“Indiana would not be where we are today without CCSI. Strategic plans should look forward to higher levels of accomplishment. Strategic plans should not be put on a shelf, but rather be a blueprint for future accomplishments.”

– Becky Fletcher, USDA-NRCS State Public Affairs Specialist

Thank you to all who participated in the development of this strategic plan. The input provided at the CCSI Annual Meeting, through e-surveys and telephone surveys, the strategic planning retreat, and through numerous draft reviews have all been crucial in building this plan.

This has been a true partnership effort. The CCSI Oversight Committee and staff look forward to working with you through this plan’s implementation.

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Local Level Partnerships
Throughout this document, there are multiple references to Local Level Partnerships. These partnerships may take many forms, but they will typically be comprised of local conservation agencies and organizations. They will be most effective if farmers, crop consultants, agricultural retailers, watershed groups, agricultural advocacy groups, and others interested in promoting soil health management systems at the local level are also actively engaged. Any of the above could assume a leadership role.

These Local Level Partnerships could encompass a single county, multiple counties or a region. They share a common goal of improving soil health and related practices on Indiana cropland. They are stronger when they seek opportunities to learn from, and to share knowledge with others.

A core tenet of the Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative is to provide support to Local Level Partnerships in their efforts to promote soil health on Indiana cropland. This strategic plan reflects that principle.

Mission Statement
To improve soil health on Indiana cropland.

Vision Statement
CCSI envisions an Indiana:
- With healthy and productive soils
- With clean water
- With profitable and resilient agriculture
- With healthy, diverse ecosystems
- Where our communities embrace a conservation ethic

Values Statement
- CCSI is farmer-focused and farmer-driven.
- CCSI values knowledge-based, farmer-proven solutions.
- CCSI values the strength of grassroots leadership.
- CCSI values the Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP) and its technical and financial support of the program.
- CCSI values improving soil health - the continued capacity of soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.
- CCSI values building an additive, synergistic, systems approach to improving soil health.

“I think we need to be focused on a grassroots, local level. It needs to be focused on a more regional, local basis.”
- Mike Starkey, Farmer and Hendricks County SWCD Supervisor

Image by Mike Shuter
2002-2008
Conservation Tillage Initiative

The Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative (CCSI) has roots in the Conservation Tillage Initiative, which promoted no-till across Indiana. The Conservation Tillage Initiative was funded through a United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Section 319 grant administered through the Sycamore Trails Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D).

- 2002-2005: Focus on no-till corn
- 2006-2007: Emphasis on systems in planning, education, outreach, and programs in United States Department of Agriculture – Natural Resources Conservation Service (USDA-NRCS)
- 2008: Added commitment to systems through training of all partners

The Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP)

At the heart of CCSI’s success is the Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP), which unifies eight conservation agriculture agencies and organizations around the state and the mission of promoting soil health. Those entities include:

- Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Indiana Department of Environmental Management
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources
- Indiana State Department of Agriculture - Division of Soil Conservation
- Purdue Cooperative Extension Service
- State Soil Conservation Board
- USDA Farm Service Agency
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service

The ICP was conceived in the 1980s during an era of tightening funding. Each agency brings its strengths and its funding, its resources and approach to supporting conservation agriculture. Dedicated to a unified message of conservation - manifested in the soil health and systems approach focus of CCSI - the Partnership provides technical, financial, and educational assistance to each others’ staffs as well as to the Indiana agricultural community.

“This level of cooperation is unprecedented,” says Jane Hardisty, state conservationist for the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Indiana. “We are successful because each organization is committed to delivering one conservation program in Indiana, and because it works from the field office level up.”

Hardisty points out that the ICP and CCSI program contributed to each others’ success.

“The ICP was committed to CCSI from the beginning and through the years, and provided whatever resources possible to make the program successful, whether funding or in-kind services,” she says. “In turn, CCSI is an effective outreach mechanism for ICP - they help spread the word of the important work each of our organizations is doing.”

