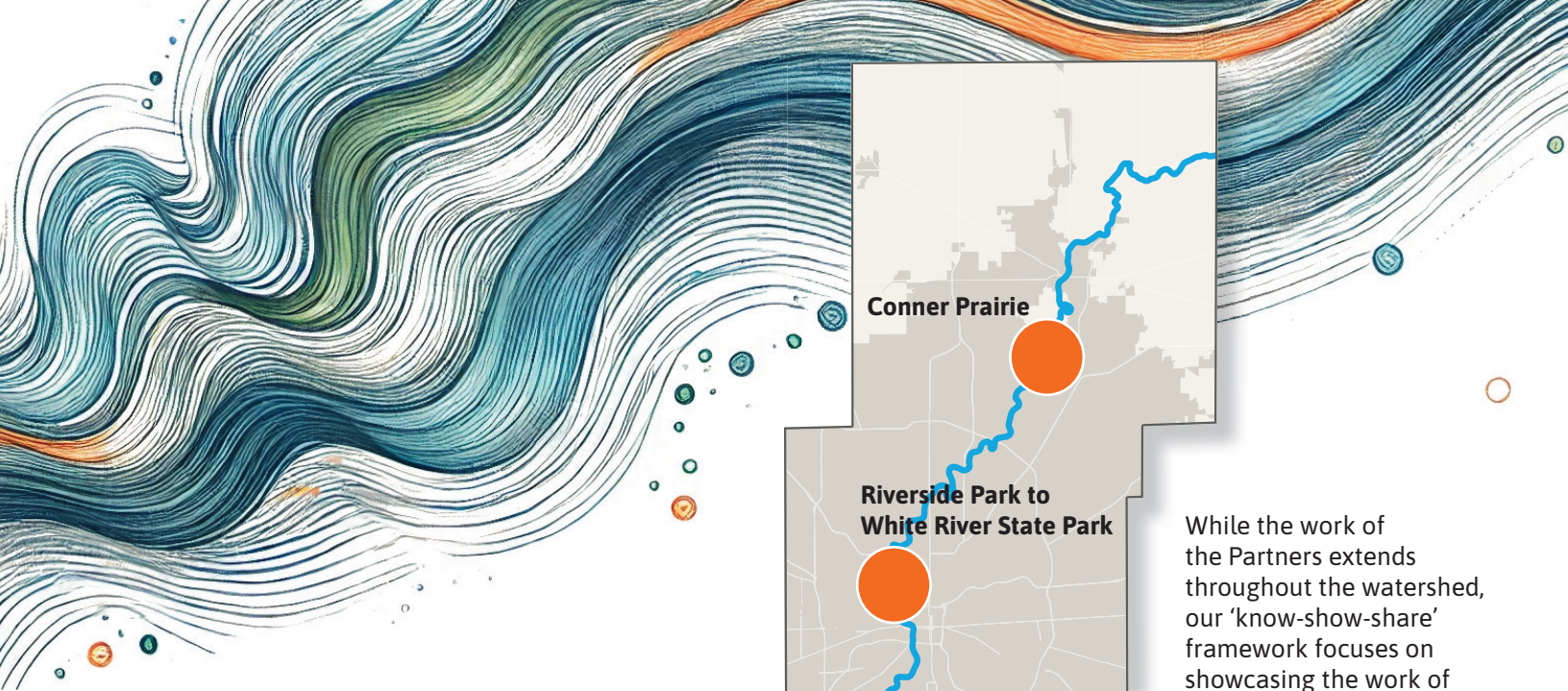
Deploy comprehensive media campaigns, stories, and op-eds addressing critical water quality and quantity issues, alongside quality-of-life and quality-of-place topics, to promote stewardship and inspire river-related investment.

E Ensure ongoing work and investments continue and grow and produce positive impacts.

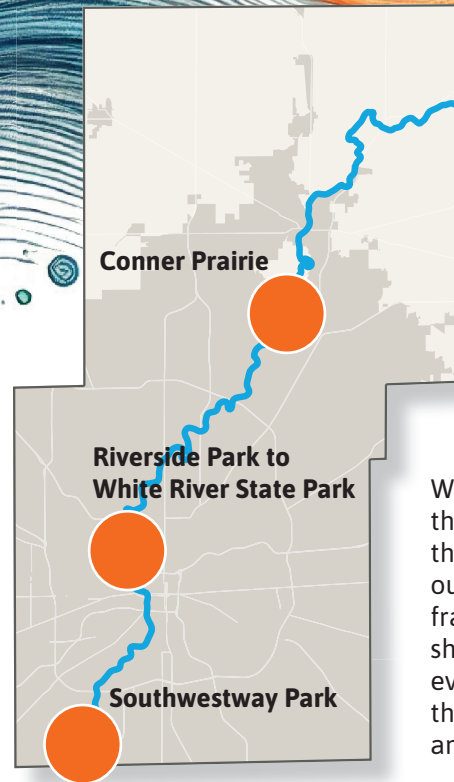
Identify and nurture diverse and consistent funding sources.

