



## **Creating A Force for Change: Minnesota Environmental Partnership**

Begun in 2000 with Beldon Fund support, the Minnesota Environmental Partnership (MEP) grew from a small informal hub to become a powerful state-wide umbrella organization. MEP now coordinates the advocacy efforts of more than 80 environmental and conservation groups. In recent years MEP has helped member organizations develop more effective organizing tactics, communications, and outreach. Above all, it has transformed a disparate state environmental community that had little or no clout into a united – and effective - force for change.

### **Impact of Collaboration**

By promoting a common policy agenda, MEP has helped advocacy groups recognize the benefits of uniting around a small number of policy priorities. Previously, it was common for environmental advocates to have over 50 competing priorities that got little attention. In 2007, the coalition presented the state legislature with four coordinated priorities and won three of them. MEP has also introduced its members to more sophisticated tools for nonpartisan public and candidate education, and provided advocates with media training to sharpen messages.

### **Policy Victories**

Among MEP's policy victories: Its "Healthy Waters" campaign helped bring the country's first ban on phosphorous pollution. Other collaborative efforts led to the passage of a landmark bill to reduce mercury from coal-burning plants, and the defeat of attempts to weaken Minnesota's local environmental protection regulations. MEP has also sought ways to collaborate with potential allies from outside the traditional environmental community, particularly through the broader multi-issue 501(c)(3) coalitions.

After the 2006 elections, MEP was well-positioned to take advantage of new policy opportunities. Thanks in large measure to MEP's advocacy, Minnesota is now one of a handful of states leading the country in efforts to combat global warming. The coalition's success has attracted support from several regional foundations, ensuring MEP will continue its work after Beldon's exit.

### **Importance of Funding Capacity Building**

MEP executive director Steve Morse believes early funding to build the coalition's infrastructure was key to its subsequent impact:

"Instead of investing in a specific issue, Beldon invested from the beginning in capacity building that might not have short-term payoffs. This was a critical kind of funding, because now we have a machine that can deliver results on multiple issues."