



# STRATEGIC PLAN

November 16, 2022

## MISSION

Friends of the Mississippi River engages people to protect, restore and enhance the Mississippi River and its watershed in the Twin Cities region.

## VISION

FMR envisions a river that is recognized and celebrated for its intrinsic values. Imagine with us a river where the water is clear and clean and safe to swim in, where fish and wildlife are healthy and abundant, and where scenic bluffs and cultural treasures are protected.

This is a river where residents and visitors can escape the rush of daily life to find solitude in a hidden backwater, wonder while paddling past towering bluffs, and connection to what sustains us.

Here you can catch fish that are healthy to eat. You can stroll through oak savannas and sand prairies alive with the diversity of our natural heritage. Here historic sites speak to the timeless connection between people and the river.

Envision a river accessible to all and a community that actively embraces this river ethic and welcomes its role as the Mississippi River's steward for current and future generations.

## CORE VALUES

**Equity:** Friends of the Mississippi River believes that the Mississippi River connects us all, and that social and environmental issues are woven together. We strive to be culturally competent, welcoming and inclusive of all people and are committed to using our resources and influence to redress structural inequality where it intersects with the health and vitality of the Mississippi River.

**Stewardship:** We believe all of us are accountable for the health of the Mississippi River, its creatures and the communities that live along its banks and rely upon its waters.

**Sustainability:** We believe our society must meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

**Leadership:** Through thoughtful and decisive action, we inspire and engage others to protect the Mississippi River.

**Collaboration:** We cannot succeed alone. We work with others because our outcomes are better and more lasting when driven by strong and diverse partnerships.

**Integrity:** We do what is right for the Mississippi River. Our decisions and actions are clearly and proudly aligned with our mission and values.

**Expertise:** We pursue our mission with professionalism, bringing to bear deep understanding, creativity and technical proficiency.

# **INTRODUCTION**

September 2022

The original draft of this plan was prepared prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019 and early 2020. In 2022 the staff and board convened a process to review and update the plan to reflect our current goals and aspirations.

There are several areas of our work that remain core to our mission but that are not changing significantly from prior plans. For example, while our Land Use & Planning and Land Conservation programs will be receiving increased investment, they will continue to pursue broad goals and strategies very similar to those in past plans.

This strategic plan does, however, contain several areas where our work is continuing to evolve to respond to new opportunities or challenges that our mission requires us to address. Highlights of these areas of change are:

## **Diversity, equity and inclusion**

Environmental problems disproportionately burden low-income communities and communities comprised of predominantly Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). Consistent with our internal work on diversity, equity and inclusion principles, the plan:

- Emphasizes FMR playing a more prominent leadership role within our sector to catalyze and advance new strategies to increase its diversity and accelerate its impact on uprooting racist structures and the disparities they create.
- Recognizes and respects the diversity of the cities, neighborhoods, and communities throughout the River Corridor and strives to work in ways responsive to that diversity.
- Strives for equity in designing and implementing programs, plans and practices, in order to provide what different communities need to gain access to and enjoyment of the river and its amenities.
- Seeks to be broadly inclusive in all aspects of its work, reflecting the accumulated wisdom and experience of different communities interested in and affected by river-related decisions.

## **Climate change**

Because we recognize climate change poses a critical threat to the health of the Mississippi River and the communities through which it flows, this plan contains a strong emphasis on addressing climate impacts across our programs.

## Agriculture

This plan reflects a continuing evolution of our work to address the impacts of agriculture on the health of the Mississippi River. The predominant emphasis of our Water Program is our multi-sector partnership to transition toward broad, market-driven adoption of continuous living cover cropping systems (CLC).

## Mississippi River Restoration & Resilience Initiative

A recent opportunity to instigate and lead a coalition to advocate for a major new federal environmental funding initiative for the ten main stem states has led us to shift resources to pursuing this project.

## Youth

Because we know today's young people are the future stewards and advocates of the river, this plan includes a significant expansion of our aspirations in the area of youth development programming and the development of functional pathways into environmental professions for young people and particularly BIPOC youth.

# PROGRAM GOALS

## Land Use & Planning

**Vision:** With FMR's support and encouragement, local communities appreciate the natural, scenic, cultural, historical, recreational, and other public values of the Mississippi River such that important planning and zoning decisions consistently protect and enhance these values.