Ensure routine implementation of the strategic plan.

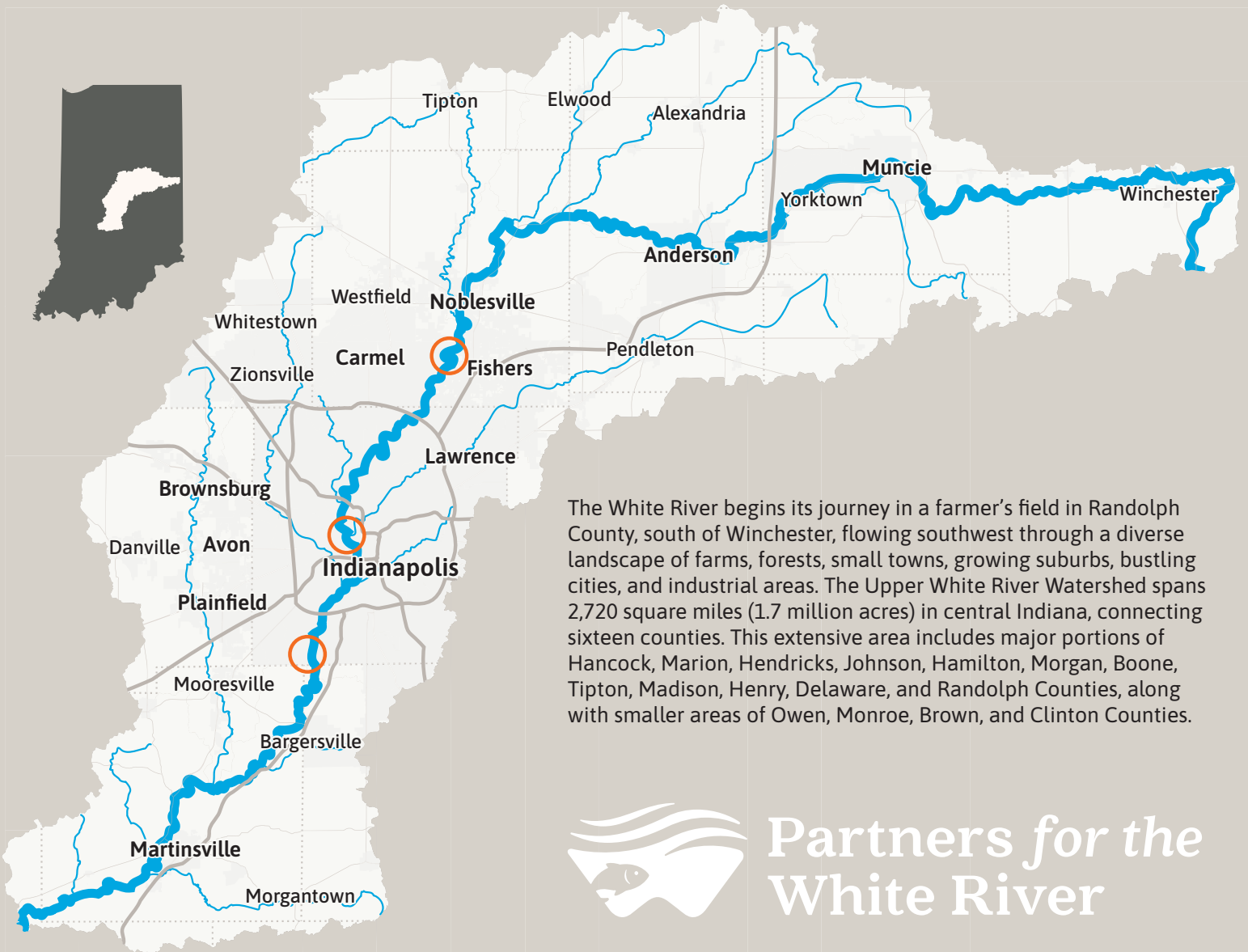
Measure success against the White River Report Card and White River Vision Plan.



Where We Focus



While the work of the Partners extends throughout the watershed, our 'know-show-share' framework focuses on showcasing the work of every partner by activating three places in Hamilton and Marion Counties.



The White River begins its journey in a farmer's field in Randolph County, south of Winchester, flowing southwest through a diverse landscape of farms, forests, small towns, growing suburbs, bustling cities, and industrial areas. The Upper White River Watershed spans 2,720 square miles (1.7 million acres) in central Indiana, connecting sixteen counties. This extensive area includes major portions of Hancock, Marion, Hendricks, Johnson, Hamilton, Morgan, Boone, Tipton, Madison, Henry, Delaware, and Randolph Counties, along with smaller areas of Owen, Monroe, Brown, and Clinton Counties.



Partners for the White River