

Innovation Network for Communities

State of the Regional Networks Report

*An Assessment of Eight Regional Networks within the Urban Sustainability
Directors Network, funded by the Summit Foundation*

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STATE OF THE NETWORKS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Due to the rapid pace of human population growth and climate change, communities face increasing pressure to insure their systems of service and infrastructure are able to adapt, change, and grow in environmentally, socially, and economically responsible ways. Part of how local governments are maximizing resources and shortening their learning curve is by networking around sustainable innovation: connecting to learn together, aligning through successes and failures, and producing through collaboration in areas where non-local challenges like climate change can be addressed across jurisdictions. The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), a North American network of 136 city sustainability directors, is one such outlet. Since USDN's inception in 2009, its members have generated seven regional networks that are in various stages of development. An eighth network is comprised of USDN members but started with outside influence.

In the summer of 2014, the Summit Foundation approved a grant to the Innovation Network for Communities (INC) to support the continuing development of regional networks of local government sustainability directors in the U.S. and Canada. The project was guided by two goals:

- 1.) Deepening regional network development, by providing recommendations for next steps and coaching to support regional network leaders, and
- 2.) Providing technical assistance, to facilitate regional networks disseminating and adopting of sustainable best practices in their regions.

This assessment examines the eight regional sustainability directors' networks and summarizes where they want to go and what they need to do to effectively collaborate around sustainability issues in their respective regions.

Insights this regional network assessment include:

- The regional networks hover between “Developing” and “Near Mature” in their network development evolution. They demonstrate “Developing” characteristics in network infrastructure compared to “Near Mature” network satisfaction and communication.
 - This indicates that the networks are not evolving evenly: the networks' capacity to grow their infrastructure lags behind their ability and desire to connect.
 - The result is stagnating network evolution for many of the regional networks.
- Without increased investment and capacity building in their network infrastructure areas of leadership, coordination, and resources, it is likely the networks will remain in a holding pattern.
- All eight regional networks agree that they will benefit from:
 - Collaborating with each other, and
 - Disseminating USDN projects with their members.
- Their collaboration interest centers around two broad objectives:
 - Working together across regions to leverage resources, and
 - Deepening network building knowledge, skills, and abilities.

Recommendations for next steps in support of regional networks include:

1. ***Create a partnership program that defines and strengthens relationships between USDN and regional networks.*** The relationship dynamics between USDN and the regional networks remain unclear. This activity needs to articulate roles in a mutually beneficial way.
2. ***Formalize regional network best practices by establishing a road map for emerging regional networks.*** This report identifies nine additional states or regions where USDN members have expressed interest in starting a new network or are already information sharing. Capturing lessons learned from existing networks to chart a course for new regional networks will support successful development of regional networks as a whole.
3. ***Enhance connectivity of leaders across regional networks.*** Strong connectivity across the regions is necessary to maintain alignment of shared priorities for collective action, and to build leadership capacity in individual networks.
4. ***Align regional network annual meeting objectives with existing USDN-related grants programs.*** Most regional networks struggle to raise resources to host their annual meetings and collaborate together. By revising their annual meeting goals, they may increase their potential for fundraising. This will lead to broader reach and impact in the urban sustainability field. For example, regional networks are uniquely positioned to explore dissemination and multi-city adoption of innovations beyond just the USDN membership, which is a strategic interest of the USDN Innovation Fund.
5. ***Pursue network coordination support from one provider to supply consistent regional support.*** Most regions rely on member volunteers to coordinate network activities. This hinders those leaders from fully participating in network activities. Seeking outside support will expand member-leader capacity to focus on further developing their networks. No single network requires full time staffing, so combining into a single supplier would maximize coordination expertise and ensure consistent quality across networks.

This assessment concludes that regional sustainability directors' networks are a viable mechanism for dissemination and adoption of urban innovations. They are worthy of continued support and investment due to the magnitude of their reach and field-building impact on North American urban sustainability.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

This section examines what local governments sharing regional similarities stand to gain by networking around sustainable innovation. It outlines what the investment has been to date in regional network development. Finally, it explores who the eight regional networks are and the territories they cover.

WHY LOCAL GOVERNMENTS NETWORK

Cities and their surrounding urban areas are home to almost 50% of the world's population. It is estimated that the number of people living in cities will almost double in the next 3 decades, from 3.6 billion in 2011 to more than 6 billion in 2050.¹ Humans are social by nature and many thrive in urban spaces that foster social, economic, and environmental connections. Due to factors like rapid growth, new climate extremes, and aging infrastructure, cities are by necessity becoming hubs of innovation - experimenting with and establishing more sustainable ways of operating and developing. Making cities sustainable for the long-term is among the most important issues of this generation.

It is often assumed by both public and private sector alike that making a city sustainable is the job of that city's government, and that this local government will have the political will, staff capacity, and budget to effectively act. However, local governments can't be relied on to single-handedly find solutions to increasing urbanization, such as developing a diverse and efficient electrical grid or a regional public transportation system. Implementing those kinds of big picture solutions requires large amounts of capital, exceptional managerial skills, and significant alignment of interests of all sectors. It also requires that cities within regions sharing common challenges and goals work well together.

Sustainability directors in cities and counties are uniquely positioned to influence the development of their own communities. They also shape how their regions respond to issues like population growth and climate change. Because these challenges aren't local by nature and the urgency for cost effective and long-term solutions is intensifying, there are no gains to be had by being territorial or recognition-hungry. Sustainability directors can't work in a silo and expect success, and they know it. This changing culture in local government has led to the emergence of entities like the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) and its eight affiliate regional networks. These networks are the focus of this report, and are examined in depth in the body of this document.

REGIONAL NETWORK INVESTMENT

In partnership with the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), the Innovation Network for Communities (INC), and the Summit Foundation have helped build capacity in most of the USDN regional networks over the past four years. They have done this by providing technical assistance, coaching, leadership training, and direct grants. This latest Summit investment enabled INC to work with USDN to conduct an in-depth examination of the eight regional networks. The point of this assessment is to identify strategic direction and actions needed in each network to achieve urban sustainability by North American region. This State of the Regional Networks report is a resource for each regional network, to serve as a benchmark and inform potential next steps.

¹ Macomber, J. D. (2013). Building sustainable cities. *Harvard business review*, 91(7), 40-50.

Prior to this research, it was evident that some of the regional networks were evolving from simply connecting and aligning to collaborating on and producing urban innovations. A few have explored dissemination of innovations that test different methods to propel wide-scale adoption of best practices. For example, the Michigan network conducted a multi-city convening to disseminate information and instigate regional adoption of the Asheville LED streetlight best practice. Another example comes from the Southeast network, where sustainability directors are disseminating the online Nashville’s Mayors Workplace Challenge for adoption in at least seven cities across the south.