From the CCSI Conservation Innovation Grant Final Report, 2016

“I think one of the important things that CCSI does is to cover the whole state. They provide tours and training events all over. They’re there. They’re part of it. And that’s such a huge asset - even for people who have been doing this for 10 years... or someone just starting. It’s such an asset to have that ‘family’ when you’re working to make a change.”

Mark Anson, Southern Indiana Farmer
Conservation Cropping Systems Initiative

With strategic planning and dedicated funding, the Conservation Tillage Initiative was expanded to promote a systems approach to soil health and dubbed CCSI.

- 2007-2009: Members of the Natural Resources Policy Committee of the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts (IASWCD) formulated and passed a resolution committing the IASWCD to “support the scientific advancement, adoption and implementation of full time, continuous no till/strip till on all working lands of this state.” The concept of CCSI along with logic models, position descriptions and budgets were developed to implement this commitment.

- 2009: Establishment of the CCSI Oversight Committee. Members are comprised of Indiana State Soil Conservation Board (SSCB), IASWCD Natural Resources Committee, Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), USDA-NRCS, and Purdue Extension. Each member is represented by two individuals. The committee operated by consensus.

- 2010-2011: 1 Technical Full-time Employee (FTE) (contractor) + ½ Technical FTE (contractor) funded through a combination USDA-NRCS Contribution Agreement + matching funds from Clean Water Indiana (CWI). Focus on outreach through Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) workshops.

- 2011: Formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between IASWCD, USDA-NRCS, ISDA, SSCB, and Purdue Extension on the roles and responsibilities of the partners.

- 2011-2012: 1 Technical FTE (contractor) + ½ Technical FTE (contractor) and 2 water quality monitoring site equipment funded through USDA-NRCS Contribution Agreement + matching funds from CWI, IASWCD, and ISDA. Focus on outreach through SWCD workshops and Indiana Conservation Partnership (ICP) staff training.

- 2012-2014: 1 Technical FTE (contractor) + ½ Technical FTE funded through National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant with matching funds from CWI. Focus on outreach through Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) workshops, ICP staff training, and technical assistance to farmers.

- 2012-2015: 1 FTE (organizational), soil health sampling/analysis, establishment of regional hubs and hub farms funding through a combination of USDA-NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant, ISDA (not CWI), Indiana Corn Marketing Council / Indiana Soybean Alliance and in-kind match from partnering SWCDs and Purdue Extension.

- 2014-2018: 3 FTE (Urban Soil Health Specialist, CCSI Program Manager, and CCSI Agronomist) and technical speakers funded through a combination of a USDA-NRCS Contribution Agreement, CWI, along with cash and in-kind matches from Marion Co SWCD, ISDA Division of Soil Conservation (ISDA-DSC), and others.

- 2016-2020: 2 FTE (Director and Communications Manager) funded through a combination of USDA-NRCS Contribution Agreement, CWI, and IASWCD.

Since 2009, CCSI participated in over 475 events reaching approximately 25,000 individuals. Over 65 of these events were top-level training sessions to over 2,800 conservation professionals, including CCAs.
DEFINITIONS

Goal: broad primary outcome

Strategic priority: the approach taken to achieve a goal

Key Performance Indicator (KPI): a measurable value that demonstrates how effectively an organization is achieving key objectives

Action Plan: includes objectives and tactics used to achieve a strategic priority

Objective: a measurable step taken to achieve a strategy. Objectives should be:
- Specific – clearly defined and identified
- Measurable – easily quantifiable
- Attainable – realistic
- Relevant – supports the mission
- Time-bound – tied to completion date(s)

Tactic: a tool used in pursuing an objective associated with a strategy

Metric: a quantifiable measure used to track and assess the status of a specific process.

As goals, strategies and tactics are developed to raise soil health understanding and skill sets, it is important to understand that acquisition and mastery of new knowledge and competence takes place in a predictable sequence (Judith S. Rycus, 2001)

1. Awareness
2. Knowledge/Understanding,
3. Applied Knowledge/Skills, and
4. Skills Development

Awareness of this sequential concept of learning and skills development can help increase the effectiveness of the strategies and tactics outlined in this plan. In addition, field staff awareness of client-cooperator’s placement in the sequential learning process can help identify needs for technical support in addition to program assistance – resulting in improved success of practice adoption.
Goal #1: Engage and involve farmers in building the adoption and promotion of soil health management systems.