- 1. Goal:** Mississippi River Corridor Critical Area (MRRCA) ordinances are clear, consistent and enforced. Resulting riverfront development balances conservation, recreation, and economic development goals.

### **Strategies:**

- Engage state agencies, local governments and community members to advocate for consistent implementation and enforcement of the MRCCA rules and ordinances, both in letter and in spirit.
  - Play a critical, impactful and timely role in the development and implementation of local MRCCA plans and ordinances for priority communities.
  - Engage a broad spectrum of community members throughout the corridor to educate public officials about the national park, key resources and threats to the river, and the importance of strong MRCCA ordinances.
- 2. Goal:** Economic and park development in the corridor is sensitive to the river's unique natural and cultural resources and climate change. Planning processes build community power, respond to community goals, and advance racial and economic equity.

### **Strategies:**

- Increase FMR's staff and volunteer capacity to play a strategic and influential role in river corridor policy, land use, and development issues. Priority issues include implementation of St. Paul's Great River Passage and Minneapolis' Above the Falls master plans, Ford Area C, open space protection, and responsiveness to emerging issues.
  - Build organizing power throughout the corridor, with a strategic focus on communities most affected by environmental injustice and/or significant development opportunities.
  - Adapt engagement strategies for corridor communities' unique contexts. Pursue state-of-the-art tactics with a focus on building community power and racial, cultural, and economic equity.
  - Advocate for riverfront development that reduces human-driven climate impacts, protects fragile habitats, and withstands extreme weather events and impacts of climate change.
  - Seek opportunities to expand Land Use & Planning program staff capacity.
- 3. Goal:** The Above the Falls vision for continuous parks and trails along the river north of downtown Minneapolis is achieved in a way that creates improved and equitable public river access from surrounding neighborhoods, as well as economic development that supports vibrant, diverse, and affordable communities.

**Strategies:**

- Play a meaningful role to guide and support the Minneapolis Park Board's efforts to acquire and develop new parkland for the Above the Falls Regional Park while preventing involuntary displacement.
- Earn and sustain trusting relationships with community members by recognizing and responding to the complexities of relationship-based work, including intersecting community goals.
- Influence Above the Falls planning and implementation of new parks, public infrastructure, and economic development while incorporating anti-displacement tools and strategies.
- Develop partnerships and explore opportunities for community-driven design, development, and/or advocacy efforts to increase community access to and ownership over emerging North Minneapolis riverfront development and parkland.

**4. Goal:** FMR plays a leading role in Twin Cities lock and dam disposition and the future of the Mississippi River gorge.

**Strategies:**

- Increase local influence in the Army Corps disposition study by engaging a wide range of community members. Expand and diversify community participation in the disposition process.
- Lead advocacy efforts with local, state, federal, and tribal decision-makers.
- Partner with Dakota tribes and other Indigenous community members to support their leadership in the future of the river gorge.
- Influence the disposition study process to ensure that issues of lock and dam disposition and removal are thoroughly studied and publicly discussed, with the final outcome to the extent possible reflecting community will and best outcomes for the river's health.

## **Land Conservation**

**Vision:** An ecologically functioning and climate-resilient corridor of natural habitat exists along the Mississippi River.

**1. Goal:** Land that is important to the river's ecosystem and for building climate resiliency is protected in perpetuity.

**Strategies:**

- Conduct yearly outreach to landowners in priority conservation areas.
- Annually revisit and update the Land Protection Priority Map.
- Conduct project-specific fundraising for protection projects.
- Work with the Metro Conservation Network to develop ecological corridor planning.
- Support local and state initiatives, including the Dakota County Open Space Referendum, to fund conservation and protect habitat.

**2. Goal:** Critical ecological functions of the land managed by FMR are restored for habitat - with special emphasis on pollinators - climate resiliency and water quality.

**Strategies:**

- Conduct outreach with at least eight landowners every two years.
- Develop at least four natural resource management plans every two years.
- Conduct restoration on at least 1,500 acres every two years.
- Work within the Metro Conservation Network to identify and address habitat gaps.
- Incorporate climate change resilient species and pollinator beneficial species into ecological management plans and restoration efforts.