Yet even with these examples, there hasn’t been sufficient understanding about how regional-level dissemination or adoption is working. How are projects being identified, created, and implemented? What types of results are being accomplished? Through this project, Summit, INC and USDN – and the USDN members that have started and participated in the regional networks - now better understand how collaborative ideas become on the ground realities. The effort also provided technical assistance and regional network capacity building.

REGIONAL NETWORKS SUMMARY

As of January 2014, eight regional networks are affiliated with USDN through a Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC). With the exception of Green Cities California, USDN members founded each network. Network building skills learned from participation in USDN are applied in varying degrees across the country. All regional networks share members with USDN, and only two regional networks (asterisked) are comprised of only USDN members. The rest include non-USDN members:

1. Cascadia*
2. Green Cities California
3. Heartland
4. Michigan Green Communities
5. New England Municipal Sustainability Network
6. OKI: Ohio, Kentucky and Indiana
7. Southeast Sustainability Directors Network
8. Western Adaptation Alliance*



Through the regional networks, USDN strives to create access to a peer network for all local government sustainability leaders in North America. The regional networks have complete autonomy and are organized according to how their members see fit. Some have developed guidelines and strategy, and others have remained organic in nature and content.

It is important to note that this assessment was framed around existing regional sustainability director networks. Some networks are emerging (Texas and Canada, for example) and need to factor into this evolving picture. However, this assessment centers on existing network content and infrastructure, with stronger emphasis on infrastructure. It explores next steps for each region, the connection between regions, and a USDN strategy for regional networks.

Regional networks of sustainability directors are an emerging strategy in urban sustainability field development. Many of the networks formed because they struggled with common challenges like state legislation barriers or similar climate change impacts. Shared political environments are perhaps the strongest draw for national network members to become more region specific. Other motivations in forming regional networks include the need to regularly connect with regional peers to discuss shared utility structures, cultures, and city administration expectations. In some cases, regional networks formed from a desire to collaboratively instigate and correlate regional social, environmental, and economic change.

Membership in regional networks steadily grows. USDN began providing assessment and data collection support in 2012. In 2015, the first of USDN’s five key strategic objectives is to:

1. *Leverage our External Influence and Disseminate Key Learnings:*
 - a. *Leverage the collective voice of USDN members to influence policy and program design and communicate our collective impact and potential for impact;*
 - b. *Help regional networks build capacity for dissemination and collaboration;*
 - c. *Develop key partnerships to support the priorities of USDN members*

Table 1 demonstrates the growth of regional network membership. Corresponding with this growth is the value members get from participating in these networks.

	PEOPLE IN REGIONAL NETWORKS	USDN MEMBERS IN REGIONAL NETWORKS	NON-USDN MEMBERS IN REGIONAL NETWORKS
2012	93	43	50
2013	129	72	57
2014	159	92	67

Table 1. Growth of Regional Network Membership.

An additional nine regional or state-based networks are either functioning where they would like to be or are in the earliest stages of formation. In some cases, it will make sense to leverage the lessons learned from successful regional network building for new network development. It will also be important to determine how a mutually beneficial relationship between regional networks and USDN will form and be strengthened.

- 1.) **Arizona State Network** - information-sharing group outside of the Western Adaptation Alliance, including non-USDN members
- 2.) **Canada Network**- Canadian USDN members have expressed interest in a network and are convening for the first time in July 2015
- 3.) **Florida State Network** - information sharing group outside of the Southeast network, including non-USDN members; have been meeting monthly since 2014
- 4.) **Great Lakes Regional Network** – potential group beginning to align around climate adaptation concerns in the Great Lakes
- 5.) **Mid-Atlantic** - EPA-led group that wants to move to member-led information-sharing
- 6.) **Prairie State Network (IL)** - information sharing group, including non USDN members
- 7.) **Tennessee State Network** - information sharing group outside of the Southeast network, including non-USDN members; have been meeting every six weeks since 2010
- 8.) **Texas State Network** – information sharing group who had a first convening in February 2015

9.) **Virginia State Network** – potential information-sharing group, including non USDN members

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING NETWORKS

USDN and the regional entities are generative social-impact networks. A generative social-impact network is a set of people who voluntarily organize themselves for collective action to solve a large, complex social problem. These networks are generative because they are designed to be a platform for generating multiple, ongoing kinds of change - not just accomplishing a single outcome. A generative network has a unique and renewable capacity, and this makes it especially useful when taking on complex, unpredictable, large-scale problems like urban sustainability and climate change.² The characteristics of a generative social impact network include the following:

- **Shared purpose.** Members share a collective purpose that is focused on creating social good.
- **Complex problem.** The problem or opportunity of focus is a complex one with no simple solution, and the network is committed to working on it from multiple angles.
- **Member-driven.** Members set the mission and goals, make the rules, and do most of the work.
- **Voluntary.** Membership in the network is voluntary and not a condition of receiving funding or other approval mechanisms.
- **Relationship-focused.** Members develop deep and enduring relationships with each other; the focus of relationship building is member to member, not staff or other providers to members.
- **Flexible.** The structure is flexible and adaptable, and changes as needed.
- **Internal markets for value.** Value is determined by whether members engage in the activity or not – members “vote with their feet.”
- **Decentralized.** Decisions are highly decentralized.

The core activity that occurs in all generative networks is the building of relationships and trust between members. This “social capital” is the primary asset a generative network has. Engaging in collective activities helps develop this social capital. The social capital in turn increases the efficiency, complexity and depth of the activities a network can engage in. It becomes a cycle of positive feedback and creates a gift economy, which in turn drives high performance networks to achieve encompassing social change.

Networks evolve, and network builders and funders should be intentional in guiding their network’s evolution. Recognizing potential evolutionary patterns can help network leaders anticipate and manage opportunities and challenges. Comparing a network to a conceptual model of network development can help assess how the network is actually doing and what it could do next.

THE CONNECT-ALIGN-PRODUCE SEQUENCE

Successful network development follows three basic steps: connecting, aligning, and producing (Table 2). Members start by connecting to exchange information. This builds trust and creates alignment around shared goals and opportunities. It also eventually leads to collaborating towards a shared outcome. Descriptions of the three basic kinds of network activities that can advance strategic outcomes are as follows:

- **Connecting**– allows members to rapidly and easily exchange information, and learn in the process
- **Aligning** – helps members align their work around a shared set of ideas, goals or strategies

² Plastrik, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press.

- **Producing** –co-production of innovative practices, policies, tools and other outputs for social impact

Early in a social-impact network’s life, thinking about the connect-align-produce sequence allows network builders to ask themselves this crucial question: *Are network members building trust and sharing information that will then make them willing and able to undertake more difficult alignment around specific goals and ideas, and produce new products and services?* If the answer is no, then development focus should be on deepening member connectivity. If yes, then the network is ready to be introduced to opportunities for alignment and production.