Rationale

Farmer-focused. Farmer-driven. Farmers communicating with farmers. Those have been the tried and proven methods to “get more soil health on the ground”. It’s the farmers who are implementing practices and actually doing the work who can provide the best information on what is working / not working on their farms.

Strategic priorities

1. Develop and provide tools for Local Level Partnerships to continue the support and involvement of “innovative” and “visionary” farmers (See Figure 5, page 12).
   a. Establish a Technical Advisory Committee that includes innovative and visionary farmers as well as ICP staff, researchers, and agricultural professionals that convenes annually at minimum.
   b. Establish a platform/mechanism to ensure innovative and visionary farmers are part of a two-way dialogue in the development and technical transfer of proven methods.
   c. Encourage innovative and visionary farmers to participate in structured programs in order to reach other local farmers.

2. Develop and provide tools for Local Level Partnerships to assist “pragmatic” and “conservative” farmers (See Figure 5, page 12) in improving their soil health management.
   a. Determine and understand motivating factors for and against soil health practice and systems adoption.
   b. Demonstrate the competitive advantage of soil health systems.

3. Develop and provide tools for Local Level Partnerships to engage and involve “influencers” (landowners, lenders, agricultural retailers) to help advance adoption of pragmatic, science-based, soil health practices and management systems.
   a. Develop prioritized list(s) of target demographics to ensure the most effective use of available resources.
   b. Encourage Local Level Partnerships to include co-ops, commodity groups, and others as active members.
   c. Develop tools to begin conversations and/or engage local “influencer” contacts

Key Performance Indicators

1. The number of counties with at least one Top Soil Health Farmer serving as a mentor and guide.
2. The percentage of Local Level Partnerships whose makeup includes “influencers” who are fully bought-in and engaged.
3. Changes in the adoption of key soil health practices as indicated by the Indiana Tillage and Cover Crop Transect.

“CCSI’s existing farmer network provides plenty of locally relevant anecdotal evidence that soil health focused systems work. While there will always be research needs, it’s encouraging to see this initiative utilize its participating farmers to drive adoption, even absent hard data on rates or organic matter production, N credits from cover crops, etc. Keep up the good work.”

- From Strategic Planning e-Survey
Goal #2: Recommit CCSI to Local Level Partnerships to build trust and buy-in to facilitate information transfer.

Rationale
Outreach and education is core to CCSI’s mission—we provide information on science-based soil health and tools to help those adopting soil health practices. It will take Local Level Partnerships’ use of that information and those tools to advance the adoption of soil health systems. And for that to happen, the Local Level Partnerships must both trust CCSI and buy-in to the CCSI mission and strategies. Because this type of communication is a dialogue, it is critical to draw out information from partners regarding their needs.

Strategic priorities
1. Facilitate and support Local Level Partnerships’ efforts to deliver soil health messaging.
   a. Ensure Local Level Partnerships are aware of and understand available CCSI services and tools.
   b. Encourage Local Level Partnerships to serve as the sponsor—inviter—coordinator—owner of events.
   c. Help Local Level Partnerships utilize the most effective workshop/meeting configurations for the audience and information (round tables vs. traditional workshop template).

2. Ensure a consistent soil health message, as identified by the ICP Soil Health Philosophy, is conveyed to, and by, Local Level Partnership members.
   a. Ensure Local Level Partnerships have a foundational awareness, knowledge, and understanding of soil health.
   b. Ensure training is comprehensive and ongoing for Local Level Partnership members.
   c. Increase the awareness and understanding of soil health principles “outside” Local Level Partnerships.

3. Provide professional development opportunities for Local Level Partnership members.
   a. Provide trainings to cultivate and advance applied soil health knowledge and skills.
   b. Provide supportive training opportunities.
   c. Provide methods for staff to document professional development achievements.