**3. Goal:** FMR’s protection and restoration work is rooted in science, incorporates Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), and is designed to have the greatest possible ecological and climate resiliency impacts.

**Strategies:**

- Develop and use methodologies to measure and understand the impact of our work.
- Increase the use of experimentation and research to improve the efficacy of our restoration work and responsiveness to climate change and communicate our results.
- Add ecological capacity and expertise to program staffing through hiring subcontractors, working with interns, partnering with academic institutions and hiring staff.

**4. Goal:** FMR’s Land Conservation Program engages and respects the diverse communities in the Twin Cities and fosters the development of racially and culturally diverse environmental professionals.

**Strategies:**

- Establish an internship program focused on BIPOC students.
- Incorporate issues of community and cultural significance in land protection and restoration efforts.
- Engage with NPS’s Cultural Resources Program Manager to ensure that all restoration projects respect the historical and cultural history of the sites where we work.
- Add a section to all natural resource management plans that describes opportunities to incorporate culturally significant plant species and restoration strategies.

## **Water**

**Vision:** The Mississippi River and its watershed meets all water quality standards and fully supports a healthy aquatic ecosystem.

**1. Goal:** Continuous living cover crop (CLC) market demand and cultivated acreage are significantly increasing in Minnesota.

**Strategies:**

- Successfully strengthen the Forever Green Partnership to provide strategic leadership for broad adoption of CLC systems in the Upper Midwest.
- Secure state and federal funding support for the University of MN Forever Green Initiative and other CLC-focused initiatives to conduct research and foster commercialization.
- Develop, prioritize and advocate for policy innovations to advance CLC systems.
- Secure implementation of additional pilot scale CLC projects in targeted areas prioritizing drinking water and public health.
- Complete and publish a comprehensive “wedge analysis” report detailing the potential acreage and environmental benefit of widespread adoption of CLC cropping systems in Minnesota.
- Play a leadership role in developing and advancing the Forever Equitable initiative to ensure CLC agricultural systems prioritize and engage BIPOC agricultural interests.

**2. Goal:** Secure federal authorization and funding for the Mississippi River Restoration & Resilience Initiative (MRRRI).

**Strategies:**

- Continue to play a leadership role in the MRRRI Collaborative.
- Advocate for a MRRRI Science Plan and Action Plan that reflect FMR’s priorities.
- Engage Tribal nations in the effort to establish and implement MRRRI.
- Leverage MRRRI funds for FMR priority projects.

**3. Goal:** State and federal water policy reflects FMR’s priorities.

**Strategies:**

- Advocate for policies and funding that reflect FMR’s priorities at the federal and state levels.
- Expand FMR’s legislative advocacy capacity.
- Identify and pursue opportunities to act as an ally for BIPOC communities in their clean water work.

**4. Goal:** FMR's water program supports effective communications to accelerate the adoption of continuous living cover cropping systems.

**Strategies:**

- Develop a strategic communications plan with key partners that clearly identifies and prioritizes our communications goals and target audiences.
- Implement & evaluate communications strategies with selected priority audiences.
- Enhance communications staff capacity to support water program advocacy and communications work.

**5. Goal:** Evaluate the benefits of CLC’s to deliver agricultural carbon reduction and climate mitigation outcomes, and advocate for policy and funding priorities that advance them.

**Strategies:**

- Enhance our understanding of the carbon sequestration, mitigation, offset and adaptation potential of CLC systems.

- Identify and advance priority state and federal legislative, administrative and funding initiatives that maximize climate benefits.

## **Stewardship & Education**

**Vision:** Individuals and communities feel a connection to the Mississippi River and its watershed that inspires an ethic of active participation in stewardship and conservation.

**1. Goal:** FMR annually engages 4,000+ participants in stewardship and education events and outings to learn about the river and meaningfully contribute to protecting and enhancing river resources.

### **Strategies:**

- Work with program funders, partners and other FMR programs to annually identify targeted audiences for stewardship programming.
- Provide background information on each site/project before, during and after via our website and social media, including historic and present importance of the site in Dakota culture.
- Expand program content and affinity programming to center more BIPOC communities.
- Expand our BIPOC River Stewards program to hold a minimum of six events per year and increase the number of participants by 25% in the next three years.

**2. Goal:** Participants and volunteers are prepared and eager to participate in more events and activities, share their experiences with others, and make river-positive behavior changes in their personal lives, homes and yards.