CATEGORY	NETWORK QUESTIONS
Connecting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there structured meeting planning and facilitation? • Are there calendar options for meetings and events? • Are there “Opt-In” learning processes, such as working groups? • Are there ways to collect member input / feedback systems? • Is there a members-only web site with good communication tools?
Aligning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there collaborative work processes and a web site? • Is there capacity to analyze, compare and synthesize items like frameworks, policy options, and definitions? • Is there a formal decision-making processes to endorse alignment mechanisms such as standards, policy positions, and statements of principle?
Producing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there capacity to negotiate production agreements among members? • Is there project management capacity? • Are there fiscal agents to manage funds? • Is there structured governance of all producers? • Are there performance accountability mechanisms?

Table 2. Connect-Align-Produce Sequence and Questions by Stage.

Not all networks want to become a producing network. If a network determines the highest value is to keep people connected, the criteria for evolution may not be important. Alternately, networks with a scatter-shot assessment may find it difficult to sustain success over time, because there is not an established foundation for their network to build on. For networks that want to work together to create new solutions to old problems or address policy change at state or regional levels, this assessment can serve as a road map. The recommendations in this report are framed with the assumption that each network would like to grow and evolve.

SECTION 3: INDIVIDUAL NETWORK ASSESSMENTS SUMMARY

The framework in Table 3 details the criteria for a network to evolve through the connect-align-produce sequence shown in Table 2. The eight regional networks were assessed using this framework. INC completed the assessments by interviewing network leaders and analyzing member surveys. Each individual network assessment can be found in alphabetical order in the Appendix. Table 4 provides an “at a glance” network assessment by region.

NETWORK ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaboration on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table 3. Network Assessment Framework.

SUMMARY OF INDIVIDUAL NETWORK ASSESSMENTS								
STAGE	CASCADIA	GREEN CITIES CA	HEARTLAND	MI GREEN COMMUNITIES	NEW ENGLAND	OKI	SOUTHEAST	WESTERN ADAPTATION
Emerging								
Developing								
Near Mature								
Mature								

Table 4. Summary of Regional Network Assessments.

SECTION 4: STATE OF THE NETWORKS

If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. This African proverb illustrates the potential of networks and the ability to connect and align with others that can open a world of possibilities. In different ways, each regional network demonstrates how working together can propel urban sustainability on a regional basis in North America. For example, The Western Adaptation Alliance (WAA) went deep into climate adaptation in a desert environment long before the rest of the regions began discussing it in earnest. In a way, they made a road map of how to collaborate regionally around climate adaptation strategies.

Imagine what is possible if the networks from different regions collaborate? What evolutions in the field of urban sustainability are accessible when a network of networks aligns their interests? In this section, the regional networks are addressed as one unit and referred to as “the networks”. To best understand the networks as a sum of their parts, the following areas are addressed: history of the networks; current state of the networks, using the network development assessment; that path forward together based on the assets and needs of the network; and recommendations for a national regional network strategy.

REGIONAL NETWORKS COLLABORATION TO DATE

The networks share a history of working together across the regions. In 2011, regional network leaders came together to form the Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC) to share experiences. With coordination support through USDN, the RNCC 1.) Hosts information-sharing calls and 2.) Serves as a steering committee of sorts to allow USDN to engage with regional networks. The RNCC acts informally as the voice of the regional networks to USDN leadership and members. Below are some key activities the networks have addressed together:

Network Startup Support: INC provided network startup coaching to most of the regional networks. This technical assistance provided leaders with critical network building knowledge and support for creative problem solving. In addition, small \$5,000-\$8,000 grants were provided to some networks to host their first network event.

Regional Network Member Surveys: USDN conducts and analyzes member surveys for networks represented by the RNCC. The survey is sent to all regional network members and evaluated by region. The survey maps network health by asking questions about member connectivity, satisfaction, and network value. Results from this annual data gathering process are often used to reflect on successes and guide annual strategic planning processes.

www.USDN.org : The USDN website was designed for members to have online interactions stored and searchable by topic, so all members can benefit from the knowledge and insight exchanges. The website serves as both document storage and a communication tool that keeps members connected. In 2013, USDN made the website available for regional networks use. Some regional networks now actively use the website as their primary communication tool.

Leadership Academy: A major training session for the networks took shape in February 2013 in the form of the Regional Network Building Leadership Academy, hosted in Chicago, IL. The convening brought together the RNCC to create strategic plans for their respective networks, based on input and insight from their peer leaders in other regions. Many network lessons came from reflection on and discussion of USDN’s process and success with network building.

Adaptation Grants: In 2014, the USDN Innovation Fund provided competitive grants to regional networks only. The intent was to spur collaboration on climate adaptation. The Innovation Fund provided these grants because regional collaboration on adaptation is a field-building innovation. The networks were interested because these grants provided resources to take their networks to the next level: members working collaboratively.

COLLECTIVE NETWORK ASSESSMENT SUMMARY

How a network is structured and what the network is focused on are separate design components. Though they are both important, this regional network assessment focuses on network infrastructure, not content. The infrastructure of a network refers to:

- The governance model and leadership capacity for making collective decisions;
- The staffing model for supporting members; and
- The resources to support member activities, communications, and connectivity.

Network Infrastructure considerations are outlined in the following Table 5, adapted from *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*.³

NETWORK INFRASTRUCTURE CONSIDERATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examine Network Health - study information and activities throughout the network • Make Room for New Leaders – keep it fresh at the top to allow for changes • Ensure Transparency – make sure members know how the network is governed and why • Develop a Leadership Pipeline – continually foster new leaders to replace older ones • Provide Basic Orientation – don’t assume new members will understand network dynamics • Staff to Support Evolution – not just meet the basic and immediate needs of the network • Staff to Fit the Network – make sure staff that are brought in understand what the network is • Invest in Communications – don’t skimp on the tools the network uses to communicate

Table 5. Network Infrastructure Considerations.

To analyze the Regional Networks and their infrastructure as one unit, INC developed the assessment framework (Table 3) and assigned increasing numerical values for each development activity as it evolved.

³ Plastrik, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press.

All eight regional networks are scored, totaled, and averaged to create the collective networks assessment in Table 6. The regional networks collectively hover between “Developing” and “Near Mature” in their network development evolution.

Most networks demonstrate “Near Mature” member satisfaction and communications - a strong indicator that these networks are delivering increasing value to their membership. The activity category is also rated as “Near Mature”, but this is slightly misleading. Although multiple networks score “Mature” with multiple collaborations, many skipped the first activity phases or rely on USDN to provide those activities. This results in less developed activity foundations for the network. Similarly, it is difficult to tell if the member satisfaction is generated solely through the regional networks, or if it blended from the support and infrastructure provided through USDN.