4. Enhance, develop, and utilize messaging and information delivery mechanisms to/from Local Level Partnerships and other stakeholders.
   a. Ensure a two-way messaging mechanism is in place to help identify local needs, problems, and farmer-proven solutions.
   b. Improve outreach to other associations and businesses – from top-level to grassroots/field level.

Key Performance Indicators
1. Number of Local Level Partnerships actively working with CCSI.
2. Percentage of ICP staff who have received foundational training.
3. Percentage of ICP staff and others who have completed training, certification levels.
Goal #3: Outreach: Effectively communicate the CCSI mission, strategy, available resources, and needed tools.

Rationale
The fact is, a LOT of CCSI partners either do not understand what CCSI can provide to them or do not recognize the role that CCSI has had in their own efforts and region. We must do a better job of communicating what CCSI does, what our strategies are, and what resources are available to local level partnerships.

Strategic priorities
1. Develop a marketing campaign and branding strategies for both internal and external purposes.
   a. Develop and implement a marketing and communications plan.
   b. Create a broad ICP brand and a public brand.
   c. Ensure every Local Level Partnership fully understands CCSI resources available to them.
2. Enhance, develop, and fully utilize social network and other media tools to deliver soil health messaging and information.
   a. Utilize traditional outreach tools such as printed materials and websites.
   b. Enhance CCSI’s social media presence.
   c. Vet and use other platforms (such as podcasts and forums) for outreach and education purposes.

Key Performance Indicators
1. The number of Indiana counties that want CCSI involvement / to be involved with CCSI.
Goal #4: Review, decide, and act on CCSI’s role in research related to soil health.

Rationale
CCSI began working in the role of research as part of a Conservation Innovation Grant. Since that grant was completed, the USDA-NRCS National Soil Health Division has provided funding to continue collection and analysis of soil and plant samples as part of a national effort to quantify soil health characteristics.

Because of the wide network developed by CCSI partners, other researchers see the opportunity to collaborate or partner with CCSI on soil-health / soil health practice investigations.

A clear plan that connects the informative tools gathered through research and the appropriate role of CCSI in research efforts is needed in order to provide guidance as opportunities arise.

An important goal is to bring together researchers and farmer-proven experience to vet research and inform researchers of advancements and needs.

Strategic priorities
1. Review current obligations and make recommendations on continuation of projects after present commitment periods are completed.
   a. Establish a research committee.
   b. Review all current projects – collaborative and lead; Make recommendations as to the future role of CCSI within those projects.
2. Develop and execute an action plan specific to research.
   a. Identify tactics to end or continue current research projects, including timelines.
3. Develop a vetting system for future opportunities.
   a. Work with a Technical Advisory Committee to develop and revise research priorities.
   b. Develop an efficient system to identify and vet potential projects for CCSI involvement.
Goal #5: Attain a financial sustainability that will allow CCSI to support its mission and achieve the goals outlined in this plan.

Rationale
Historically, CCSI has significantly relied upon USDA-NRCS and SSCB funding to support its mission; the support of these agencies will continue to be important. Diversifying funding sources will provide some amount of security and flexibility. Developing and implementing a funding strategy will be critical to achieving this goal.

Strategic priorities
1. Develop minimum (what CCSI needs to remain highly effective) and maximum (allowing delivery on all program objectives) operating budgets.
2. Develop a capital structure plan that takes into account long-term, non-operating needs.
   a. Identify operating reserve needs to withstand temporary cash flow fluctuations, unplanned reductions in revenue, or increased demand for programs/services.
   b. In addition to operating reserve needs, identify asset purchases (like equipment) and funding program/management initiatives (such as a pilot program or staff capacity building).
3. Develop a funding model that identifies and pursues specific sources of funding that are a good match to support the work of CCSI.
   a. Identify ranges and quantity of donations/grants required to meet funding goals. (see Sample Funding Charts, p14)
   b. Review, revise (as needed) the CCSI donation policy.
   c. Identify, pursue, and secure specific sources of funding.
   d. Develop marketing tools to use when communicating with potential funders and financial partners.