### **Strategies:**

- Cultivate and sustain deeper relationships with individual volunteers and groups.
- Facilitate strong and sustainable connections to our stewardship sites with local groups, schools and community members.
- Continue to offer river-friendly homes and gardens workshop offerings to intentionally reach new communities.
- Expand events programming in collaboration with community partners, prioritizing partners that are BIPOC-led and/or center underrepresented groups to create programs that are more culturally relevant.
- Conduct additional follow-up communication with event participants to provide tips and ideas for personal stewardship and opportunities for deeper involvement with FMR.

**3. Goal:** Stewardship events and activities support other FMR programs and efforts, including membership, fundraising, land conservation, advocacy and communications.

### **Strategies:**

- Expand and enhance the FMR database in order to maximize relationships with event participants, volunteers and stewardship program partners.
- Work with other staff and the database to coordinate cross-departmental communications.
- Promote membership opportunities at all public events.

- Promote advocacy opportunities when feasible and/or relevant at select events.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL GOALS**

### **Youth Engagement**

**Vision:** A new generation of river stewards is inspired and prepared to protect and restore the health of the Mississippi River and to engage in efforts to promote environmental health and environmental justice as advocates and professionals.

**1. Goal:** Youth are engaged in programs that create an appreciation, understanding, and ethic for protecting the health of the river and the diverse communities through which it flows.

**Strategies:**

- Provide river-based environmental education and experiential programming for schools, youth groups, colleges and universities in the Twin Cities metro area.
- Introduce and connect young people to the natural areas and water resources in their community and engage them in hands-on volunteer activities to improve the health of the river.
- Develop and expand sustainable partnerships with schools, youth-serving organizations, the National Park Service and other partners that will facilitate long-term youth involvement in river-based programming.
- Develop and integrate program content aimed at increasing understanding of climate change and important changes in agriculture for protecting the river.

**2. Goal:** Youth are empowered to create and lead positive, self/community-driven change for protecting the river and its diverse communities.

**Strategies:**

- Continue to enhance and refine the Environmental Stewardship Institute (ESI) aimed at learning in a cohort model (summer intensive program and school year advisory council) and using self-driven environmental projects for high school students.
- Establish opportunities for continued involvement in the Environmental Stewardship Institute for past participants to inform and participate as leaders in subsequent years of the program.
- Expand ways to incorporate youth in advising FMR in the ongoing development of youth programming, including our ESI Youth Council
- Explore ways to facilitate youth-led involvement in FMR's advocacy and community environmental organizing efforts through the ESI council.
- Incorporate perspectives and knowledge from BIPOC leaders in youth development programming.

**3. Goal:** Expand interest and participation in career pathways for all youth in environmental careers with a priority focus on BIPOC youth.

**Strategies:**

- Enhance and enrich the Environmental Stewardship Institute by creating mentorship and multigenerational opportunities; engaging with community organizations and leaders; and creating clear, direct paths from engagement to employment in environmental fields.
- Expand partnerships with BIPOC-led organizations, to co-create culturally relevant program content that engages and empowers youth in environmental issues and careers.
- Explore certificate-based programming and or partnerships to advance youth opportunities in environmental careers/internships.
- Create meaningful and mutually beneficial paid internship opportunities, prioritizing BIPOC individuals, for career exposure across FMR programs and departments and with other existing internship programs.
- Play a leadership role in creating a Collaborative Pathways Program with other environmentally focused organizations.

**Climate**

**Vision:** An ever-growing group of diverse, local advocates and environmental stewards are advancing policies and programs that effectively and equitably mitigate climate change impacts on Twin Cities communities and the river.

1. **Goal:** FMR elevates awareness of the impacts of climate change on the river and increases understanding of measures that can be taken to reduce carbon emissions, increase resilience and mitigate climate impacts.

**Strategies:**

- Include climate change as a topic/issue within youth and stewardship/education program content
  - Through all communications channels, increase understanding of the connection between climate change, the river's health and FMR's work
2. **Goal:** FMR incorporates climate resilience objectives as a key priority in its policy advocacy and land conservation, restoration and planning efforts.