Network leadership, coordination, and resources are the key indicators to understanding network infrastructure. Collectively, the networks demonstrate “Emerging” and “Developing” characteristics. Many networks struggle to dedicate strategy and time exclusive to network building. In networks without coordination support, dedicating time to network building is difficult because the leaders are responsible for maintaining basic network operations. Furthermore, many network founders are still serving as network leaders, and are fatigued in their capacity and desire to lead.

The “Emerging” and “Developing” nature of network infrastructure compared to “Near Mature” network satisfaction and communication indicates that the networks are evolving unevenly. The networks’ ability and/or capacity to evolve their infrastructure is lagging behind their ability and desire to connect. The result is a network evolution holding pattern for many of the regional networks. Based on this assessment it is likely the networks will remain in a holding pattern without increased investment and capacity building in their network infrastructure areas of leadership, coordination, and resources.

The table below shows the state of the collective networks is “Near Mature” in activity, communication, and member satisfaction. Yet “Emerging” to “Developing” in leadership, coordination, and resources.

REGIONAL NETWORKS AS A WHOLE- ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
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Table 6. Assessment of Regional Networks as a Whole.

FUTURE COLLABORATION POTENTIAL

Network leaders were interviewed and surveyed to assess their interest in collaborating across regions to improve network development. This survey spanned the following infrastructure categories: leadership, coordination, communications, and resources. Across these four infrastructure categories, 27 action areas were included. Examples of these action areas are: steering committee coordination, annual strategic planning support, taking meeting minutes, and logistics coordination.

The results of this survey indicated a significant interest in collaborating across regions to build stronger networks. Their interest can be grouped into two broad objectives: 1.) Collaborate to leverage resources, and 2.) Deepen learning about network building. The following Table 7 details the activities the networks would be willing to work together to accomplish:

COLLABORATION OBJECTIVE	NETWORK ACTIVITIES
Leverage Resources	Secure annual meeting convening costs
	Secure logistics and coordination support
	Conduct network member surveys and network assessment
	Access a members only web site for keeping in touch (ex: USDN.org)
	Conduct annual meeting planning and facilitation
	Document and disseminate member city best practice
Deepen Learning about Network Building	Participate in the Regional Network Coordinating Committee
	Create annual strategic plans and work plans
	Fundraising strategy development
	Convene a Leaderships Academy about network building and strategic partnerships

Table 7. Collaboration Options for Regional Networks Collectively.

SECTION 5: USDN STRATEGY FOR REGIONAL NETWORKS

This section of the report recommends a pathway for USDN formalize its relationship with regional networks. It envisions outcomes, why these outcomes are sought, and what ground can be gained for the field of urban sustainability by supporting and strengthening regional networks. Investing to rally, strengthen, and enable regional networks is a significant USDN priority. This is because regional networks serve to not only deepen the relationships and collaborations of USDN members sharing similar political and physical geographies, but they also carry USDN's field building vision to non-USDN member communities. They are the premiere conduit that allows USDN values and products to be disseminated while enabling USDN to maintain ideal size - and retain its core value of connectivity. It makes sense for USDN to provide support and resources to help these small networks grow and thrive. USDN and the regional networks are in a mutually beneficial, evolving relationship building on collective city efforts.

Through the interview and survey research, it is clear that the networks are interested in collaborating across regions to grow their individual networks. In the last section, the greatest opportunities for collaboration were identified as the following themes: leverage resources and deepen learning about network building.

The following strategy recommends how the networks can work together. It also proposes ways for USDN to work with them to achieve mutually shared field-building goals.

USDN Strategy Recommendations:

1. ***Create a partnership program that defines and strengthens relationships between USDN and regional networks.*** The relationship dynamics between USDN and the regional networks remain unclear. This activity will articulate roles in a mutually beneficial way.
2. ***Formalize regional network best practices to establish a road map for emerging regional networks.*** This report identifies nine additional states or regions where USDN members have expressed interest in starting a new network or are already sharing information. Capturing lessons learned from existing networks to chart a course for new regional networks will support successful development of regional networks as a whole.
3. ***Enhance connectivity of leaders across regional networks.*** Strong connectivity across the regions is necessary to maintain alignment of shared priorities for collective action and build leadership capacity in individual networks.
4. ***Align regional network annual meeting objectives with existing USDN-related grants programs.*** Most regional networks struggle to raise resources to host their annual meetings and collaborate together. By revising their annual meeting goals, they may increase their potential for fundraising. This will lead to broader reach and impact in the urban sustainability field. For example, regional networks are uniquely positioned to explore dissemination and multi-city adoption of innovations beyond just the USDN membership, which is a strategic interest of the USDN Innovation Fund.
5. ***Pursue network coordination support from one provider to supply consistent regional support.*** Most regions rely on member volunteers to coordinate network activities. This hinders those leaders from fully participating in network activities. Seeking outside support will expand member-leader capacity to focus on further developing their networks. No single network requires full time staffing, so combining into a single supplier will maximize coordination expertise and ensure consistent quality across networks.

REGIONAL NETWORKS PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

This partnership framework is supported and endorsed by the Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC), and was developed in close coordination with USDN staff and Planning Committee. Section 4 of this report showed that Regional Networks need to work together to develop stronger infrastructure. USDN has a vested interest in making this happen, both to support members in their efforts towards meeting local sustainability goals, and to provide non-USDN member communities the opportunity to access the vast body of work USDN members have built.

Understanding the Framework: The intent of the framework is to align regional networks along USDN field building objectives. In exchange, USDN will increase support to meet regional network needs. As the urban sustainability field matures, it is increasingly important for networks to clearly articulate their role and relationship with each other. This strategy provides recommendations to begin this process between USDN and regional networks. The collective strengthening of USDN, the regional networks, and the urban sustainability field is the goal.

Understanding the Value Proposition: Table 8 provides a framework that establishes tiers for regional networks and USDN. This framework defines the relationship and mutual expectations between regional networks. Each year, regional networks interested in establishing a formal relationship with USDN can self-select into tier 2 (USDN Affiliate Network) or tier 3 (USDN Partner Network). Regional networks that identify as tier 2 or 3 agree to certain expectations, in exchange for various network support activities from USDN (detailed below). This tiered framework also provides a path for new regional networks to consider when they begin and as they grow.

Understanding the Tiers: The tier sequencing (1-3) indicates the natural growth progression of a network. Many regional networks will evolve in their relationship with USDN through this sequence. Others will not. There is no right or wrong path for a regional network, as long as its members are leading the way.