Key Performance Indicators
1. Operating reserves accumulation
2. Funding sources secured to deliver 100% of program objectives

It’s important for CCSI to think strategically...
• So how does CCSI look in next 3 years?
• What are your funding sources?
• How can you diversify to support the program, which could mean giving up some control which can be difficult (coming from the SSCB hat)

Larry Clemens,
State Soil Conservation Board Member,
Director, TNC North American Ag Program

Input such as that given by Top Farmers (bottom image) provides focus for training, research, and outreach efforts
CURRENT TRENDS IN ADOPTION OF SOIL HEALTH PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS

Through a collaborative effort of USDA-NRCS, ISDA, Indiana’s 92 SWCDs, Earth Team Volunteers and other members of the ICP, a tillage and cover crop transect is conducted annually. Tillage information dates back to 1990’s and cover crop information dates back to 2011.

The tillage transect information (Fig 1 and 2) illustrates the need to continue past efforts and develop new strategies to increase the adoption of no-till (direct seeding) and conservation tillage (at least 30% crop residue intact) practices.

Adoption trends for cover crops have continued to grow across Indiana. Development of new outreach and education strategies along with the continuation of existing efforts will be required to maintain this rate of adoption. Of note, a relatively small percentage – 1 in 5 cover crop acres—are enrolled in cost-share programs.
CURRENT PRACTICE ADOPTION STAGES AND IMPACT ON OUTREACH STRATEGIES

Indiana leads the nation in voluntary adoption of no-till and cover crop practices. Acres and percentage of Indiana cropland that are farmed using no-till and cover crop practices may be used as a key indicator of soil health systems adoption. This systems approach includes the use of no-till, cover crops, adaptive nutrient management, integrated pest management, diverse crop rotations, and integration of livestock or manures.

Application of Everett Rogers Diffusion of Innovations theory (Rogers, 1962) helps to illustrate the stages of adoption for soil health practices. These are categories of adoption that can serve to classify individuals in a social system on the basis of innovation – and shape the way practices are presented to those individuals. According to Rogers, these categories include:

1. **Innovators**: The first individuals to adopt an innovation. Innovators are willing to take risks, youngest in age, have the highest social status, have financial liquidity, are very social, and have the closest contact to scientific sources and interaction with other innovators. Risk tolerance has them adopting technologies which may ultimately fail, though their financial resources help them absorb these failures.

2. **Early adopters (Visionary)**: This is the second fastest category of individuals who adopt an innovation. These individuals have the highest degree of opinion leadership among the other adopter categories. Early adopters are typically younger in age, have a higher social status, have more financial liquidity, possess an advanced education, and are more socially forward than late adopters. They are more discrete in adoption choices than innovators, as they realize that judicious choice of adoption will help them maintain a central communication position.

3. **Early majority (Pragmatic)**: Individuals in this category adopt an innovation after a varying degree of time. This time of adoption is significantly longer than with the innovators and early adopters. The early majority tends to be slower in the adoption process, has above average social status, has contact with early adopters, and seldom holds positions of opinion leadership in a system.

4. **Late majority (Conservative)**: Individuals in this category will adopt an innovation after the average member of the society does. These individuals approach an innovation with a high degree of skepticism. The late majority typically has below average social status, has very little financial liquidity, shares contact with others in the late majority and the early majority, and has very little opinion leadership.

5. **Laggards (Skeptical)**: Individuals in this category are the last to adopt an innovation. Unlike some of the previous categories, individuals in this category show little to no opinion leadership. Laggards typically tend to be focused on “traditions”, are likely to have the lowest social status, have the lowest financial liquidity, be the oldest of all other adopters, and are in contact with only family and close friends.