**Strategies:**

- Prioritize climate resilience in the selection of land protection sites to mitigate climate impacts on and beyond the site
- Incorporate climate resilience into all of our ecological management plans and goals
- Incorporate climate change benefits (carbon sequestration and climate resilience) in the selection of our agricultural water policy priorities
- Advocate for riverfront development that reduces human-driven climate impacts, protects fragile habitats, and that is resilient to the impacts of climate change

- 3. Goal:** FMR understands that the impacts of climate change disproportionately affect BIPOC and low-income communities and incorporates that knowledge into the policies we advocate for and the allies we work with.

**Strategies:**

- Incorporate climate justice principles in our youth, stewardship and education program content
- Grow and diversify our base of advocates by engaging with and supporting the work of climate justice organizations where they intersect with our mission.
- Highlight climate change's disproportionate impact on BIPOC and low-income communities throughout our work.

**Building Influence & Impact**

**Vision:** FMR successfully influences decisions that affect the health, vitality and accessibility of the Mississippi River by bringing to bear reliable information and a strong, diverse and well-informed network of advocates.

- 1. Goal:** FMR activates a strong, diverse and well-informed network of advocates, and maintains the staff and technical capacity to organize and support their participation in important decisions that affect the health, vitality and accessibility of the Mississippi River.

**Strategies:**

- Increase grassroots power by growing and diversifying our base of advocates through targeted engagement.
- Expand and utilize a broad menu of advocacy tactics and tools focusing on building community power and continuous organizational learning.

- 2. Goal:** Expand government affairs capacity to achieve policy objectives.

**Strategies:**

- Explore adding staff or contract resources to enhance state legislative and administrative policy advocacy capacity.
- Explore adding staff or contract resources to enhance federal legislative and administrative policy advocacy capacity.

**Communications & Outreach**

**Vision:** People in Minnesota, especially in the Twin Cities metropolitan area, value and respect the Mississippi River. They are well informed about FMR's work and how to protect, restore and enhance the river.

- 1. Goal:** FMR strategically and effectively communicates with key audiences and communities about the river's importance and the organization's work, inspiring and supporting the actions needed to

protect it.

**Strategies:**

- Continuously assess the use and value of current communications efforts.
- Develop a communications strategy, identifying key messages and audiences for every FMR campaign.
- Enhance synergy across FMR programs and communications to raise the profile of individual programs and FMR as a whole.

**2. Goal:** Strengthen FMR’s position as the “go-to” organization for the media, policymakers and other decision makers who wish to protect the river.

**Strategies:**

- Actively cultivate relationships with the media and policymakers.
- Enhance the impact of FMR’s online presence.

**3. Goal:** Increase understanding of the connection between climate change and the river’s health, community health and FMR’s work.

**Strategies:**

- Identify key messages that illustrate these connections.
- Reinforce connections by highlighting climate change in outgoing content in various formats.

**4. Goal:** Increase understanding of the connection between the health and well-being of metro communities, the river and the importance of the river’s benefits flowing to all.

**Strategies:**

- Identify key messages that illustrate this connection.
- Reinforce connections by highlighting issues of access and equity in outgoing content in various formats.
- Support outreach of river-related events and projects from under-represented groups.

## **Diversity, Equity & Inclusion**

**Vision:** Diverse communities are actively engaged in caring for the river and the work of FMR.

**1. Goal:** FMR engages diverse communities to effectively address the needs of the river and our communities.

**Strategies:**

- Develop strong, mutually beneficial intercultural relationships and share resources with diverse communities directly impacted by FMR’s key programmatic activities and priorities.
- Identify, engage, and support underrepresented communities in river activities and decisions that impact the river and riverfront communities.

- Engage local Indigenous communities in our work.
- Cultivate diverse FMR stakeholder representation (volunteers, advocates, event participants, members).
- Help to lead a unified effort to advance the inclusivity and diversity of our sector to better meet the needs of the river and our communities.

**2. Goal:** FMR’s Board and staff reflect the cultural and racial diversity of our community and foster an inclusive organization.

**Strategies:**

- Identify, recruit, and retain Board members from diverse backgrounds and communities.
- Proactively recruit, hire and retain a diverse staff.
- Develop and contribute to environmental career pathway efforts for BIPOC youth.
- Take deliberate steps to foster a culture of inclusion.
- Prioritize the investment of our time and resources in equity-related work, and expand dedicated staff time for advancing equity actions and priorities for internal growth.