USDN REGIONAL NETWORKS FRAMEWORK				
Tier One Learning Network:	Expectations of USDN:	USDN Benefits:	Expectations of Regional Network:	Regional Network Benefits:
<p>Networks in this tier focus on learning foundational network building best practices and implementing them.</p> <p><i>These networks have an informal relationship with USDN.</i></p>	<p>1. Make available foundational network building best practices (a-f, to the right)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximize investment in regional network development • Establish a clear path for new and evolving regional networks • Support dissemination of USDN network building success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement the foundational network building best practices: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Create network goals and vision b. Develop a member information exchange strategy c. Produce an annual work plan d. Convene annual face to face meetings e. Establish membership guidelines f. Determine the a network governance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a clear path for new and evolving regional networks • Clarify USDN expectations for regional network building • Provide a standard that can inform network goal setting

USDN REGIONAL NETWORKS FRAMEWORK CONTINUED				
Tier Two	<u>Expectations of USDN:</u>	<u>USDN Benefits:</u>	<u>Expectations of Regional Network:</u>	<u>Regional Network Benefits:</u>
<p>USDN Affiliate Network:</p> <p>Networks in this tier engage in cross region peer learning through the Regional Network Coordinating Committee.</p> <p><i>These networks have a formal relationship with USDN</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Provide access to the USDN website 2. Coordinate and facilitate cross region peer learning through the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee 3. Welcome applications to USDN grant funds pending all grant requirements are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a “steering committee” that represents the voice of regional networks to USDN • Achieve a level of consistency across regional networks • Expand USDN reach in the field • Expand partnerships with non-city entities that can help to advance the field 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Have implemented the foundational network building best practices 2. Participate in cross region peer learning through the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage collective voice to pursue funding opportunities together • Maintain a clearing house for regional network best practices • Facilitate peer support between regional network leaders • Coordinate a collective voice of the regions to USDN
Tier Three	<u>Expectations of USDN:</u>	<u>USDN Benefits:</u>	<u>Expectations of Regional Network:</u>	<u>Regional Network Benefits:</u>
<p>USDN Partner Network:</p> <p>Networks in this tier support urban sustainability field development through engaging non USDN members in their network.</p> <p><i>These networks have a formal relationship with USDN.</i></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct annual member surveys 2. Offer targeted coordination support to individual partner networks 3. Provide occasional targeted grant opportunities 4. Invite partner network leaders and staff to attend the USDN annual meeting 5. Provide access to the USDN website 6. Welcome applications to USDN grant funds pending all grant requirements are met 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reach non-USDN peers without growing USDN membership • Invest in regional networks as a USDN best practice dissemination strategy • Solidify the regional network presence through expanded services • Strategically track urban sustainability field development beyond USDN membership • Track regional network performance and growth in order to maintain voice of the urban sustainability customer to funders 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create a plan and targets for non USDN membership in their network 2. Coordinate with USDN to assess and appropriately route new members to regional networks or USDN. 3. Maintain a co-chair and steering committee leadership structure 4. Create a leadership succession plan 5. Have implemented the foundational network building best practices 6. Participate in cross region peer learning through the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leverage coordination support • Leverage potential grant opportunities • Leverage and maintain access to existing USDN investments such as the USDN website • Maximize technical analysis of network performance through annual member surveys • Expose non-USDN members to national conversation through USDN.org access

Table 8. USDN Regional Networks Framework.

SECTION 6: CONCLUSION

In summary, this State of the Networks Report shows that the regional networks continue to evolve, but at a stunted pace due to lack of resources. The networks ability to grow their infrastructure lags behind their desire connect. Increased investment and capacity building in network infrastructure will allow these networks to reach field building potential. All eight regional networks will benefit from collaborating with each other.

Their collaboration interest centers around two broad objectives: 1.) Working together across regions to leverage resources, and 2.) Deepening network building knowledge, skills, and abilities. Overarching next steps in support of regional networks include:

- Create a partnership program that defines and strengthens relationships between USDN and regional networks.
- Formalize regional network best practices to establish a road map for emerging regional networks.
- Enhance connectivity of leaders across regional networks.
- Align regional network annual meeting objectives with existing USDN-related grants programs.
- Pursue network coordination support from one provider to supply consistent regional support.

This assessment concludes that regional sustainability directors' networks are a viable mechanism for dissemination and adoption of urban innovations. They are worthy of continued support and investment due to the magnitude of their reach and field-building impact on North American urban sustainability.

1. Network Building Resource List

- a. Plastrik, P. and Parzen, J. (2012). *Guidebook for Building Regional Networks 2.0*. <http://usdn.org/uploads/cms/documents/usdn-regional-network-development-guidebook.pdf>
- b. Plastrik, P., Taylor, M., & Cleveland, J. (2014). *Connecting to Change the World: Harnessing the Power of Networks for Social Impact*. Island Press. <http://connectingtochangetheworld.net>
- c. USDN 2012 Regional Networks Leadership Academy Documents. <http://usdn.org/public/Innovation.html>

2. Network Communications Chart

COMMUNICATION METHOD	IMPLEMENTATION TIP	PEERS TO LEARN FROM
Network Information Sharing Calls	These are regularly scheduled or ad hoc calls that all members are invited to. They provide opportunities for members to connect in between face to face meetings. These are often content focused calls that are organized by a leadership team or rotating responsibility can be assigned to various members.	USDN, Michigan, Heartland, SSDN
Network Newsletter	These can be informational about project highlights from member communities and/or network focused about upcoming network events or network projects. The opportunity to keep up to date through a newsletter is a low commitment activity for members to engage in.	USDN, Michigan, SSDN
USDN Website Regional Network Page	Regional networks can work with USDN to provide access to a page on the USDN website specific to their regional network. Through this page, members can post and answer questions, share documents and events, and generally keep in touch through a web feed.	Heartland, New England, SSDN
Leadership Member Circles	Each network leader is assigned a circle or members. That leader is charged with reaching out by phone and email 2-4 times a year to keep in touch, hear how they are doing and check in on how the network is working for them.	USDN, SSDN
Member Work Groups	Work groups come together typically around a content topic. Their purpose can be to share information, pursue a grant, and/or collaborate on a project.	USDN, Cascadia, Green Cities California, Western Adaptation Alliance, SSDN
External Facing Website	Through an externally facing website networks can communicate with the general public and funders about network activities and success stories.	USDN, Green Cities California, Michigan, SSDN

Table A-1. Network Communications Chart.

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 13; all USDN members

States Represented: Oregon, Washington, British Columbia

First Convening: January 2012

The Cascadia network was built on long standing relationships between individuals in Seattle, Portland and Vancouver. These informal relationships consisted of phone calls and conversations at conferences and meetings of shared interest. The individuals transitioned their conversation into a formal network because they all participated in the national conversations on sustainability. Although the national dialog was valuable to them they felt their region was facing district challenges. Their motivation to create the network came from a shared understanding that their region was far advanced in the practices and content issues in the field of sustainability and regional collaboration would likely result in valuable synergy.