Although there is still a large need to increase the adoption of no-till soybeans in Indiana, the adoption stage is at such a point that continued adoption is likely to be self-sustaining. Conversely, no-till corn and cover crop adoption are likely insufficient to have reached that same “critical mass”. Cover crop adoption is largely within the Visionary category, beginning to impact Pragmatic farmers. No-till adoption is largely a process of Pragmatic farmers. Understanding these categories of adoption can help shape communications and outreach strategies for each of these practices.
Methods used to develop high-tech marketing strategies may be applied to farming. Similar to high-tech markets, there can be a tendency of farmers to reference each other when making adoption (buying) decisions. The bell curve of adoption is not necessarily smooth - with the widest gap occurring between Early Adopters/Visionaries and Early Majority/Pragmatists. This gap is identified as “the chasm” (Moore, 1999) and it effectively divides the “Early Market” from the “Mainstream Market”.

The Early Market is made up primarily of Innovators and Early Adopters (Visionaries) and is where adoption of cover crops currently lie.

**Innovators** are the “gatekeepers for any new technology. They are the ones who have the interest to learn about it and the ones everyone else deems competent to do the early evaluation.”

**Visionaries** “are that rare breed of people who have the insight to match up an emerging technology to a strategic opportunity.” This class of individuals are typically not just looking for improvements – they are looking for leaps forward.

The Mainstream Market is comprised of the rest of the classifications – Pragmatists, Conservatives, and Skeptics. This is the current market for no-till operations.

**Pragmatists**, unlike visionaries aren’t looking to make breakthrough progress. They are looking for “percentage improvements – incremental, measureable, predictable progress.” They also tend to reference people like themselves when making decisions... i.e. They are not looking to visionaries or innovators for information or leadership.

**Conservatives** are typically against discontinuous innovations. “They believe more in tradition than progress”

**Skeptics** are generally not going to participate in evolving markets. They tend to feel that new technology over-promises, under-delivers, and comes with unintended consequences.

Understanding the fundamental differences in the decision making processes of the groups on either side of the “chasm” (Visionaries and Pragmatists) will be critical in increasing the adoption of soil health practices among mainstream farmers.

Advancing the adoption of cover crop use and robust soil health cropping systems may require different outreach strategies than those currently used to reach the Pragmatic market. Further advancement of no-till corn adoption may require more reliance on Pragmatic farmers and other influencers to saturate this market class.
SAMPLE FUNDING CHARTS

Funding charts can be a practical means of developing strategies to attain financial goals. The standard funding chart sample that follows was developed using techniques outlined by H.A. Rosso (Rosso, 1991) and promoted by the Indiana University - Lilly School of Philanthropy.

### Table 1 Sample Funding Charts

#### SAMPLE Goal: $ 100,000.00

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ave Gift</th>
<th># Gifts Req</th>
<th>P/Gift Ratio</th>
<th># Prospects Required</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
<th>Cumulative Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
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<td>2</td>
<td>5 to 1</td>
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<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<td>$ 500.00</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3 to 1</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>$10,000.00</td>
<td>$60,000.00</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

~10% of Gifts  ~60% of Goal

| $ 250.00  | 80          | 3 to 1       | 240                 | $20,000.00 | $80,000.00       | 20%     |

~20% of Gifts  ~20% of Goal

| $ 80.00   | 250         | 2 to 1       | 500                 | $20,000.00 | $100,000.00      | 20%     |

~70% of Gifts  ~20% of Goal

Totals 372 894 $100,000.00

#### SAMPLE 2

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Ave Gift</th>
<th># Gifts Req</th>
<th>P/Gift Ratio</th>
<th># Prospects Required</th>
<th>Subtotal</th>
<th>Cumulative Total</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>5 to 1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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<td>4 to 1</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>$20,000.00</td>
<td>$60,000.00</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11% of Gifts  60% of Goal

| $ 500.00  | 40          | 3 to 1       | 120                 | $20,000.00 | $80,000.00       | 20%     |

15% of Gifts  20% of Goal

| $ 100.00  | 200         | 2 to 1       | 400                 | $20,000.00 | $100,000.00      | 20%     |

74% of Gifts  20% of Goal

Totals 271 647 $100,000.00