## **Development**

**Vision:** FMR maintains a sustainable, diverse and flexible resource base to fuel the creativity, pace and agility with which we pursue our mission.

**1. Goal:** Leadership giving grows 7.5% annually.

**Strategies:**

- Identify and steward leadership donor prospects and renew and upgrade current Mississippi Riverkeepers.
- Pursue small family foundation and donor advised fund prospects through targeted communication and stewardship meetings.
- Explore opportunities to more strategically engage and leverage the board in leadership donor identification, cultivation, solicitation and stewardship.
- Develop opportunities to more deeply engage leadership donors, including but not limited to serving on a committee, participating in a focus group, hosting a gathering in honor of FMR, engaging in learning and stewardship opportunities (i.e. webinar, lunch and learn), etc.

**2. Goal:** Double membership in 5 years exceeding 5,000 households, to ensure a strong base of sustainable and unrestricted support to advance our mission.

**Strategies:**

- Implement a membership audit and strategic plan to develop strategies, tactics and processes to increase membership numbers and improve membership engagement.
- Prioritize and implement the membership program recommendations outlined in the membership audit and strategic plan over the next three years, including exploring development staff capacity expansion.

- Pursue varied membership acquisition strategies, including but not limited to recommendations outlined in the membership audit and strategic plan, mass mailings, targeting our activists and volunteers, membership events, and utilizing Minnesota – State Voices and other geographic or issue-based resources.
- Implement a member stewardship and upgrade plan as recommended by the findings in the membership audit and strategic plan.
- Test strategies to incentivize membership acquisition, renewals and upgrading (i.e. premiums, segmented messaging, A/B testing in acquisition and renewal letters, recognition opportunities, etc.)
- Improve our tools and systems (i.e. database functionality, renewals process, etc.) based on the recommendations in the membership audit and strategic plan to ensure maximum efficiency, accurate data management, and timely membership engagement.
- Implement and test digital tools and technologies recommended in the membership audit and strategic plan to grow FMR’s toolbox of emerging resources to maintain and grow FMR’s membership base.
- Prioritize funding in annual budgets for membership growth activities as defined in the membership audit and strategic plan.
- Continue to build and populate a robust set of membership metrics to benchmark, track and measure our membership renewal, acquisition and engagement efforts on a quarterly basis.

**3. Goal:** Grow Mississippi River Legacy Society (MRLS) membership to 30 members in three years, ensuring sustaining support for our mission.

**Strategies:**

- Annually identify, cultivate, and solicit top MRLS prospects.
- Work with estate planning professionals to provide educational opportunities (i.e. lunch and learn, workshops) to prospective and current legacy donors.
- Emphasize planned giving as a way to support the Our River special campaign (goal 5).

**4. Goal:** Institutional giving grows at a pace that meets the demand of our expanding programs and helps to fill the funding gap left by changes in key funder priorities.

**Strategies:**

- Continuously and proactively seek new institutional donors.
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- Annually host a Fall Fundraiser that strives to raise significant unrestricted support for our mission, serves as an inspiring introduction to FMR, and is accessible to – and inclusive of – all.
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- Cultivate new and non-traditional funders with interests in burgeoning program areas, including but not limited to our ag/water work, youth development, equity, and climate.

**5. Goal:** Raise \$10 million through a special campaign to grow enhanced and sustained funding for FMR, and to support high-impact initiatives outlined in the case for support.

**Strategies:**

- Implement the campaign plan developed in partnership with our campaign consultants.

## **Our People**

**Vision:** Friends of the Mississippi River is a great place to work – we recruit extraordinary talent, cultivate a supportive and flexible working environment, value individual and organizational ambitions, and achieve excellence.

**Goal:** Friends of the Mississippi River attracts and retains dedicated, creative, diverse and expert staff.

### **Strategies:**

- Strive to lead our sector in fair and appropriate compensation (salary and benefits) for our staff.
- Ensure that the conditions in which staff work and the tools they are provided allow them to thrive.
- Devote organizational resources to fostering a transparent, intentional, inclusive and supportive culture.
- Value, foster and recognize employee development.
- Maintain a staff care committee to advance progress and ensure a platform for all voices at FMR to be heard.