What is the Cascadia Network's Reason for Being?

- Accelerate urban sustainability throughout the region
- Accelerate adoption of local sustainability practices through collaborative initiatives.
- Recognizing that USDN is a powerful and effective developer of connectivity, the Cascadia Network focuses on enabling collaborative projects around specific topics.
- Build fast, candid, high-quality information channels among Cascadia sustainability directors by strengthening relationships

What are the Cascadia Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- climate adaptation
- organics collection and use
- green economy
- energy efficiency in rental housing
- resource consumption in multi-family housing
- food policy

CASCADIA NETWORK ASSESSMENT

The Cascadia network is developing in all areas except their leadership and activity which display more mature network characteristics. Members connect through one on one calls or emails with the deepest value activity being their annual face to face network meeting. Additionally pairs of cities have worked together for deep technical dives with site visits on specific topics such as garbage and food collection. The Cascadia network collaborated on two projects: one addressing sustainable consumption and the other on urban tree canopy and climate adaptation. This network is heavily content and project driven which will serve them well as long as members share the same interests and needs for collaboration. Cascadia has a lean infrastructure support system with no formal coordination or communication strategy. One network leader expressed it this way, "I am a fan of the super-efficient lean operation, as long as we have resources to have an in person annual meeting each year, that is fundamental to the Cascadia Network".

CASCADIA NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-2. Cascadia Network Assessment.

CASCADIA NETWORK RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Create a leadership succession plan. In order to maintain the network with its current focus on project collaboration new leaders will need support developing connections to USDN leadership opportunities and other funding relationships.
2. The member survey indicated the biggest improvement opportunity is in peer to peer learning process. Focusing on member increasing communications between face to face meetings would support this. See appendix for successful communications strategies from peer networks.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Discuss membership size as a group. Small networks focused heavily on collaboration can face two unique challenges. One is it can be difficult to continue finding shared interests over time. The second is there are less people to distribute the work load which may result in participation fatigue.
2. Review regional network building best practices to enhance the strategic plan. See appendix for resources list.

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 14; 7 are USDN members

State Represented: California

First Convening: June 2007

Individuals from the California cities have known each other for quiet sometime. Many of them first met at the Pacific Coast Roundtable gatherings convenes by ICLEI after which they kept in informal contact regarding state based issues. The true birth of the network however was during a convening of sustainability directors at the Rocky Mountain Institute in 2006. This event was the same event where the idea for a national network of sustainability directors was born. During that convening the California cities felt they were already aligned around state based issues and decided to go ahead and pursue a state network alongside the soon to form national effort, we now call USDN.

What is Green Cities California's Reason for Being?

- Accelerate the adoption of sustainability policies and programs in California through collaborative action.
- Community choice aggregation for electric providers
- Energy data access and benchmarking for existing commercial buildings
- Pharmaceutical take back programs
- Sustainable food choices and a Cool Foods Resolution

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

GCC NETWORK ASSESSMENT

Green Cities California is a mature network with long established connectivity and products. GCC has a strong foundation of connectivity activities such as their network activities around member retreats twice a year, a best practices website, and bi-monthly issue based calls. In the GCC network their retreats are true retreats. With yoga and hikes to support their content sharing activities. The GCC website www.greencitiescalifornia.org provides a wealth of knowledge about what urban sustainability looks like in California for members, other communities and the general public. This network also has significant experience aligning and producing around local and state policy. For example all members passed the same ordinance in their communities for recycled paper procurement and a procurement ban of single use bottled water. State policy the network has influenced collectively include: AB 32, the Global Warming Solutions Act; AB2347, the Mercury Collection Act, and TB 604, relating to flame retardant in clothing.

Like Green Cities California maturity in the connection, align, produce sequence this network has a strong support infrastructure via a Network Director and member dues. The Director staff the steering committee, plans the bi-annual retreats, and manages the website among other important network tasks. Member dues range from \$2,000 -\$10,000 year and primarily cover costs for retreats and staff. Although this networks budget fluctuates and their ability to fundraise experiences challenges like any organization, GCC has a strong infrastructure foundation.

GREEN CITIES CALIFORNIA NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-3. Green Cities California Network Assessment.

GCC RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Review regional network building best practices to enhance the strategic plan. See appendix for resources list.
2. Consider a strategy to better integrate GCC members with USDN funding and leadership opportunities. Although GCC shares members with USDN, these networks have distinct cultures. Both

networks could benefit with more intentional connectivity to each other.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. The member survey indicated the biggest improvement opportunities are through structured knowledge sharing and more interaction between retreats. Focusing on increasing communications between meetings would support this.

HEARTLAND SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTORS NETWORK

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 19; 7 are USDN members

State Represented: Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas, Oklahoma, Missouri

First Convening: September, 2010

Many cities in the heartland of the United States created new Sustainability Director positions to launch local sustainability programs through the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) program through the Department of Energy. As the end of the grant period approached many sustainability directors shared the same threat: the end of grant funds and no commitment to continue the program from their city. The Heartland regional network was born by directors who wanted to share ideas for how to quantify results and demonstrate the value from local government sustainability offices with USDN and non USDN members alike.

What is the Heartland Network's Reason for Being?

- The Heartland Network was created to share information, experiences, and lessons learned in creating, implementing, and maintaining sustainability initiatives among local government sustainability staff in the heartland region of the U.S.
- The network will create momentum for promoting sustainability in additional communities in the heartland
- The network will connect with peers in a region that's not always supportive of sustainability initiatives

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- Communicating what climate change looks like locally and how to adapt
- Expand current project that is creating future weather scenarios for five cities to more cities and at state levels
- Building energy benchmarking
- Connecting sustainability directors to key officials involved in risk mitigation and disaster preparedness planning
- Energy and greenhouse gas inventories

HEARTLAND NETWORK ASSESSMENT

The Heartland Network demonstrates a scattered evolution pattern with more mature communications and activity despite their bare bones approach to coordination and resource capture. Although they do not use the USDN website for connection many members keep in touch through Facebook and twitter taking their professional relationships to a level of friendship. For example when one of the members was diagnosed with cancer and going through treatment network members kept in touch, sent cards, and shared their love with her. This network evolved to the alignment phase as they faced anti Agenda 21 state legislation. The only effort to date of collaborate is through an adaptation project to create city specific projection reports for future weather scenarios. The network infrastructure is bare bones with no consistent operating budget or hired network coordination, but this works for them. Members volunteer on a rotating basis to schedule and facilitate meetings and tend to basic network activities. The travel distance is relatively short making annual meetings a low cost expense most members can cover from their municipal budget.

HEARTLAND NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-4. Heartland Network Assessment.

HEARTLAND NETWORK RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Create a leadership succession plan. Empower new leaders to share responsibility with founders to sustain their support. Engaging non USDN members as leaders to support the network's original intent to connect with non USDN communities.
2. Engage members in collaborative efforts through work groups. Expand adaptation work to additional projects.

Maximize existing resource opportunities through established USDN grants funds.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Consider creating a fundraising plan to increase the speed of network evolution and produce deeper outcomes.
2. Member survey indicated use of USDN website could be improved to retain information and conversations. Commit to using the USDN website.

MICHIGAN GREEN CITIES

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 15-18 depending on what activity they participated in; 3 are USDN members

State/s Represented: Michigan

First Convening: Late 2010

Leaders from this network initially set their sights on a multi-state effort throughout the rust belt, but realized the timing wasn't ripe at this scale. They did however find interest from cities in Michigan as well as interest from the Michigan Municipal League to provide staff support for a state level initiative. With this convergence of interests the Michigan Green Cities Network was born. This network made an intentional decision in the beginning to create a network with broad participation from communities across Michigan. There are very few cities in this state with formal Sustainability Director roles, yet many communities pursuing sustainable initiatives.

What is Michigan Green Cities Network's Reason for Being?

- Promote and facilitate peer learning to support innovative solutions for community sustainability
- Build on the USDN model to build a safe peer learning space for a smaller community scale and create the new space where USDN ideas can filter down and local issues can filter up
- Recognize communities for their sustainability accomplishments.
- Support the Green Communities Challenge
- Coordinate policies and leverage investments from corporations, state and federal agencies, philanthropic organizations and non-profit organizations to support local governments in their pursuit of sustainability
- Enhances Michigan's economic competitiveness in the 21st century global green economy

- Develop and shares world-class models that will reduce costs and increase business activity in our communities and stimulate world-class research, development and commercialization of breakthrough green technologies, products and processes

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- Recycling and state recycling legislation
- Transportation
- Local food systems
- Stormwater management
- Community energy planning
- Utility disclosure

MGC NETWORK ASSESSMENT

The Michigan Green Cities Network (MGC) largely exhibits traits of a developing network. The foundational activity of MGC is their annual meeting. For the MGC this meeting functions like a conference with high levels of attendance and a wide variety of staff. An array of communication methods were conducted when the network had organized coordination through the Michigan Municipal League (MML) or interns from Michigan universities. Work that demonstrates this networks evolution to alignment activities includes a collaborative effort to work with the investor owned utility to increase the use of LED streetlights in Michigan and work towards a state wide recycling policy. An ongoing and very successful collaboration effort of the network is through a partnership with the MML. The Michigan Green Community Challenge, www.mml.org/green, established a road map for sustainable communities and provides awards for various levels of achievement. Network coordination for MGC has been inconsistent and dependent on outside funding. In the early years of this network state and USDN grants supported

coordination support and convening costs. Securing resources for these purposes has become more difficult in recent years and has resulted in temporarily suspending calls, newsletters, and the annual convening. IN the face of these challenges the network created a steering committee of 12 members with intentions to distribute the work and create stronger member buy in.

MICHIGAN GREEN CITIES NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	*SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-5. Michigan Green Communities Network Assessment.

*MGC technically has a 12 person steering committee but it is non-operational, defaulting leadership back to founder communities.

MGC NETWORK RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Revisit network vision and goals. MGC’s reason for being is very broad; more focus could solidify peer learning and collaborating.
2. Establish defined member requirements. Lack of member characteristics make participation permeable / limits connectivity.
3. Clarify relationship with MML to maximize their partnership for the purpose of network coordination.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Reinvigorate/reinvest in communication activities between face to face meetings such as the newsletter and case studies
2. Create a leadership succession plan. Empower new leaders to share responsibility with founders to sustain their support. Engage non-USDN members to support the network’s original content to connect with non-USDN communities.
3. Pursue alignment opportunity through in shared interest in state policy

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 30; 9 are USDN members

State Represented: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont and one city (Albany) in New York

First Convening: September 2010

The New England Municipal Sustainability Network (NEMSN) began with USDN members who wanted to take the inspiration and ideas that came from meeting fellow sustainability directors to a more local level. Their vision was one where all towns and cities would be able to learn from peers and exchange information in the municipal sustainability field. The goal was to provide training in common areas of interest, face-to-face meetings, and access to information and resources. At the same time, EPA Region 1 was looking to support sustainable communities and the work of sustainability directors. A relationship was developed through this common interest resulting in EPA Region 1 staff providing coordination support to this network.

What is the NEMSN's Reason for Being?

- Provide opportunities for peer learning about issues related to sustainable practices
- Develop collegial network for idea sharing as a “sounding board” for ideas
- Host bi-annual meetings about areas of mutual interest

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- Composting /Recycling
- What is the role of a sustainability director
- Energy efficiency outreach and community engagement
- Climate Action Plans and hazard mitigation planning
- LED lighting
- Flood resilience

NEMSN NETWORK ASSESSMENT

NEMSN is a developing and near mature network. This network creates strong value for its members through bi-annual face to face meetings that focus on field trips and peer learning. In between face to face meetings an NEMSN steering committee has monthly calls largely for the purpose of planning the next gathering. Coordination support for this network is provided through a partnership with EPA. EPA staff coordinates logistics for face to face meetings and monthly calls.

NEMSN NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-6. New England Municipal Sustainability Network Assessment.

NEMSN RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Review regional network building best practices to enhance the strategic plan and network coordination. See appendix for resources list.
2. Consider incorporating performance metrics into strategic plan and network coordination scope to track progress and better define success.
3. Implement communications strategies that engage all members in between annual meetings such as the USDN website. Currently the

monthly calls only engage the steering committee leaving the rest of your membership disconnected between face to face meetings.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Maximize the analysis provided through the USDN offered member survey improve strategic planning influence and support your annual strategic planning process.
2. Facilitate network collaboration opportunities and seek resources to implement projects.

NEWORK SUMMARY

Members: 10; 6 are USDN members

State/s Represented: Ohio, Kentucky, Indiana

First Convening: March 2012

“Sustainability work is harder in the Midwest than on the coasts, and yet exciting steps toward sustainability are being made here every day.” ~ Larry Falkin. Like some other networks, the OKI founder wanted to make deeper connections with people facing similar challenges. Participation in the national conversation through USDN provided certain valuable connections, and yet the need for deeper dives with peers on the same culture page emerged as a need. From this need came the OKI network. Individual had been introduced to each other at various events or conferences then decided to take it to the next step and organize themselves to get together to connect and share.

What is the Ohio- Kentucky- Indiana Network’s Reason for Being?

- Discuss programs and policies and lay the groundwork for sharing of best practices relevant to communities in the region.

What are the Network’s 2015 Content Interests?

- Bike sharing
- Dirty materials recovery facility (MRF) implementation
- Food waste collection and infrastructure
- Resiliency planning and climate adaptation

OKI NETWORK ASSESSMENT

OKI has successfully operated since 2012 yet this network still functions as an emerging network meet over time to keep in touch and share best practices. The primary activity of this network is face to face meetings every 6 to 12 months. During that meeting a member volunteers to host the next meeting a date is picked then they reconvene the next year. Through the face to face meetings relationships have been developed with enables them to remain in contact throughout the year through a one on one basis.

AS an emerging network OKI has not coordination or resources to support network activities. The membership of this network are content with the minimal level of infrastructure that corresponds with the minimal level of member investment needed to maintain basic connectivity between members.

OKI NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-7. Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Network Assessment.

OKI RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Create a leadership succession plan. Empower new leaders to share responsibility with founders to sustain their support.
2. Create a steering committee to share leadership responsibility and generate greater network buy from more members.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Implement communication strategies between face to face meetings in order to increase opportunities to exchange information and learn from each other.

SOUTHEAST SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTORS NETWORK

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 38; 19 are USDN members

State/s Represented: North Carolina, Tennessee, Arkansas, Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, Florida

First Convening: June 2012

The Southeast Sustainability Directors Network was initiated through USDN members who wanted to replicate the connectivity and collaboration they experienced in USDN to the large group of emerging sustainability directors in the south who weren't part of USDN. The wave of southern cities creating Sustainability Director Positions began in 2008 later experiences a ground swell with the infusion of EECBG grants through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) in 2010. The sustainability directors who had a few years under their belts wanted to shorten the learning curve for the directors in other communities who came after them. Through creating SSDN the leading southern sustainability directors intentionally started a network to build urban sustainability capacity in the south.

What is the SSDN's Reason for Being?

- Close the progress gaps between the Southeast and the rest of the nation by influencing sustainable policies and practices at the local and state levels
- Leverage the knowledge and experience of local government sustainability officials by being a member driven network to build regional capacity; and
- Collaborate to streamline sustainable policymaking and program development.

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- Climate adaptation
- Green business recognition programs
- Social equity in residential energy efficiency
- Energy data management and access
- Food policy
- Engaging staff and getting buy in
- Community engagement

SSDN NETWORK ASSESSMENT

The Southeast network is a mostly mature network. Members connect through a wide variety of communication channels including: monthly newsletter, USDN website, work groups and committees, network calls, and annual face to face meetings.

The network infrastructure is well established with a part time staffed network coordination duo, a steering committee, and funding strategy.

SSDN NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
Developing	Larger hub of 6-10 strongly connected members	Established steering committee (SC) of 3-5 members	Members align and spread shared ideas such as policy or project needs	Informal communication between face to face meetings between some members	Coordination by member volunteers and minimal third party support	Network beginning to deliver satisfaction for hub of group	Minimal and/or in-kind resources for annual meeting or network coordination or collaborations
Near Mature	Multiple hubs of strongly connected members	SC of 6+ members who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate on their first project	Formal network wide communication between face to face meetings	Coordination by third party	Network delivering satisfaction for most members	Resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations
Mature	Multiple hubs that intertwine of 20+ strongly connected	Second generation of SC leaders who create annual strategic plans	Members collaborate and produce outcomes on multiple projects	Multiple, network wide communications between face to face meetings with high member participation	Consistent, effective coordination by third party	Broad, high level of member satisfaction by a majority of the members	Consistent resources for annual meeting, network coordination, and member collaborations

Table A-8. Southeast Sustainability Directors Network Assessment.

SSDN RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Continue engaging members in collaborative efforts through work groups. Maximize existing resource opportunities through established USDN grants funds.
2. Implement member dues to create consistent stable resource base.

Next steps for network evolution:

3. Create standards by creating network policies and procedures. Such as roles and expectation for steering committee members and network coordinators.

NETWORK SUMMARY

Members: 15; all are USDN members

State/s Represented: Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico

First Convening: April 2011

Individuals from the California cities have known each other for quiet sometime. Many of them first met at the Pacific Coast Roundtable through ICLEI after which they kept in informal contact regarding state based issues. The true birth of the network however was during a convening of sustainability directors at the Rocky Mountain Institute in 2006. This event was the same event where the idea for a national network of sustainability directors was born. During that convening the California cities felt they were already aligned around state based issues and decided to go ahead and pursue a state network alongside the soon to form national effort, we now call USDN.

What is the WAA's Reason for Being?

- To be a learning network of local governments across the Rocky Mountain Front Range, Intermountain and Desert Southwest Region of the Western United States
- Collaborate to prepare urban areas in arid/semi-arid environments for the impacts of global climate change.

- Increase knowledge and adaptive capacity for member communities to be stronger, better prepared and more resilient to a changing climate.

What are the Network's 2015 Content Interests?

- climate adaptation: political and technical approaches
- community engagement relating to climate adaptation

WAA NETWORK ASSESSMENT

The WAA Network demonstrates a scattered evolution pattern with more mature collaboration activities and developing communications and coordination. The WAA network formed to implement a specific project focused on regional adaptation planning. This initial collaboration activity solidified this group as a network and expanded to include additional collaboration projects about adaptation. WAA members developed near mature connectivity through USDN coordinated information sharing and relationship building activities. Yet, independent of USDN, WAA demonstrates developing support for foundational network activities and communications. WAA worked with the Institute from Sustainable Communities (ISC) for coordination support of bi-monthly steering committee calls and to host face to face events. The face to face events focused on multi person city teams attending to learn new information and less on network building member activities. Resource capturing for coordination support and face to face gatherings was reliant on ISC and has been inconsistent.

WAA NETWORK ASSESSMENT							
STAGE	Connectivity	Leadership	Activity	Communication	Coordination	Member Satisfaction	Resources
Emerging	Small hub of 3-5 connected members	Two or more committed founders	Members connect and exchange information	Face to face meetings with no communications between meetings	Ad hoc capacity by small group of member volunteers	Most members see opportunity but network not yet delivering	No and/or in-kind resources for network activities
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Table A-9. Western Adaptation Alliance Network Assessment.

WAA RECOMMENDATIONS

Immediate needs to maintain:

1. Increase the size of the steering committee. Empower new leaders to share responsibility with founders to build stronger buy-in from more members.
2. Revisit network vision and goals. Incorporate information sharing and communication priorities into the strategic plan to develop a strong network foundation to better support collaborative projects.
3. Implement communications strategies that engage all members as a network such as annual meetings, monthly info sharing calls, using the USDN website.

Next steps for network evolution:

1. Discuss membership size as a group. Small networks focused heavily on collaboration can face two unique challenges. One is it can be difficult to continue finding shared interests over time. The second is there are less people to distribute the work load which may result in participation fatigue.
2. Review regional network building best practices to enhance the strategic plan. See appendix for resources list